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**Plenary meeting to determine modalities and institutional arrangements for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services
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Consideration of the modalities and institutional arrangements for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services: functions and structures of bodies that might be established under the platform

Functions and structures of bodies that might be established under an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Note by the secretariat

Introduction

1. At the third ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 7 to 11 June 2010, representatives of Governments agreed that an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services should be established, as stated in the “Busan outcome”, the outcome document of the meeting. They also identified the platform’s main functions and operating principles, and principal institutional arrangements. Document UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/3 highlights the platform’s main functions and operating principles. The present note outlines its principal institutional arrangements, discussing in particular the possible functions and structures of bodies that might be established under the platform.

I. Institutional arrangements for the platform

2. The Busan outcome states that the platform should be established as an independent intergovernmental body administered by one or more existing United Nations organizations, agencies, funds or programmes. While the legal status of the platform will be defined by the way in which it is established, as an independent intergovernmental body it will be constituted by Governments with a permanent structure so that it can function autonomously. For the purpose of its administration, the platform is expected to be institutionally linked to existing United Nations organizations, agencies, funds or programmes, which might agree to perform administrative functions for it.

A. Membership of the platform

3. The scope of the membership of the platform should be clarified as to whether it is open to all States Members of the United Nations or members of its specialized agencies and the International

* UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/1.

Atomic Energy Agency. The Busan outcome stated that the decision-making body of the platform (which could be referred to as the “plenary”), on which all members of the platform are expected to be represented, should be open to participation by all States Members of the United Nations and by regional economic integration organizations, but does not refer to the participation of States that are members of a specialized agency or the International Atomic Energy Agency but are not Members of the United Nations.

4. Representatives may wish to consider whether membership should be open to all States Members of the United Nations or members of specialized agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency, or whether it should be restricted to States Members of the United Nations. Furthermore, representatives may wish to clarify the participation of regional economic integration organizations in conjunction with their membership of the specialized agencies.

5. In addition, representatives may wish to clarify whether only those States that signify their intention to become members of the platform through an agreed procedure would constitute members of the platform entitled to participate in its work or whether the platform should be open-ended, without any definitive membership. Any procedures for becoming a member of the platform also should be clarified.

B. Main bodies of the platform

6. The Busan outcome identifies the main bodies of the platform as the plenary and the secretariat. The plenary might also establish subsidiary bodies or working groups as necessary.

C. Evaluation of the operation of the platform

7. As envisaged in the Busan outcome, the platform’s efficiency and effectiveness should be independently reviewed and evaluated on a periodic basis as decided by the plenary, with adjustments to be made as necessary. The modalities of such evaluation should be identified.

II. Plenary

8. As stated in the Busan outcome, a plenary should be established as the platform’s decision-making body.

A. Membership

9. The Busan outcome states that membership of the plenary should be open to all States Members of the United Nations and regional economic integration organizations. Since the plenary is expected to comprise all members of the platform, the issue of membership of the plenary may be seen to coincide with the issue of the membership of the platform as a whole, which is discussed in section A of chapter I of the present note.

B. Participation of United Nations bodies and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations

10. As stated in the Busan outcome, intergovernmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders should participate in the plenary as observers in accordance with the rules of procedure established by the plenary.

C. Functions

11. Bearing in mind the platform’s functions and the role of the plenary as stated in the Busan outcome, the plenary’s possible functions might include:

- (a) Overseeing the platform’s operation;
- (b) Establishing priorities for action by the platform in response to the needs of and requests from Governments, including those conveyed to it by multilateral environmental agreements related to biodiversity and ecosystem services as determined by their respective governing bodies;
- (c) Adopting a programme of work for the platform and reviewing its implementation;
- (d) Approving a budget and providing oversight of the allocation of funds;
- (e) Reviewing, adopting or approving major reports or executive summaries;
- (f) Establishing subsidiary bodies and working groups;
- (g) Considering and undertaking any additional action that might be required to achieve the platform’s objectives.

12. In addition, the plenary might need to adopt the following:
- (a) Rules of procedures for meetings of the platform, including election of officers;
 - (b) Financial rules for the plenary and its subsidiary bodies, in addition to financial provisions governing the functioning of the secretariat;
 - (c) Procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests;
 - (d) Procedures for defining the scope and outline of reports, in addition to a process for reviewing and adopting reports;
 - (e) Procedures for developing and implementing the knowledge-generation, assessment, capacity-building and policy-support components of the work programme;
 - (f) Procedures for independently reviewing and evaluating the platform's efficiency and effectiveness.
13. The plenary, in carrying out its functions, should encourage and take into account, as appropriate, inputs and suggestions made by relevant stakeholders, such as other intergovernmental organizations, international and regional scientific organizations, environmental trust funds, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, as envisaged in the Busan outcome.

D. Officers of the plenary

1. Composition

14. With regard to the officers of the plenary, the Busan outcome states that one chair and four vice-chairs, taking due account of the principle of geographical balance among the five United Nations regions, should be nominated and selected by Governments that are members of the plenary. The criteria, nomination process and length of service should be decided by the plenary.

2. Functions

15. The plenary may wish to define those functions of the chair and vice-chairs of the plenary that are not covered by the rules of procedure. The functions of the chair might include the following:

- (a) Presiding over meetings of the plenary;
- (b) Presiding over meetings of any subsidiary bodies of the plenary;
- (c) Acting as the representative of the platform in relevant international meetings;
- (d) Carrying out any outreach activities or communications activities on behalf of the platform.

16. Depending on the functions and structure of the plenary and its subsidiary bodies, the vice-chairs might also be tasked with undertaking specific functions in respect of those bodies.

3. Criteria for the selection of the chair and vice-chairs

17. Consideration should be given to identifying the criteria for the selection of the chair and vice-chairs of the plenary, taking into account the principle of equitable geographical distribution. The following criteria could be taken into account:

- (a) Ability to carry out the agreed functions of the chair and vice-chair;
- (b) Scientific expertise in biodiversity and ecosystem services across both natural and social sciences;
- (c) Scientific and technical knowledge of the main elements of the platform's programme of work;
- (d) Ability to fulfil the requirements set out under the agreed structures, functions and compositions of the subsidiary bodies of the plenary or working groups, if such bodies are established;
- (e) Understanding of the role of science in policy development;
- (f) Recognized ability to both lead and work as a team member in international processes and consensus-building;
- (g) Knowledge of the main intergovernmental processes on biodiversity and ecosystem services;

- (h) Excellent communication skills, on a level appropriate to an ambassador for the platform;
- (i) Ability to represent the platform politically at the highest level.

18. The criteria for the election of officers might need to be reviewed in the light of the programme of work adopted by the plenary and agreement on whether the plenary should establish working groups on specific issues such as capacity-building or assessments. The extent to which the skills of the chair and the vice-chairs complement one another might also need to be taken into consideration.

III. Subsidiary bodies of the plenary

A. Possible functions of subsidiary bodies

19. In addition to the plenary, consideration might be given to the establishment of subsidiary bodies for the smooth and effective operation of the platform. Such bodies might, among other things:

- (a) Support the functions of the platform with regard to urgent issues arising between sessions of the plenary. Such support might take the form of:
 - (i) Addressing urgent issues and requests related to the platform's programme of work and products that require prompt attention by the platform between sessions of the plenary;
 - (ii) Overseeing responses to possible errors in completed assessments and other platform products;
 - (iii) Helping to settle disputes in the peer-review process;
 - (iv) Carrying out a coordination role with other potential working groups set up under the platform;
 - (v) Acting as a coordinator for the platform and other relevant bodies, such as multilateral environmental agreements;
- (b) Perform the following administrative functions:
 - (i) Overseeing communication and outreach activities;
 - (ii) Overseeing the effective implementation of decisions of the plenary;
 - (iii) Reviewing the performance of the secretariat;
 - (iv) Overseeing the work of any task groups established;
 - (v) Reviewing requests by observer organizations for admission to the plenary;
 - (vi) Organizing and helping to conduct the sessions of the plenary;
 - (vii) Overseeing progress in and coordination of the platform's work;
 - (viii) Overseeing the observance of the platform's principles and procedures;
 - (ix) Advising on coordination between the platform and other relevant institutions;
 - (x) Identifying donors and developing partnership arrangements for the implementation of activities;
 - (xi) Overseeing the management of financial resources and reporting thereon to the plenary;
- (c) Perform the following scientific and technical functions:
 - (i) Participating in an editorial board in finalizing technical papers;
 - (ii) Providing advice on scientific and technical aspects of the platform's programme of work;
 - (iii) Providing advice and assistance on technical and/or scientific communication matters;
 - (iv) Overseeing a peer-review process to ensure the highest levels of scientific quality and credibility for all products delivered by the platform;

- (v) Developing and agreeing upon a list of authors, review editors and expert reviewers, taking into account the need for balance in expertise, geographical coverage and gender;
- (vi) Recommending, reviewing and appointing peer-review editors and helping to settle disputes in the peer-review process;
- (vii) Engaging the scientific community both globally and regionally on issues relating to the platform;
- (viii) Approving specific scientific procedures related to the conduct of assessments and other studies;
- (ix) Overseeing the scientific quality of the platform's products;
- (x) Participating in responses to possible errors found in the platform's products;
- (xi) Providing guidance on cross-cutting scientific issues related to the platform's products.

B. Potential options for the structure and composition of subsidiary bodies of the plenary

20. There are a number of options for the structure of any subsidiary bodies that might be established by the plenary; such structure would of course have to take into account the functions to be performed by any such body. Without prejudice to any decision that might be taken by the plenary, a bureau, an executive committee and a science panel are referred to in the following possible options for the purpose of facilitating discussions on possible subsidiary bodies:¹

(a) *Option 1:* One subsidiary body: In this option, the plenary might establish one subsidiary body, in the form of either a bureau of the plenary or an executive committee established by the plenary. This body could perform all the functions listed above;

(b) *Option 2:* Two subsidiary bodies: In this option, the plenary might establish two subsidiary bodies: an executive committee to support the platform on urgent issues arising between sessions of the plenary, and a bureau of the plenary to advise the platform on administrative and scientific issues;

(c) *Option 3:* Three subsidiary bodies: In this option, the plenary might establish, in addition to a bureau, an executive committee and a science panel that would carry out the scientific and technical functions that, in options 1 and 2, are undertaken by the bureau or the executive committee.

21. Regarding option 1, the ability of a large body meeting fairly infrequently to carry out the functions ascribed to it would need to be reviewed to ensure that it could respond to urgent requests made between sessions of the plenary and could deliver a high-quality service to the plenary.

22. Regarding options 2 and 3, the relationship between the proposed bodies would have to be clarified to minimize bureaucracy. Each body's functions would also need to be examined to ensure that there was no duplication or confusion. Regarding option 3 in particular, the resource implications would need to be considered, both in terms of the cost and the secretariat support needed to facilitate the smooth running of the proposed bodies.

23. With all the options described above, the composition of the body or bodies would need to be reviewed to ensure that it reflected the functions assigned to them.

24. In any of the options, the members of each subsidiary body could include the chair and vice-chairs of the plenary, the chairs or co-chairs of any working groups and, as ex officio members, the head of the platform's secretariat, representatives of the secretariats of relevant multilateral environmental agreements and representatives of the host organization or organizations and, for the science panel, scientists from each geographic region.

C. Working groups

25. In addition to the above subsidiary bodies, the plenary might establish working groups to oversee the implementation of the work programme. The tasks to be performed by such groups could include:

¹ These options were discussed at previous meetings on the platform.

- (a) To identify and prioritize key scientific information needed for policymakers and catalyse efforts to generate new knowledge (without undertaking new research);
 - (b) To perform regular and timely assessments of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services and their interlinkages, which should include comprehensive global, regional and, as necessary, subregional assessments, and thematic issues at appropriate scales and new topics identified by science;
 - (c) To identify policy-relevant tools and methodologies, such as those arising from assessments, to enable decision makers to gain access to those tools and methodologies and, where necessary, to promote and catalyse their further development;
 - (d) To prioritize capacity-building needs to improve the science-policy interface at appropriate levels and then provide and call for financial and other support for the highest-priority needs related directly to its activities, as decided by the plenary, and to catalyse financing for such capacity-building activities by providing a forum with conventional and potential sources of funding.
26. Ad hoc working groups might also need to be set up to carry out specific tasks, such as performing thematic assessments or discussing emerging issues.
27. The following issues might need to be discussed, while recognizing that any agreement to establish working groups can take place only after more detailed discussion of the work programme:
- (a) How many working groups are needed, including their purpose and functions;
 - (b) Which working groups should be permanent and which should be ad hoc in nature;
 - (c) The structure of the working groups and their relationship to the plenary, other subsidiary bodies of the plenary and the secretariat;
 - (d) The composition of the working groups.

IV. Secretariat

28. The Busan outcome envisaged the establishment of a secretariat. The secretariat's administrative functions could be, among others:
- (a) To organize meetings and provide administrative and substantive support for meetings;
 - (b) To identify, acquire, coordinate and manage information to assist the platform in its work and to manage data, resources and documents to support its work;
 - (c) To assist in preparing documents for, and reports to, the plenary and others as needed;
 - (d) To facilitate coordination between any working groups that might be established by the plenary;
 - (e) To liaise with Governments, civil society organizations and all other relevant stakeholder organizations;
 - (f) To organize and coordinate public information and outreach activities, including editorial work and translation and the release of reports and other products;
 - (g) To produce relevant communication materials;
 - (h) To publicize and disseminate the platform's reports to the wider scientific community and policymakers;
 - (i) To serve as a focal point to promote and facilitate the achievement of the platform's objectives;
 - (j) To prepare the platform's programme of work and budget for submission to the plenary;
 - (k) To manage and report on related funds and trust funds and prepare any necessary reports;
 - (l) To mobilize financial resources in accordance with the platform's directions;
 - (m) To facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of the platform's work.
29. Furthermore, the secretariat might be tasked by the plenary with undertaking technical functions, such as providing relevant assistance to ensure that the platform implements its work programme. Such functions need to be developed following discussion of the work programme.

30. With regard to the institutional arrangements for the secretariat, the Busan outcome stated that the platform might be administered by one or more existing United Nations organizations, agencies, funds or programmes. In this context, clarification might be needed as to whether there should be a central secretariat hub that carries out the main administrative functions of the secretariat, and if so, whether it should be hosted by one or more United Nations organizations, agencies, funds or programmes.

31. The details of institutional arrangements concerning the secretariat might be discussed after agreement has been reached on the functions and structure of the secretariat and on the work programme.

V. Trust fund

32. The Busan outcome states that a core trust fund to be allocated by the plenary should be established to receive voluntary contributions from Governments, United Nations bodies, the Global Environment Facility, other intergovernmental organizations and other stakeholders, such as the private sector and foundations. Such a trust fund might be established by an organization that administers the platform alone or together with other United Nations organizations, agencies, funds or programmes. While the financial rules and regulations of the organization that established such a trust fund would be applicable to it, specific requirements for governing the trust fund might be specified in financial rules and procedures to be adopted by the plenary.

VI. Suggested action

33. The representatives may wish to consider the institutional arrangements of the platform, including the following:

- (a) Membership of the platform and of its plenary;
 - (b) Participation of United Nations bodies and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations;
 - (c) Functions of the plenary;
 - (d) Composition and functions of the officers of the plenary, and criteria for the selection of the officers;
 - (e) Possible functions of subsidiary bodies of the plenary;
 - (f) Potential options for the structure and composition of subsidiary bodies of the plenary;
 - (g) Working groups of the plenary;
 - (h) Secretariat;
 - (i) Trust fund;
 - (j) Evaluation of the operation of the platform.
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