Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

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Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda*

**Initial work programme of the Platform: task
forces on capacity building, knowledge and data
(including data and management plan/system) and
indigenous and local knowledge systems**

Report on the status of the catalogue of assessments (deliverable 4 (a))

Note by the secretariat

1.   The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services was established by a resolution adopted by the plenary meeting to determine modalities and institutional arrangements for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services at its second session in 2012 (UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/9, annex I). The functions of the Platform, set out in appendix I to that resolution, include the maintenance of a catalogue of relevant assessments. Subsequently, in its decision IPBES-2/5, the Plenary of the Platform requested the secretariat to maintain an online catalogue of assessments and to collaborate further with existing networks and initiatives to enhance the online catalogue of assessments. The catalogue of relevant assessments is included in the work programme 2014–2018 as deliverable 4 (a).

2.   The catalogue was established and has been managed to date by the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre working on behalf of the secretariat of the Platform. It is available from http://catalog.ipbes.net/. Assessment practitioners within existing networks and initiatives, including the Sub-Global Assessment Network, are directly involved in its maintenance.[1]

3.   The primary objective of the catalogue is to provide an open and accessible forum through which lessons can be learned from existing and ongoing assessment processes so as to inform the future development of the Platform. The catalogue is a metadatabase, bringing together information on and experiences derived from undertaking assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services from the global to the subnational scales. It offers direct access to assessment reports and supporting technical documents as a resource for assessment practitioners and policymakers.

4.   The annex to the present note provides information on the status of the catalogue of assessments. It is presented without formal editing.

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* IPBES/3/1.

[1] www.ecosystemassessments.net.

Annex

Status of the catalogue of assessments

I. Implementation

1.   The Catalogue is based around a database that uses a standardised format to capture information under common sections for each assessment. Examples of sections include 'Conceptual framework, methodology and scope', 'Knowledge generation' and 'Policy impact' (see Table 1 for a full list of sections and subsections). Information describing the history and purpose of the Catalogue, how to register for editor rights to add/edit assessments and who to contact for technical assistance is also included.

2.   The Catalogue offers both browsing and searching functionality. Users can browse the content by scrolling down the full list of assessments or by using the map and clicking on a particular country to filter assessments. Alternatively, users can search for assessments by typing in a word/phrase, or by selecting one (or more) of the four filters (geographical scale; systems assessed; ecosystem services/functions assessed; tools and approaches used). Information on individual or all assessments can be downloaded to a spreadsheet to enable further analysis or direct comparisons between assessments to be made. The Catalogue has been designed to directly involve assessment practitioners in the population of its content. Users are required to register to submit new assessments or edit information in the database.

II. Status of the Catalogue

3.   The Catalogue has been online since September 2012. An initial effort to populate the Catalogue was coordinated jointly by the SGA Network Secretariat (based at UNEP-WCMC) and the IPBES Interim Secretariat. All SGA Network member assessments were added to the Catalogue and most entries into the Catalogue have been peer-reviewed. Additionally, a request was sent to all IPBES member states to add relevant assessments.

4.   As of September 2014 the Catalogue has been viewed by over 8,400 users, with 36% of these users having visited the site more than once. The Catalogue has been viewed by 167 countries, thereby including countries that are not members of IPBES[2]. Over the past two years 139 users have registered to be editors of the Catalogue.

5.   As of September 2014, information on 215 assessments has been added to the Catalogue. Collectively, these assessments cover 104 countries and include assessments from both member and non-member countries of IPBES. This set of assessments has been conducted at a variety of scales and include representative assessments at each of the six categories of geographical scale (global, national, regional, sub-regional, sub-national, set of sites, and single sites). Currently, around one third of the assessments have been described as national assessments. Regional and global assessments are the next two most frequent scales contained within the Catalogue. However, in a small number of cases (13% of assessments) more than one scale category was selected. Forest and woodland ecosystems, cultivated/agricultural land, inland water and coastal ecosystems have been the most frequently assessed ecosystems and have been examined in 70% to 85% of the Catalogue's assessments. Dryland and island ecosystems have been the least well represented and have been assessed in less than 30% of assessments.

6.   The database is populated predominantly by ecosystem assessments rather than biodiversity assessments. This is partly due to the origins of IPBES and the Catalogue's sections and subsections being more relevant to the former assessment type rather than the latter. However, IPBES acknowledges that "*biodiversity from terrestrial, marine, coastal, and inland water ecosystems provides the basis for ecosystems and the services they provide that underpin human well-being*"[3]. Therefore assessments of biodiversity that make the link with human well-being could be more relevant for the Catalogue than those that do not.

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[2] At the time of writing there were 121 IPBES members
[3] http://www.ipbes.net/about-ipbes.html

7.   The completeness of information on each assessment in the Catalogue varies considerably. This is to some extent the result of SGA Network assessments being added based on information available online, which may include insufficient detail of the specific process an assessment took. Almost half the assessments in the Catalogue have at least 70% of key sections (see Table 2) completed in some form. Over 70% of assessments included a link to a website and/or had uploaded a report from an assessment so that users could find more information. Information on the conceptual framework used was described, or a link, provided for 30% of assessments.

8.   The second session of the IPBES Plenary (IPBES/2/5, section VI) requested that the Catalogue be maintained and should include collaboration with existing networks and initiatives to enhance the online Catalogue. This is assumed to cover enhancement of both content and use, and so effort is underway to encourage population of new information on assessments and to increase awareness of the tool via various avenues. For example, IPBES national focal points and UNEP Regional Offices have been asked to remind their networks that the Catalogue exists. To facilitate the use of the Catalogue by new users a guidance note on how to register to submit content to the Catalogue has been updated and circulated. Efforts have also been made to ensure that assessments from initiatives such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) country studies are included in the Catalogue. Other relevant databases, including the Assessments of Assessments GRAMED, and UNEP's PEARL database, are being explored to identify the potential for transfer of information to the Catalogue. The SGA Network, which is a network of ecosystem assessment practitioners established as a mechanism for sharing experience amongst practitioners, provides a number of opportunities to promote the Catalogue. For example, through the network's communication streams including workshops, newsletter, webinars and website.

III.   Role of the Catalogue in relation to the Platform's Work Programme

9.   The information contained in the Catalogue (deliverable 4a) has the potential to support many other deliverables in the Platform's Work Programme 2014-2018. The perceived roles of the Catalogue, detailed in subsequent paragraphs, include:

(a)   underpinning periodic critical reviews of the assessment landscape;

(b)   providing input into the scoping and implementation phases of IPBES assessments;

(c)   providing opportunities to locate existing knowledge, practice and experience.

10.   In 2012 the Catalogue underpinned a critical review of the assessment landscape for biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES/1/INF/8). Information in the Catalogue contributed to a synthesis of lessons learned on various aspects of the assessment process, such as the scope and coverage of assessments, use of conceptual frameworks, gaps and capacity building needs, experience of integrating input from diverse knowledge systems, the use of scenarios and other tools, and achieving policy impacts. The Work Programme (decision IPBES-2/5) states that "*the catalogue will provide the basis for periodic critical reviews of the assessment landscape and lessons learned*" to inform the Platform's processes.

11.   According to the Work Programme the Catalogue will facilitate the identification of inputs to the thematic (deliverables 3a,b), regional (deliverable 2b) and global (deliverable 2c) assessments that will be carried out to strengthen the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services. In particular, input will be provided during the scoping and implementation phases of IPBES assessments. For example, in advance of the first author meeting of an IPBES assessment a report could be generated based on assessments in the Catalogue from a particular region or theme (including any attachments that have been uploaded). A targeted search of the Catalogue on assessments that have considered pollination services has been undertaken to inform the implementation stage of deliverable (3a). Future searches are planned for the land degradation, invasive alien species, and sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity assessments (deliverable 3b). Further, the Catalogue has been highlighted in the Guide for Assessments (deliverable 2a; IPBES/3/INF/4) as a key resource for IPBES assessment practitioners. As one component of an information management system, the Catalogue will be a source of information for knowledge and data management, in particular, identifying and prioritizing key scientific information needed for policy makers at different scales (deliverable 1d).

12.   Through the various deliverables, the Catalogue will provide opportunities to locate existing knowledge, practice and experience by bringing together this information into a central location and making this information accessible to assessment practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders involved in IPBES activities. These groups are likely to be the principal users of the Catalogue, although there may be others. The Catalogue will capture and share future assessment information generated and approaches tested as a result of new assessments using guidance on scenario analysis and modelling of biodiversity and ecosystem services (deliverable 3c) and on the different values of biodiversity and nature's benefits to people (deliverable 3d). Additionally, the Catalogue will be a source of information on indigenous and local knowledge systems. The Catalogue will also play a role in communicating the Platform's activities (deliverable 4d) and provide information useful for deliverable 4 (e) on the review of the effectiveness of the Platform. It is envisaged that the Catalogue will contribute to achieving Aichi Biodiversity Target 19 on improving the knowledge base.

13.   Additionally, the Catalogue has the potential to support other areas of the Platform's work. These areas, detailed in subsequent paragraphs, include:

      (a)   contributing to capacity building activities;

      (b)   building relationships with practitioners through the SGA Network;

      (c)   complementing the Catalogue of Policy Support Tools and Methodologies.

14.   IPBES is committed to enhancing human, institutional and technical capacities for undertaking assessments (IPBES/3/INF/4). The Catalogue provides a tool to assist experts and institutions to effectively implement and use assessment findings by improving access to information, knowledge and lessons learned from the assessment process. It is also a tool to understand how other assessment practitioners have undertaken their assessments and managed issues that arose in different contexts. The report of the first meeting of the IPBES Task Force on Capacity Building identified that the Catalogue could contribute to capacity building activities under the activity *"Promote and support communities of practice and knowledge networks that provide support to delivery of the IPBES work programme"* (support to deliverables 1a and 1b). The report also suggested that a review of the use and future direction of the Catalogue could be useful to determine if it is an effective mechanism for sharing the experiences of countries and institutions in carrying out activities relevant to IPBES.

15.   The Catalogue has the potential to play a role in the building of relationships between assessment practitioners through existing networks (support to deliverables 1b and 1d). The SGA Network, for example, is a community of practice through which assessment practitioners share their knowledge and experience via face-to-face meetings and online. All SGA Network members are encouraged to share their assessment information through the Catalogue, and to make use of other assessment entries in their work (support to deliverables 2b, 2c, 3a and 3b).

16.   The Catalogue could support and complement the planned Catalogue of Policy Support Tools and Methodologies (deliverable 4c). Further discussions are required on how best the two catalogues could 'talk' to one another. Having an understanding of who is using the Catalogue of Assessments and whether these users are interested in which tools and methodologies an assessment has used will be a key factor in guiding discussions on to what extent these catalogues could be integrated. Who is using the Catalogue of Assessments (research, policy etc.) and for what purpose is currently unknown but the use of surveys could help address this knowledge gap (see paragraph 31 for more details). One way the Catalogue of Assessments could support the Catalogue of Policy Support Tools and Methodologies is by identifying potential case studies of how different tools/approaches have been used as part of the assessment process.

IV.   Review of the Catalogue's form, function and practical application

19.   In 2013 a critical review of the Catalogue's form, function and practical application was undertaken by UNEP-WCMC for the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The resulting report was submitted as an Information Document to the second session of the IPBES Plenary (IPBES/2/INF/14). Suggestions on how to improve the Catalogue to better meet users' needs were identified from a survey of current and potential users of the Catalogue. Findings of the survey, along with suggestions for areas of improvement, are summarised below.

20.   Respondents of the survey considered the Catalogue's existence to be of great value due its role as a single repository of a huge amount of dispersed information on assessments internationally. Further efforts to increase the number of completed assessments and to add assessments in under-represented regions would strengthen the resource considerably. The simplicity of the Catalogue's

layout and the ability to search on different topics were identified by respondents of the survey to be key features of the Catalogue. More sophisticated mapping functionality in regards to marine and sub-national assessments would increase the usability of this particular method of identifying information in the database.

21.   The content of the Catalogue was considered to be highly relevant to the work of the respondents, who were mainly in primary research. However, two overarching themes were identified from feedback on the practical application of the Catalogue's information (see Table 1). The first theme could be addressed by adding a new section to the website on Frequently Asked Questions.

Table 1. Suggestions for how to increase the practical application of the Catalogue (IPBES/2/INF/14)

Key suggestions for how to increase the practical application of the Catalogue	Specific examples
More information and guidance on the Catalogue for potential users of the content and users wishing to add new assessments	A description of what information is in the Catalogue and who may be interested in this information.
	The date range of assessments that should be added (e.g. assessments completed in the 2000s onwards vs. a more historic record of assessments undertaken).
	The type of assessments that should be added. For example, state of the environment-type assessments and baseline survey-type assessments could also be considered relevant as they provide a source of useful information for practitioners on monitoring, data and analysis, and indicator development. These types of assessments can provide baseline data on many environmental measures at a national level.
More technical information in the Catalogue	Adding extra comment boxes to explain multiple choice answers or the addition of completely new subsections to capture more detail on certain topics, such as: · indicators used, · list of the key messages, · an indication of whether an assessment was policy-driven vs. research-driven Modifications to the template should also be reflected in the search functionality.

22.   One clear gap identified by respondents was the lack of biodiversity assessments in the Catalogue. To address this and to make the assessment template more relevant to biodiversity assessments, the level of detail that can be added to the biodiversity-related subsections (e.g. species groups assessed; see Table 2) could be increased. Modifications to the template should also be reflected in the search functionality.

V.   Options for future development

23.   This section identifies a number of options for how the future development of the Catalogue could better meet the needs of the Platform. The options, detailed in subsequent paragraphs, consider the:

(a)   relevance and format of the information being gathered;

(b)   usability of the Catalogue both for searching and inputting information;

(c)   strategies for increasing population of the Catalogue and use of its information;

(d)   options for integrating the Catalogue into other processes and activities.

24.   In terms of increasing the relevance and format of the information in the Catalogue for use by IPBES assessment practitioners specifically, modification of the assessment template to include additional IPBES-relevant information could be beneficial. Specifically, to ensure assessment information relating to all six elements of the IPBES Conceptual Framework is captured sufficiently. Table 2 presents a number of suggestions of how the assessment template could be improved to better meet the needs of the Platform. However, a more comprehensive evaluation of how the assessment template could be modified could be undertaken in collaboration with each of the IPBES Expert Groups and Task Forces. Tailoring the information captured in this way, together with developing the search functionality to enable more complex searches of the Catalogue's content to result in more precise search results, could lead to further uptake of the information by IPBES assessment practitioners and other end users.

Table 2. Current and potential information on assessments contained in the Catalogue

Assessment template		Examples of potential modifications to the assessment template	Relevance to an IPBES Expert Group or Task Force
Section	**Subsection**		
Title	– Full name and short name of assessment		
Geographical coverage	– Scale of assessment – Location – Countries covered	– Add option to select IPBES regions	Expert group on Guide to Assessments
Conceptual framework, methodology and scope	– Objectives – Mandate – Conceptual framework developed or adapted – Systems assessed – Species groups assessed – Ecosystem services/functions assessed	– Add tick box for IPBES assessment and/or type of IPBES assessment (e.g. thematic, regional or global) – Add option to select IPBES conceptual framework – Increase detail on species groups assessed	Expert group on Guide to Assessments Task Force on Data and Knowledge
Timing of the assessment	– Start/end dates – Periodicity of assessment	– Add option to select IPBES Work Programme dates (e.g. 2014-2018)	
Assessment outputs	– Website – Report(s) – Communication materials – Journal publications – Training materials		Task Force on Capacity Building

Tools and processes	– Tools and approaches used – Process for stakeholder engagement – Key stakeholder groups – Number of people directly involved – Types of knowledge incorporated – Peer review of assessment reports	– Align and expand categories under 'Tools and approaches used' to fit better with the proposed families of tools in the Catalogue of Tools and Methodologies – Add hyperlinks between the two catalogues to direct users to more information on a particular tool/method – Expand information collected on traditional/local knowledge – Add tick box to record if uncertainty language has been used	Expert Group on Policy Support Tools Task Force on Indigenous Local Knowledge Task Force on Data and Knowledge
Data	– Accessibility of data used	There is scope for this section to be expanded if considered helpful: – Tick boxes to indicate use of key global datasets – List of indicators used – Move subsection 'Type of knowledge' from the section on 'Tools and processes' to this section and revise to better capture what kind of data were used in the assessment	Task Force on Data and Knowledge
Policy impact	– Impacts on policy and/or decision making – Independent or other review on policy impact – Lessons learnt for future assessments from these reviews	– Broaden this section so that it captures information on the use of the assessment by different audiences (e.g. list publications which have used this assessment or subsequent assessments that have taken place after the initial assessment) – Consider if lessons learned should be a standalone section as there may be other lessons around the process that would be useful to draw out	Expert Group on Policy Support Tools
Capacity building	– Capacity building needs identified – Actions taken to build capacity		Task Force on Capacity Building
Knowledge generation	– Gaps in knowledge identified – Communication of knowledge gaps to stakeholders		Task Force on Data and Knowledge Task Force on Capacity Building

Contact details	Not currently visible to Catalogue users	Make details available to users to facilitate knowledge exchange. Add a tick box to grant permission to display this information when adding new assessments	Task Force on Capacity Building
Additional information	Free-text box	Consider if there is any other relevant information on IPBES assessments that would be useful to capture	

25.   Options for improving the usability of the website, specifically related to the functionality of the website, include enhancing the download feature to enable download of information on a subset of assessments based on search results. This could be particularly useful for regional and thematic assessments under IPBES. A clearer presentation of the information when it is downloaded into a spreadsheet could also be helpful to users and for analysis of the content for periodic reviews of the assessment landscape.

26.   In terms of strategies for increasing population of the Catalogue and use of its information, one option is annual requests to IPBES national focal points, member countries and IPBES stakeholders for assessments to be added. A network of contributors could be established to work with the national focal points and the Technical Support Unit for the Task Force on Data and Knowledge to facilitate the submission of assessments to the Catalogue. Other stakeholders to IPBES could be contacted (if they have not already been contacted) to increase the population of the Catalogue with relevant assessments. Other approaches could include conducting phone interviews with nominated assessment contacts to facilitate the completion of missing information in existing entries in the Catalogue. Additionally, making the submission of new IPBES assessments an obligatory part of the IPBES assessment process could also facilitate increased population of the Catalogue. Assessments should be encouraged to be added in the initial phase of the assessment, and updated at regular intervals during the assessment process. This would ensure a consistent stream of new information into the Catalogue and further improve the Catalogue's relevance to IPBES assessment practitioners. These steps should be made explicit in the IPBES Guide for Assessments (deliverable 2a). The dissemination of assessment outputs carried out under IPBES could also be augmented through use of the Catalogue and promotion of the materials by way of existing networks, such as the SGA Network. Targeted communications to different audiences may also help to raise awareness that the Catalogue exists, for example, submission of a journal article on the Catalogue may help to increase the use of this resource by the science community.

27.   One option to potentially increase the use of the information could be to make the contact details (name, organisation and email address) of the nominated contact for each assessment available online. Currently this information is only visible to Catalogue administrators. This could facilitate the sharing of knowledge between assessment practitioners as well as generate a list of assessment experts, which could potentially be filtered by region. For assessments presently in the Catalogue, permission would be sought on an individual basis to change the visibility of this information in advance of any changes being made.

28.   Improvements to the administrative functionality of the website could be also be made to enhance analysis of the content for future status updates and to monitor more easily who is editing assessment content and when this activity is happening. Such improvements could allow more active formatting of the content by the managers of the Catalogue to increase the consistency of how the information is presented. One limitation of the current assessment template is that it is difficult to capture standardised information across a huge range of assessments types conducted at variable scales etc. Modifying the assessment template to include 'not applicable' tick boxes to distinguish between cases where information is available but not provided versus being unavailable as it is not applicable would be useful to analysis more effectively existing gaps in the content.

29.   Currently the Catalogue is presented in English. Over 60% of visits to the Catalogue are by English speakers, which mean that a considerable number of users speak other languages including German, Spanish, French and Chinese. Users do have the ability to utilize the 'Google Translate' option in order to view the site in their chosen language. However, there are limitations to this functionality as Google Translate is an automated software application and can therefore sometimes misinterpret the technical terms used. Translating some pages or the entire site into the six UN

languages could increase population and use of the Catalogue in different regions but this functionality could pose some challenges in terms of maintenance of the site.

30.   One option for integrating the Catalogue into other processes and activities is to build closer links with the SGA Network and to understand if SGA Network members are using the Catalogue, and if so how. An online survey could be one mechanism to capture this information.

31.   Feedback on the uptake and usefulness of the Catalogue could be evaluated more rigorously in the future to guide further development of the Catalogue. One option could be through an annual survey similar to those described in IPBES/2/INF/14. This survey could be conducted alongside a survey of the Catalogue of Tools and Methodologies as it is likely that many end users will use both resources concurrently. The survey questions could also be used to investigate (i) how the Catalogue is being utilised during implementation of the Work Programme 2014-2018, as well as (ii) how the Catalogue could be better integrated into other IPBES processes and activities of the Platform's current and subsequent Work Programmes. In the short term, to gather more information on who (research, policy etc.) is currently visiting the Catalogue and for what purpose (e.g. what type of information are they looking for) users could be invited to complete a very short survey when they visit the home page of the Catalogue. Another option could be to add a feedback feature to the website so that users could voluntarily provide feedback on the usefulness, or another aspect, of the Catalogue. In addition, adding the ability for the managers of the Catalogue to monitor what information is being downloaded and how frequently would also provide some data on the uptake and usefulness of the download feature.

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