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**Second session**

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**How the Sub-Global Assessment Network and the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services can be mutually supportive**

**Note by the secretariat**

The annex to the present note contains an information note by the secretariat of the Sub-Global Assessment Network, prepared on behalf of its members, entitled “How the Sub-Global Assessment Network and the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services can be mutually supporting”. The annex is presented as received from the secretariat of the Network and has not been formally edited.

**Annex**

## **How the Sub-Global Assessment Network andIPBES can be mutually supporting**

**Information note prepared by the Secretariat of the SGA Network on behalf of its members**

### *Summary*

*The Sub-Global Assessment (SGA) Network has the potential to contribute substantively to all four functions identified for IPBES in the Busan outcome and to many of the potential activities identified in the working document on possible elements of the work programme. Specifically, the SGA Network offers a structured knowledge sharing network of experienced assessment practitioners actively involved in sub-global assessments around the world which can:*

- (a) *Facilitate access to existing sub-global assessments as a foundation for IPBES assessments and catalogue of assessments;*
- (b) *Support the capacity building function of IPBES;*
- (c) *Provide access to best practice, case studies, tools, indicators etc., and to individuals experienced in key areas relevant to IPBES;*
- (d) *Through its community of practice contribute to enabling the harmonization required across assessments of IPBES; and*
- (e) *Assist in the identification of gaps in knowledge and knowledge needs at a range of geographical scales.*

*With this document, the SGA Network therefore offers to contribute to IPBES functions and activities, and provides a range of examples on how the SGA Network could support IPBES activities, as identified in UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2.*

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## I. The Sub-Global Assessment Network

1. The Sub-Global Assessment (SGA)Network, established over six years ago in the follow up to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, provides a common platform for practitioners (individuals and organisations) involved in ecosystem assessment at regional, sub-regional, national and sub-national levels. It's growing membership currently comprises of 66 sub-global assessments across the globe. The SGA Network, together with an independent Advisory Committee, promotes and facilitates improved capacity in undertaking assessments and using the results. This statement is presented on behalf of the members of the SGA Network, and outlines how they believe the SGA Network can support and work with the IPBES process. It is based on a discussion that took place at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the SGANetwork, which was held in Bibao, Spain from 11 to 15 December 2011.
2. SGA Network members are committed to supporting and contributing to IPBES. They recognise that sub-global assessments and IPBES processes should be strongly linked to ensure maximum synergy, but should be maintained as separate processes. In this context, the SGA Network is aware of the potential value of linking the SGA Network work plan more closely with the future IPBES work programme, and will closely follow developments in the establishment of IPBES. In the future, the SGA Network will consider arranging SGA Network meetings back-to-back with IPBES meetings to help facilitate more interaction between the processes. In addition, the SGA Network recognises the importance of considering how to harmonise the timescales and spatial scales of sub-global assessments and IPBES so that they are mutually beneficial.

## II. Potential relevance to the future IPBES work programme

3. The SGA Network has the potential to contribute substantively to all four functions identified for IPBES in the Busan outcome<sup>1</sup> and to many of the potential activities identified in the working document on possible elements of the work programme<sup>2</sup>. Specifically, the SGA Network offers a structured knowledge sharing network of experienced assessment practitioners actively involved in sub-global assessments around the world which can:
  - (a) Facilitate access to existing sub-global assessments as a foundation for IPBES assessments and catalogue of assessments;
  - (b) Support the capacity building function of IPBES;
  - (c) Provide access to best practice, case studies, tools, indicators etc., and to individuals experienced in key areas relevant to IPBES;
  - (d) Through its community of practice contribute to enabling the harmonization required across assessments of IPBES; and
  - (e) Assist in the identification of gaps in knowledge and knowledge needs at a range of geographical scales.
4. The SGA Network encompasses multi-disciplinary knowledge, skills and experience in a broad range of technical areas, including ecological assessments, economic and social valuation, mapping and modeling, scenario and indicator development, and participatory management, as well as experience of working with assessments at variable and multiple scales, and in ensuring the use of assessment outcomes. We believe that this diversity of practical assessment-related expertise will be of great value to IPBES, in particular providing insights into emerging areas such as incorporating local and traditional knowledge into the assessment process.

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1 UNEP/IPBES/3/3

2 UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2

5. It is also noted that the SGA Network has already been mentioned several times in formal IPBES negotiations and expert meetings. The international expert meeting on IPBES and capacity building held in Trondheim, Norway from the 25 to 27 May 2011 recognised that sub-global assessments could be a major driver for capacity building in the context of IPBES<sup>3</sup>.
6. It therefore seems appropriate to conclude that the SGA Network and the IPBES process should be strongly linked, yet remain independent to maintain the complementary strength that the SGA Network can offer with its national- and local-scale focus in relation to the IPBES process, which has a regional and global focus. In order to assist progress towards this, the sections below outline how the SGA Network would be relevant to each of the IPBES functions (*assessments, knowledge generation, policy support tools and methodologies and capacity building*), and how it could support many of the potential activities for inclusion in the work programme identified in UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2. For ease of reference these are addressed in the order in which they appear in the working document.

### **III. Supporting implementation of the future IPBES work programme**

7. Working document UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2 refers to “*building on existing initiatives and experiences*”, and it is clear from this statement that the SGA Network is already carrying out work directly relevant to IPBES. It may therefore be appropriate for IPBES to build a “*strategic partnership*” of some form with the SGA Network in order to promote collaboration and coherence, and to avoid potential duplication of efforts.
8. The SGA Network has a number of capacity-building activities in the pipeline, and therefore collaboration with and support for SGA Network activities would be compatible with aspirations to identify opportunities for “*early achievements*” that “*could be quickly implemented so as to demonstrate rapid progress and promote the value of IPBES to governments and other stakeholders*”. The SGA Network also provides an effective platform for communicating a wealth of information about assessments as well as increasing the “*understanding of why it is important to use science effectively in decision-making on biodiversity and ecosystem services*”, with a key communication tool being the SGA Network’s website<sup>4</sup> which is constantly expanding and being updated as both a communications and support tool. In addition to this, individual SGA Network members are encouraged to play a role in disseminating this information further to their local- and national-scale stakeholder networks.

#### **A. Understanding of the assessment landscape (III.B.1)<sup>5</sup>**

9. The SGA Network could contribute to ensuring IPBES has an understanding of the assessment landscape at the national and local scales. The SGA Network database, which includes assessments undertaken at the local, national and sub-regional scales, could contribute to the “*catalogue of assessments*”, referred to in Potential activity 1. The catalogue would assist in identifying key gaps and assessment needs at various scales. The SGA Network is in the process of updating information on assessments in its database, and working document UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2 already recognises the value of this database by referring to the potential to collaborate with the SGA Network to help with “*maintain[ing] a peer-reviewed website for submission of local and national assessments*”. This suggestion should be given serious consideration as it would reduce potential for duplication of efforts.

#### **B. Developing and adopting consistent assessment methods and approaches (III.B.2)**

10. In determining how sub-global assessments can contribute to the IPBES approach, lessons learned should be drawn from the attempt to match the sub-global assessments with the global process during the course of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Sharing knowledge and experiences from undertaking assessments by distilling lessons learned from the approaches previously used can guide and inform new practitioners. For example, members of the SGA Network can draw on their experiences of engaging different scientific

3 UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/INF/10

4 www.ecosystemassessments.net

5 Refers to sub-section III.B.1 and therefore Potential activity 1 in working document UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2

disciplines (including both natural and social scientists), stakeholders and knowledge communities into the assessment process to assist IPBES in developing guidelines which help to ensure an “*interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach*” is adopted for IPBES assessments.

### **C. Carrying out global and regional assessments (III.B.3)**

11. Working document UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2 refers to how findings on biodiversity and ecosystem services from the sub-global assessments that make up the SGA Network can be used to inform IPBES regional and global assessments. In addition, members of the SGA Network could offer insights into the challenges of conducting assessments at different scales, thereby contributing to the ongoing discussion within IPBES on how global, regional and sub-regional assessments would be carried out. The SGA Network is also currently exploring the development of regional hubs in order to build synergies through commonalities, and to facilitate capacity building. Once established, early experiences from these pilot hubs could inform IPBES approaches to regional hubs.

### **D. Catalyzing and promoting national and sub-regional assessment activities (III.B.4)**

12. Working document UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2 acknowledges the important role of sub-global assessments in informing “*national and sub-regional decision making and policy formation*” and how they might contribute “*to a bottom-up approach to IPBES global and regional assessments*”. It is the national and sub-regional scale where the SGA Network has particular strength. The relevance of the SGA Network in relation to catalyzing support for and promoting national and sub-regional assessment activities is also explicitly recognised, noting that the SGA Network has the potential to be “*strengthened and built upon*”. In this area of work in particular there are significant opportunities for the interests of IPBES and the work of the SGA Network to be closely aligned and mutually supportive, and the opportunities and modalities for achieving this could be explored as the IPBES work programme develops. In particular, the SGA Network could be supporting emerging national and sub-regional assessments through its knowledge platform, providing access to existing experience, tools and resources, and encouraging peer-to-peer learning.

### **E. Carrying out thematic assessments and assessment of new topics identified by science (III.B.5)**

13. Thematic assessments were discussed briefly at the 3<sup>rd</sup> SGA Network Annual Meeting as a means for helping to ensure a more demand-based approach to assessments. The SGA Network could support IPBES in the early stages of these thematic assessments by helping to identify relevant data, information and expertise from the sub-global scale networks of scientists and stakeholders associated with sub-global assessments. Members of the SGA Network could also draw on their wide-ranging experience to help the future IPBES Plenary to identify and review the implications of potential new topics for assessments. In this way the annual meetings of the SGA Network, or possibly dedicated network workshops, could assist in scoping and startup phases of any assessments established by the future IPBES Plenary.

### **D. Identifying and prioritizing gaps in knowledge (III.B.6) / Engaging key stakeholders in addressing prioritized knowledge needs (III.B.7)**

14. Information gaps commonly become apparent during an assessment process. With a growing database of assessments the SGA Network could potentially contribute to the proposed “*annotated list of identified policy-relevant knowledge needs*” (Potential activity 6) through compiling information on the gaps identified as part of both completed and ongoing sub-global assessments. This list could be complemented by including, where possible, proposed solutions for each identified gap. Through coordinating efforts to undertake assessments, the SGA Network could also provide guidance on what priority work and actions need to be undertaken at sub-global levels. In this context, the proposed SGA Network regional hubs could be an excellent mechanism to help promote this and support the work of IPBES. This might also contribute to review of capacity building needs and priorities. In addition, SGA Network members could assist in “*communicating information on knowledge needs to the wider scientific community, other knowledge holders [and] funding agencies*” through their own local networks, to increase awareness of knowledge needs at sub-global scales.

## **E. Making effective use of modeling and scenarios (III.B.9) / Identifying policy-relevant tools and methodologies (III.B.10) / Improving access to policy-relevant tools and methodologies (III.B.11) / Promoting and catalyzing further development of policy-relevant tools and methodologies (III.B.12)**

15. Members of the SGA Network includespractitioners working with a wider range of tools and approaches for assessments, and also those who are developing and/or testing new tools and methodologies. This includes members of the SGA Network who have expertise in modeling and/or scenarios and can contribute to ongoing discussions within IPBES on “*how to make effective use of modeling and scenarios in the context of IPBES*” (Potential activity 9). The SGA Network couldtherefore certainly contribute tothe “*overview of policy-relevant tools and methodologies*” referred to in Potential activity 10. In addition, the SGA Network, through its website<sup>6</sup>, will be providing access to tools and methodologies (Potential activity 11)via links to relevant websites such as The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)<sup>7</sup>.The SGA Network is also working to improving mainstreaming and application of results from sub-global assessments, and may therefore also be in a position to report to IPBES on which policy-relevant tools are being used by decision makers, and to“*identify new areas*” that require tools (Potential activity 12). In addition, theSGA Network may be able to assist in promoting tool-developmentby testing policy-relevant tools within local-scale stakeholder networks associated with particular sub-global assessments. During discussion at the informal international expert workshop on policy support through relevant tools and methodologies in IPBES, held in Bonn, Germany from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> December 2011, it was suggested that much of the effective work on policy support tools and methodologies would be done through communities of practice. The SGA Network may be well placed to stimulate and support such communities of practice, and this will need further consideration as the IPBES work programme evolves. Building capacity for practitioners to use policy-relevant tools and methodologies is a further activity the SGA Network could undertake to support tool use.

## **F. Identifying and prioritizing capacity buildings needs (III.B.13)**

16. One of the main objectives of the SGA Network is to promote and facilitate improved capacity in undertaking and using assessments.The aim is to achieve this at least inpart through running capacity building workshopsand training on areas identified as prioritiesprimarily by its members.Annual reporting of thesepractitioner-identified prioritiescould inform Potential activity 13 on “*reviews of capacity building needs*”.However more significant for the SGA Network is the potential for sub-global assessments and activities relating to them to be identified by the IPBES Plenary as priorities, and hence to be more strongly promoted and supported at national and international levels. The SGA Network plays an important role because it can help to strengthen capacity at the national level especially through the learning-by-doing approach, and through sharing of experience with others working at the same level, both often done on a South-South<sup>8</sup> basis and sometimes a North-South basis. Much of this is beyond the scope of IPBES itself, but can be supported through recognition by the IPBES Plenary that this is a capacity building priority.

## **G. Catalyzing funding for capacity building activities (III.B.14)**

17. Access to funding is a major hurdle for the sub-global assessments, whether it is the preliminary undertaking of an assessment or initiating a follow-on phase that might involve economic valuation or broader communication of the findings. Any activities that IPBES undertakewhichcatalyze funding for capacity building would be welcomed, and the SGA Network wouldbe happy to assist in any way considered appropriate including, for example, by participating in focused “*meetings/conventions*” on this topic or contributing to the proposed “*list of needs and financing gaps in capacity building*” from the perspective of those actually implementing sub-global assessments.

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6        [www.ecosystemassessments.net](http://www.ecosystemassessments.net)

7        [www.teebweb.org](http://www.teebweb.org)

8        **South-South (Cooperation)** is a term historically used by policymakers and academics to describe the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries (<http://south-south.ipc-undp.org>)

## **F. Increasing access to data, information, and knowledge (III.B.15)**

18. The SGA Network's website<sup>9</sup> is a key resource providing access to information on each sub-global assessment and to related reports, guidance materials and tools, and it is intended that this will continue and where possible be expanded so as to increase the value of the resource. Increasing access to the data being used in the sub-global assessments has not been considered to date, but if financial support could be secured, one useful activity that would indirectly support IPBES could be to comprehensively record the datasets behind each sub-global assessment, and to identify their accessibility. This could form the basis of a database which new IPBES assessments could be added as they are completed.

## **G. Addressing balance in participation in the IPBES work programme (III.B.16)**

19. The need has been identified to ensure balanced participation in the IPBES work programme, and the working document UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/2 includes a list of activities which different international assessment processes have undertaken in order to try to achieve this. It should be noted that the SGA Network is already using a number of these approaches. Additionally, through the SGA Network IPBES could access a wide range of individuals from all over the world who are already gaining experience in implementation of sub-global assessments, and who may be well placed to support IPBES and to help ensure a broader participation.

**Contact details of the SGA Network Secretariat:**

*UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)*

219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, CB3 ODL, UK

assessment@unep-wcmc.org

*The Cropper Foundation*

Building #7, Fernandes Industrial Centre, Laventille, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad & Tobago, West Indies

info@thecropperfoundation.org