



# Engaging the conservation community in the IPBES process

There is increasing political and scientific recognition of the value of nature for human well-being (Díaz et al. 2015). However, trade-offs between human development and the environment continue to harm biodiversity and ecosystem services (BES) (Tittensor et al. 2014). The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was established in 2012 as a science-policy platform to catalyze action on environmental issues by producing global and regional assessments that synthesize information on the state of the planet's biodiversity, its ecosystems, and the essential services they provide to society and to support policy formulation to prevent further declines in BES. The IPBES serves a complementary role to biodiversity-related conventions such as the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and has a similar synthesizing role to the Intergovernmental Platform on Climate Change (IPCC). A key novelty of IPBES is that it acknowledges that socioecological relationships are an explicit component of the biodiversity landscape.

The IPBES is an international science-policy platform, with the expectation, opportunity, and responsibility for experts from many disciplines globally to engage with it. IPBES offers rigorous and synthesized scientific information on BES that can drive public engagement and policy dialogue (Redford et al. 2012). Prior recommendations to ensure high-quality assessment reports through rigorous and transparent review and participation of a broad range of experts (Pe'er et al. 2013) are being addressed through its stakeholder engagement strategy (SES), work programs, and rules of procedure. Stakeholders are involved in all IPBES functions, including the contribution and integration of knowledge from scientists and indigenous and local knowledge systems (ILKs), integral to the platform's success. The first IPBES assessments, Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production and Scenario Analysis and Modelling of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, are near completion. The latter assessment provides guidelines for using scenarios and models in policy and decision-making contexts that will support upcoming global and regional assessments and a thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration.

## Stakeholder Engagement

An open-ended stakeholder network is forming to facilitate the organization of stakeholders from government, nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, the scientific community, indigenous peoples, and local communities. Stakeholder involvement will be promoted through connections with existing stakeholder networks and by encouraging transdisciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange and regional and local stakeholder participation in assessments and scenario development. Governments and stakeholders can nominate individuals to serve as experts in IPBES assessments, with stakeholders identifying up to 20% of those selected. The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is one of many stakeholders that have contributed nominations, facilitated government nominations through advertising IPBES nomination processes, and connected individuals to the process.

An ongoing challenge involves broadening this stakeholder group, which is dominated by western natural scientists and biodiversity-related government and nongovernmental organizations. Professional societies and networks are ideally positioned to encourage contributions to IPBES assessments and task forces through their networks of relevant experts. For example, SCB can connect IPBES with known gaps in disciplinary expertise, such as SCB's Social Sciences Working Group, and promote more diverse geographic participation through its regional sections.

## Scientific Rigor and Legitimacy of IPBES Products

Mechanisms are in place to ensure the transparency and integrity of IPBES products, based on robust science and knowledge (Redford et al. 2012; Pe'er et al. 2013; Hochkirch et al. 2015; Larigauderie 2015). The IPBES procedures provide standards for inclusion of peer-reviewed information, evaluation and communication of uncertainty, and robust and transparent processes for revision, approval, and adoption of assessment reports and summary documents.

To avoid bias, experts do not represent particular industries, governments, or regions, and conflicts of

Interest must be reported (Larigauderie 2015). Clear disciplinary biases were evident in the selection of the interim multidisciplinary expert panel (MEP); members were predominantly natural scientists, with poor representation of gender, disciplinary diversity, and ILK. The SCB and other stakeholders were strong catalysts in the recognition of this lack of diversity, resulting in a revised MEP nomination structure that is promoting diversity of this expert panel. In response, a more diverse second MEP was selected at the third plenary session (Montana & Borie 2015).

### Knowledge-Policy Interface

In addition to its role in delivering global, regional, and thematic assessments, IPBES aims to develop policy-relevant tools and methods to help translate BES knowledge into informed decision making and to promote dialogue between the scientific community, knowledge holders, and the broader stakeholder community and decision makers. Scenarios help people explore the effects of alternative development and policy options on BES and help counter the current reactive mode of decision making, in which society responds to the degradation of BES in an uncoordinated, often sectorial fashion. Direct involvement of stakeholders at national and subnational scales should improve the policy relevance of BES scenarios and provide broader perspectives on management solutions, trade-offs, and synergies between biodiversity conservation and other uses of the natural environment.

### Capacity Development

Key capacities that require attention include strengthening the ability of currently underrepresented groups to participate in IPBES assessments; developing and strengthening the participatory mechanism for ILKs; and supporting the mobilization and alignment of financial and technical resources. Task forces on capacity building and ILK have developed recommendations that should catalyze funding and commence initiatives, such as the development of training programs for BES scenarios (e.g., ScenNet) and development of an ILK network.

The IPBES relies almost entirely on voluntary contributions of scientists and knowledge holders to develop and review assessment documents, and increasing this capacity is a key priority. The IPBES Young Fellows Pilot Programme was launched in 2015 and aims to encourage early career scientists to contribute to assessments; over 400 applications were received. The Task Force on Capacity Building has developed a “matchmaking facility” to encourage dialogue between those offering financial and technical support and those requiring it. The IPBES can also partner with societies, including SCB, to provide training courses and workshops concurrently with

society conferences. Language and cultural challenges continue to be poorly addressed, and IPBES should prioritize translation of its products into multiple languages. Regional stakeholder networks such as SCB could support IPBES by facilitating these translations.

### Recommendations

The IPBES is strongly aligned with SCB’s mission—to advance the science and practice of conserving biological diversity—and provides a venue for conservation science to influence policy. It offers a novel collaborative opportunity to develop new inter- and transdisciplinary applied research and methods. Key recommendations to support the growth of IPBES include:

- 1 Get to know IPBES. Lack of awareness of IPBES and its functions among the conservation community limits productive engagement with IPBES. Information on the platform is available at <http://www.ipbes.net/>. The SCB’s IPBES committee welcomes new members ([www.conbio.org/ipbes](http://www.conbio.org/ipbes)).
- 2 Identify and nominate relevant experts to the assessments, task forces, and expert groups, particularly individuals from outside western Europe and North America and with experience in the social sciences, policy, and ILK.
- 3 Join and encourage others to participate in the stakeholder engagement network (<https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/ipbes-engagement-network>).
- 4 Disseminate outputs from the IPBES deliverables both within the scientific community and to local and national policy makers.

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