

1st (informal) IPBES Belgian Expert meeting

30 October 2015; Belgian Science Policy Office – Louisalaan 231, Brussels - Belgium

Rapporteur: Hilde Eggermont

IPBES National Focal Point Website: www.biodiversity.be/ipbes

Agenda

10.00 – 10.15: Welcome + Brief introduction on the Belgian Biodiversity Platform & IPBES National Focal Point activities (Hilde Eggermont, *RBINS*)

10.15 – 11.15: Tour de Table (3-5 min presentations of the participants)

- Your role, and the role of your institute
- Perceived links with other IPBES deliverables
- Major concerns/questions with regard to your role as Belgian expert
- Your personal appreciation of the role (and maybe effectiveness) of IPBES in providing scientific support for policy making

11.15 – 12.30: Informal discussion on best practices, working modalities, synergies amongst assessments, practical issues etc.

12.30 – 13.30: Bio-lunch

Participants

Target audience: people engaged in the implementation of the IPBES workprogramme as Belgian expert (for scoping exercises, actual assessments and/or reviewing processes), and/or supporting the Belgian IPBES NFP activities

Participants list: see Annex 1



General objective of the meeting

- Sharing best practices, discuss working modalities, synergies amongst assessments, and practical issues (time management, travel grants,...)
- Improve the general understanding of the IPBES process
- Provide suggestions to improve the implementation/quality/usefulness of the assessments, and the functioning of bodies involved in IPBES (national focal points, secretariat,...)

Summary of the discussions

MAJOR COMMENTS/CONCERNS

- **LACK OF CREDITS for scientists/institutes:** Lack of credits for the scientists; no clear return on investment, at least on the short term. Also, currently – it is still hard to convince managers/promoters to allow engagement of their personnel in the assessments (invest time & resources). However, some experts indicated that the benefits for ‘personal development’ and networking are not to be underestimated (the latter could also lead to future collaborations and academic productions). The situation might improve as the IPBES assessments get published, and start to show their value (or not); that was also the initial purpose of the so-called “fast track assessments”. In the future, being engaged in IPBES might get more weight on a CV and citation record; or contribute to the institute’s prestige (similar to the situation with the IPCC – the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change)
- **USE OF E-TOOLS:** The e-scoping for the Invasive Alien Species assessment was not well perceived. There was hardly any interaction between participants (contributors and facilitators); also not clear how expert contributions will be dealt with. This decreases the motivation to participate in such exercises. Face-to-face meetings were considered much more effective (though these obviously come at a higher cost and are less inclusive). Overall – it seemed that only a very limited number of experts actively participated
- **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** How will citizens be involved in IPBES; retired experts and others? At the international level, such engagement could (should) be reinforced by the IPBES Stakeholder Engagement Network that is currently being set up (see also Google Group: [here](#)); Terms of Reference are still being discussed. We hope to have a better view on this structure & full potential of this network by IPBES-4 (Feb 2016). In any case, stakeholder engagement in IPBES is not a panacea (highly government-driven process). The concern was also raised that stakeholders should be engaged throughout the process, not just at ‘the end of the pipeline’
- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO EXPERTS (and to the IPBES TRUST FUND)?** Countries are free to decide on financial support of expert participation. Several countries (e.g. UK) have a limited budget available to support expert participation in IPBES but cannot guarantee support for all experts selected by the MEP, or that funding will be provided for attendance at every meeting. Funding is thus considered on a case-by-case basis per meeting, taking into account the Member State’s priorities of the IPBES work programme. As number of selected experts is highly unpredictable, Belgium is investigating a similar approach as the one described above, with payment of experts (i.e. travel and accommodation costs only, no reimbursement of

expert/working time) by one or more regional authorities (assuming that Member State contribution would be fully covered by Belspo) and Belspo, on an ad-hoc basis. Likely, non-residents will not be eligible for travel support. So far, Belgium has not contributed to the IPBES Trust fund (unlike many neighbouring and even developing countries); the dossiers are waiting a decision from the State Secretary.

- **VERY AMBITIOUS WORKPLAN:** The IPBES Workprogramme is considered very ambitious – not only in terms of the actual assessments (extent, up-scaling and integration), but also as regards capacity building (dialogue with, and engagement of developing countries, Central Asia in particular). Expectations are very high – both at the side of the scientists and at that of the policymakers
- **ACTUAL IMPLICATIONS/USEFULNESS OF THE ASSESSMENTS:** It is not clear how the results of IPBES will contribute to an increase in human wellbeing (lots of buzzwords). Similarly – it is still unclear to what extent the assessment will be used/translated in policymaking (to what extent they will be useful in providing policy-relevant information?). In BE, not all concerned policy-makers have been involved from the very beginning, and hence - have not been able to give inputs on the types of assessments they would have found useful.
- **CONSERVATION versus ECOSYSTEM SERVICES:** Balance between Conservation (intrinsic value of biodiversity) and Ecosystem Services biased towards monetary/utilitarian/anthropogenic views). Future developments of the conceptual framework, the methodological assessment on diverse conceptualization of values, and integration among the various assessments might help to overcome this discussion.
Similarly – there is still a very limited view on sustainable Use (often restrained to tourism & aquaculture); so far, the exercise (scoping) does not reach its full potential
- **1st AUTHOR MEETINGS:** Overall, the 1st author meetings for the regional assessments were quite well managed and well perceived (except for some logistical issues, like interpretation for French speaking participants from developing countries). See also Figure 1 (below) - explaining the difference between a literature review & an assessment; such information is really useful to understand the scope and value of the assessments.
Also during the 1st meeting of the capacity building forum meeting – there was a good interaction, positive spirit and energy!
- **IPBES COMMUNICATION:** IPBES should improve its communication at various levels: communication with the IPBES NFPs, experts and other stakeholders. Often, there is a timelag resulting in (too) limited time for exchange/review/feedback. Limited resources at the side of the secretariat are likely at the basis of this problem.
- **IMPLEMENTATION OF ASSESSMENTS/TIMING AND EXTENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS:** Experts would like to have a better view on the planning (time schedule) and required contribution (from their side) at all stages of the assessment (what is expected, from who, by when?). Link with the decision-making process should be made clear (plenary sessions etc.). The role of coordinating lead authors is crucial. They should integrate the inputs from the contributing experts (not just put together a summation of all the comments).
- **MOMENTUM IN BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH AND NETWORKING:** IPBES creates a momentum in the community; it reinforces communication between various communities, raises biodiversity on the policy agenda, and improves the knowledge base for decision making. This side-effect might be more important than the actual usefulness of the assessments

- **IMBALANCE BETWEEN DISCIPLINES AND BETWEEN COUNTRY REPRESENTATION (of the experts):** Still an obvious imbalance in expertise (mostly natural scientists); and country representation
- **BIODIVERSITY & HEALTH:** Link between biodiversity & health should receive more focus in the assessments
- **'POLICY FILTER':** Scientists have to be aware that IPBES is not about 'doing science', but about providing the knowledge-base for informed decision making; the outcome of the process needs to be policy relevant (yet, not policy prescriptive). Various policy "options" need to be presented, with possible outcomes
- **AVOIDING DUPLICATION:** will be key (e.g. with other biodiversity initiatives)! See also "the Catalogue of Assessments on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services," a source of information on assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services from the global to the sub-national scales: [here](#)
- **COMMUNICATION ON UNCERTAINTIES (accurate reflection of uncertainties):** crucial! Scientists should recognize that they are not omniscient, and have to communicate very clearly on uncertainties. Similarly, politicians have to take these uncertainties into account (precautionary principle).

A FEW MORE COMMENTS SPECIFIC TO THE Belgian IPBES-NFP

- Belgian national focal point seen as a useful entry point to voice major concerns – both with regard to the actual assessments (contribute/coordinate national input) and IPBES functioning
- Feedback on plenary sessions (process, decisions) would be welcome – e.g. distribute a light version of the Belgian delegation report to the experts involved
- The IPBES-NFP website, and the one currently being created for the Pan-European network of National Focal Points could be a good entry point to events, documents, resources
- This type of informal meetings are perceived very useful, and should be organized on a regular basis (depending on the needs)
- Concerns raised during this meeting should be taken up as lessons-learned. It could also be useful to share them with other national focal points (as will be done in the pan-european network of IPBES national focal points)

FIGURE 1 – Comparison between assessment and a literature review



An assessment is not a literature review

	A literature review	An assessment
Primary Audience	Scientists	Decision-makers
Authors	One or a few	Large, varied and transdisciplinary group nominated by governments and stakeholders
Identifies gaps in	Research: curiosity-driven	Knowledge for implementation: problem driven
(Un)certainty statements	Not required	Essential
Judgement of relevance to a policy question	Optional	Required but clearly flagged
Review	Peer review, typically anonymous and often a small number of scientific reviewers	Peer review as well as government and other stakeholders review. Typically reviewers are not anonymous.
Summary for a broader audience	Not essential	Essential to reduce complexity
Outputs	Scientific paper	Report, Summary for Policy Makers, etc.



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