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The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), up and walking

Introduction

The success story of the IPCC¹, putting climate change on the agenda of politicians and science financing bodies worldwide, is meant to be duplicated by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)², which focuses on the global biodiversity crisis and the services we get from nature. After its initiation in January 2013 in Bonn, Germany, the second plenary (IPBES-2) was held in Antalya, Turkey, between December 7th and December 14th. At IPBES-2 an ambitious work programme

was adopted for the years 2014–2018. Eight assessments (see Table 1 and Figure 1), three of which are intended to be finished as soon as 2015, and 2016 respectively, will be taken on in this initial work phase, in addition to a range of other deliverables aimed at fulfilling the Platform’s other three functions: capacity building, knowledge generation and policy tools (Figure 1).

The initial “thematic” assessment on “pollination and food production” is meant to provide an ‘early win’, given that this biodiversity issue is already highly relevant and a lot of parti-

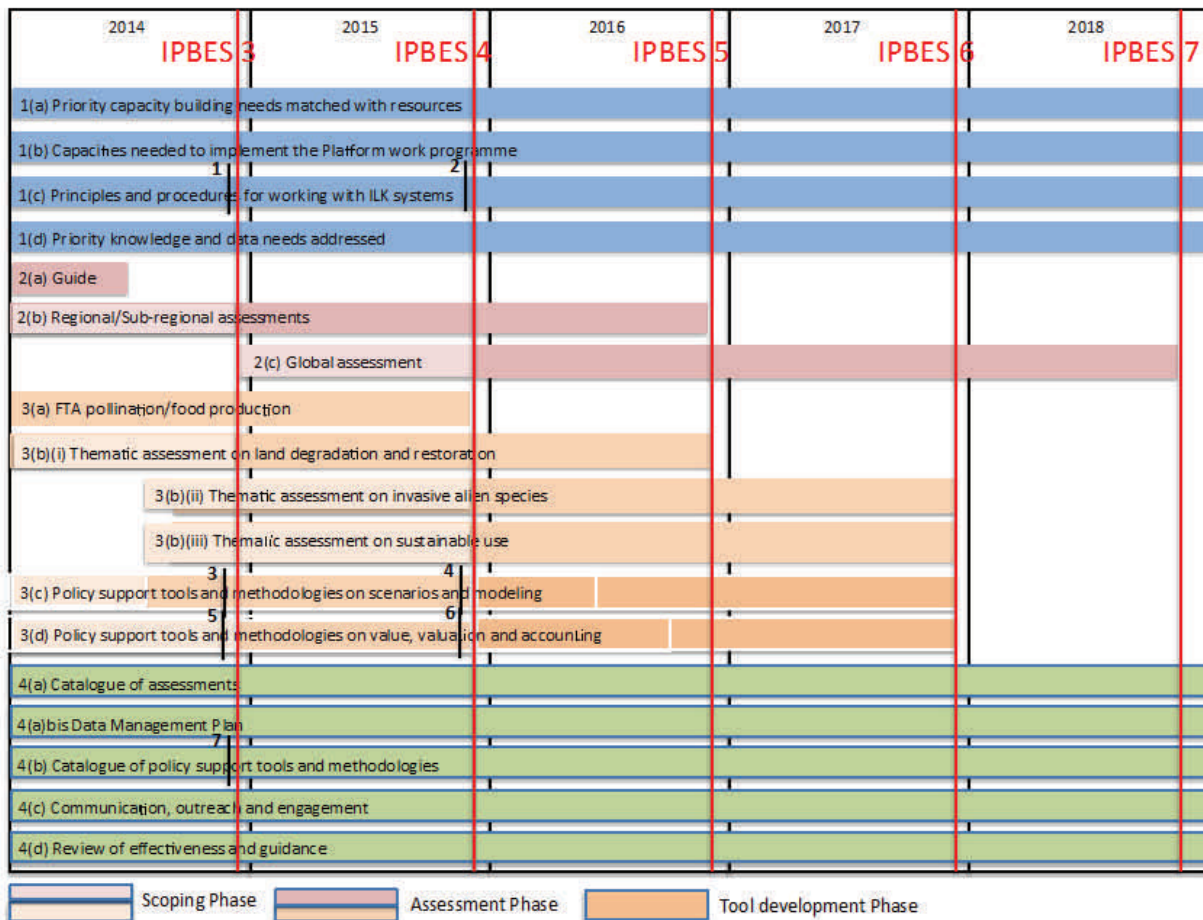


Figure 1. Schedule for delivery of the work programme. Numbers 1–7 refer to milestones: (1) ‘preliminary’ and (2) ‘final’ principles and procedures for working with indigenous and local knowledge; (3) ‘preliminary’ and (4) ‘final’ guide on how to use scenarios and modelling in the Platform’s work; (5) ‘preliminary’ and (6) ‘final’ guide on how to use values, valuation and accounting in the Platform’s work; (7) guidance on policy support tools. Source: Decision of the second Plenary of IPBES².

1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, at <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

2 <http://www.ipbes.net/>

Table 1. Eight assessments adopted for work programme 1 in IPBES (2014–2018). Numbers in parentheses refer to Figure 1.

1. Regional and Subregional Assessments (2b)
2. Global Assessment (2c)
3. Fast Track Assessment on Pollination, Pollinators, Food production (3a)
4. Thematic assessment on invasive alien species (3b)(ii)
5. Thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration (3b)(i)
6. Thematic assessment on sustainable land use (3b)(iii)
7. Fast track assessment on Policy support tools and methodologies on scenarios and modeling (3c)
8. Policy support tools and methodologies on value, valuation, and accounting (3d)

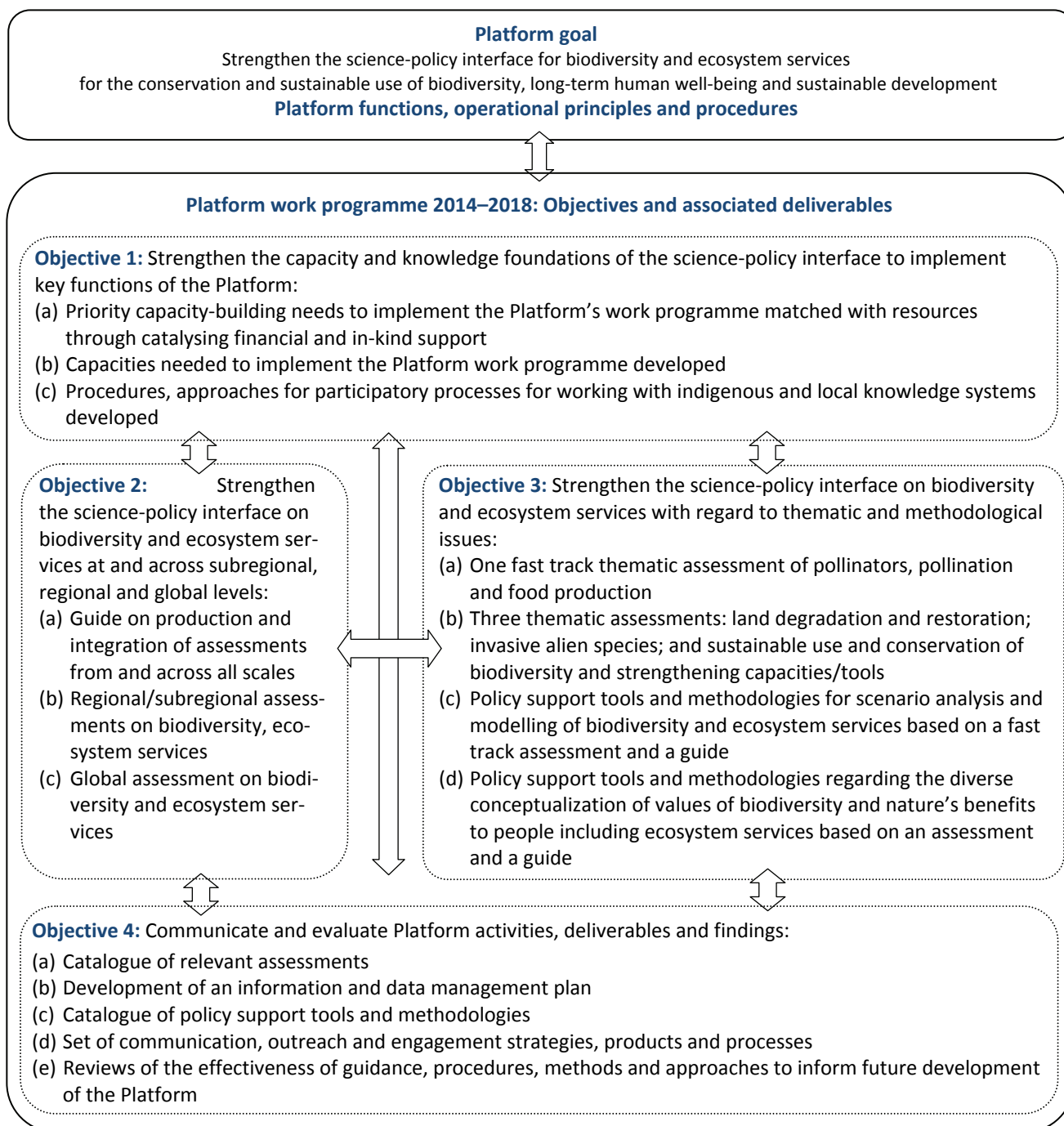


Figure 2. Structure and key elements of the Platform work programme as it relates to the Platform’s goal, functions, operating principles and procedures. Source: Decision of the second Plenary of IPBES².

ment research is available. The regional biodiversity assessments, which will serve as a basis for the global assessment, and an assessment on land degradation and restoration (see Table 1), will also start immediately and are expected to be finalized by 2016. All assessment themes touch on key issues in the biodiversity debate, and one can hope that these assessments will really contribute to fostering the protection of the global biodiversity as well as human well-being.

Is IPBES too ambitious to succeed?

From the start, the IPCC had a clear-cut focus, both thematically and in terms of the global geographic scale. Furthermore, its assessments were based mainly on peer-reviewed and published

scientific literature. The IPBES sets out with an even more ambitious agenda (Figure 2). One reason is that, although a global phenomenon, the biodiversity crisis in the end happens regionally and locally. Thus, assessments will have to cover a considerably greater diversity of geographic scales than the IPCC. Aiming at making the Platform’s results relevant for its ‘end users’—particularly the local, regional, and national policy-makers and practitioners—IPBES in addition wants to embrace different knowledge systems in its work programme: especially indigenous, traditional and local knowledge (Figure 3). How these different knowledge systems can and will be included in the process, how different value systems can be combined, and how they can be translated into policy

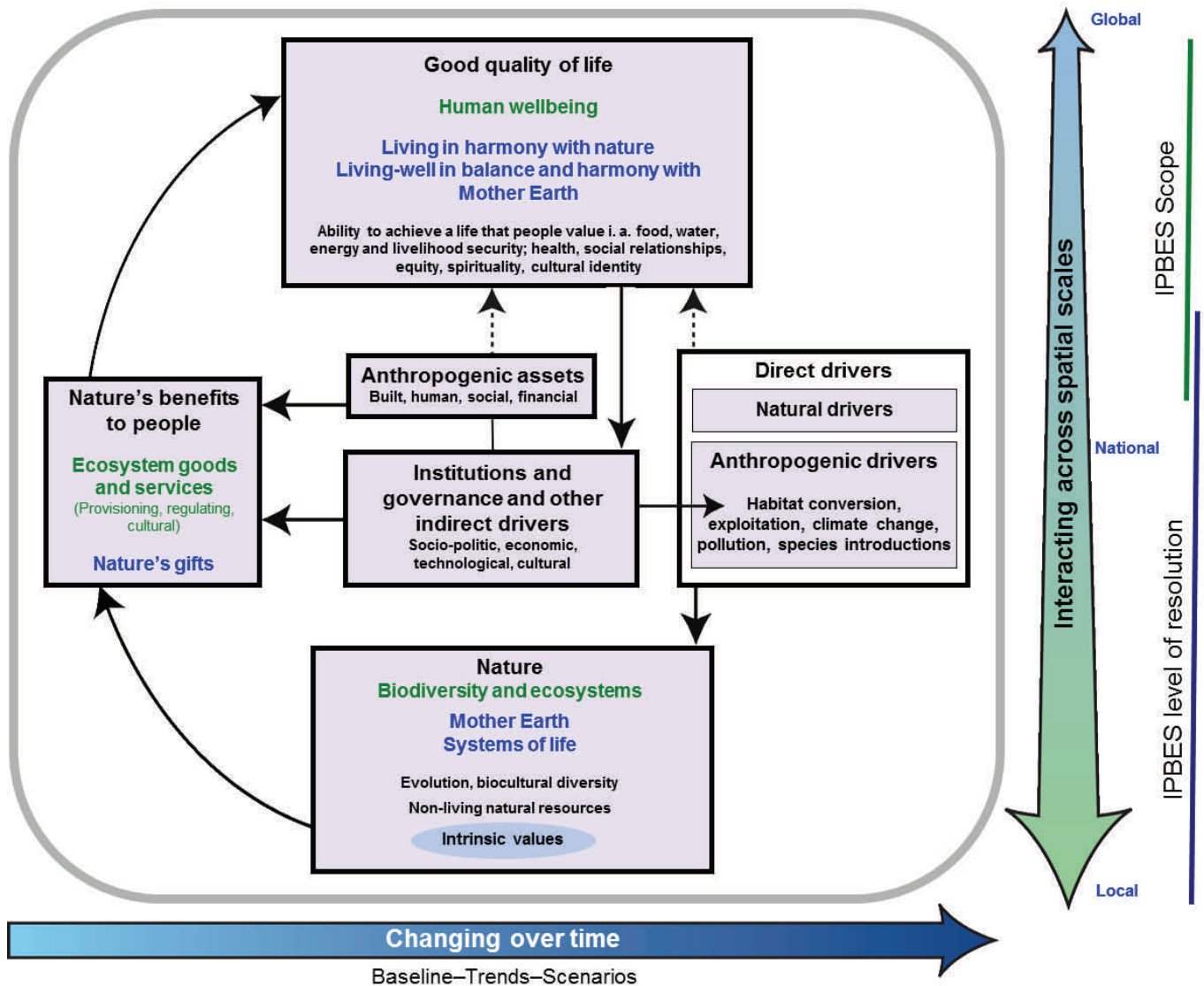


Figure 3. Analytical conceptual framework. Text in green denotes a science-based conceptualization whereas text in blue denotes conceptualization from other knowledge and value systems. Source: Decision of the second Plenary of IPBES².

will largely have to be learnt on the job. The ideas behind this inclusive approach are that indigenous and local knowledge can significantly contribute to solving the biodiversity crisis. Furthermore, the biodiversity crisis in the end needs to be solved at regional and local scales. As a consequence, the acceptance of the resulting assessments needs to be as broad as possible, and since it is hoped that acceptance will increase with participation, including local and indigenous knowledge holders is considered a good strategy by many in the IPBES process. Finally, the whole process also is regarded in the light of capacity building, which again promotes the inclusion of regional and local scales.

Whether IPBES can succeed with these ambitious goals will have to be seen. At least, significant effort has been made, and can be seen throughout the work programme and also in the conceptual framework, to forge new ground in bridging different knowledge and value systems.

Is there open, independent and inclusive involvement of the scientific community and other knowledge holders?

Most people involved in the IPBES process will agree that, like in the IPCC, a comprehensive scientific basis is the core for its credibility. From a scientist's viewpoint this credibility can only be gained if all processes involving knowledge synthesis and generation involve contributions from the best available experts in open and transparent processes. Though many governments probably have a fairly good overview of their national scientific communities, science is generally structured internationally rather than nationally. For example, the International Biogeography Society (IBS) has ca. 850 members worldwide who are biodiversity experts with potential contributions to the IPBES process. The IBS has been surveying these members to determine who would like and is qualified to contribute to IPBES assessments. Thus

the IBS has an effective process for the nomination of experts to IPBES assessments. In contrast, given that 115 countries are members in IPBES, it would be a significantly larger effort if the IBS had to nominate these experts through their respective national focal points. Many learned societies and especially individual experts would probably shy away from that task and thus potential experts might never make it to the nomination list. Thus, in order to make use of international science organizations, the international avenue may be the most efficient way to generate diverse representation.

Open expert involvement should be realized also in the scoping of themes and reviewing of assessments. However, not all member states envision such open and inclusive participation. Instead, the G77 countries present at IPBES-2, plus Russia, were committed to keeping the nomination of experts and the scoping and reviewing process of IPBES deliverables in the hands of governments or of experts chosen by them. As a result, the members of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP - the scientific heart of IPBES that e.g. selects the authors for the assessments and establishes task forces.) would be chosen on the basis of governments' lists only. After intense debates, a compromise was brokered with regard to the nominations for the scoping and writing activities: that up to a maximum of 20% of the selected experts are allowed to come from nominations by "relevant stakeholder" groups. By contrast, the nomination process in IPCC is completely open. The future will show whether this compromise will be sufficient to garner acceptance of IPBES products or whether it will have compromised the credibility of IPBES in the long run. On the same page, the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (SES), although generally welcomed by many member states, was not agreed upon in Antalya. The aim of this strategy is active involvement of stakeholders, indigenous peoples and local knowledge holders



The abstract book of the 6th IBS Biennial Meeting is available at:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3kb4c5jr>

<http://www.biogeography.org/html/Meetings/2013/program.html>.

in all IPBES processes, as well as the creation of a self-organized, open-ended partners' forum to ensure that the output is produced in a participatory manner. Currently, it seems unlikely that this strategy will be adopted in its present form, considering the hesitant positions that many governments demonstrated in Antalya.

How to get involved

Despite the fact that many stakeholder groups had hoped for more open and inclusive processes in IPBES, involvement is crucial for it to become a success story; all relevant processes such as scoping themes, writing assessments and reviewing assessments will in large parts be done by scientists and other knowledge holders on a voluntary basis. As indicated above, there are basically two trajectories to getting involved. One is through your national focal point that can be found on the IPBES webpage³. A second is through relevant

stakeholder groups, e.g. learned societies such as the IBS. Nomination by either national focal points or stakeholder organizations is of course no guarantee for being selected—experts will be chosen by the MEP based on merit.

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³ <http://www.ipbes.net/about-ipbes/members-of-the-platform.html>

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