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# Five years of IPBES – reflecting the achievements and challenges and identifying needs for its review towards a 2<sup>nd</sup> work programme



17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, Leipzig, Germany

## Workshop report

## Executive summary

On 17 to 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017, twenty-four academics and practitioners with diverse inter- and transdisciplinary experiences gathered for a workshop to collectively reflect on IPBES' work and performance. The workshop was held at the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) in Leipzig. The workshop and this report represent an effort to proactively contribute to IPBES' ongoing (external) review process. The external review process opens up a window of opportunity towards re-thinking the very purpose of IPBES and identifying new pathways to live up to its initial ambitions, such as to move beyond assessments. The workshop identified a spectrum of potential opportunities, provided visions for the future work of IPBES, and collected insights into how to cope with them. While the workshop focussed on identifying future challenges and possible solutions, all participants underlined the great achievements that IPBES has already accomplished. This report provides a synthesis of the workshop discussions. The main recommendations for the external review were:

- The external review should seize the opportunity to establish itself in a responsive and future-oriented way so that it not only assesses past performance but also facilitates learning and identifies new pathways for IPBES. It is important that the focus of the review is not just on the extent to which IPBES has fulfilled its ambitions but also on the efficiency with which it has done this, and on the potential unintended effects of decisions.
- For IPBES to achieve its initial ambitions, strengthening the (mainly global-scale) scientific knowledge base behind assessments is necessary but not yet sufficient. To meet its broader set of goals, it is required to pay critical attention to all aspects of policy support, knowledge generation and capacity-building, including the meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities and the incorporation of local and indigenous knowledge. This will require building synergies between knowledge systems, promoting the engagement of the social sciences and humanities, and addressing current challenges in the nomination and selection procedures for the identification of experts.
- The external review also opens up space to identify a full range of alternative options and choices that are available when reforming IPBES. The review should engage in real-world dialogues and liaise closely with partners from research, policy and practice as well as with national platforms and local actors.

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# Introduction

The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was set up in 2012 to assess the state of the planet's biodiversity, its ecosystems, and the essential contributions they provide to society. In doing so, it strives to include knowledge from across scientific disciplines and indigenous and local knowledge, in a way that is relevant for decision-making. IPBES has innovative features compared to previous biodiversity-related assessment bodies. In addition to producing thematic and methodological assessments, IPBES also includes capacity building, knowledge generation and policy support as main functions. It seeks to engage a broad and diverse range of stakeholders and to achieve regional and gender balance among its contributing experts.

IPBES has now been active for about 5 years, conducting an ambitious work programme serving different functions, thus coping with diverse challenges emerging during its implementation. As part of the preparation of its second work programme, the 2016 Plenary meeting of IPBES launched a review process to "evaluate the effectiveness of IPBES as a science-policy interface" (Decision IPBES/5/22).

On October 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2017, the international workshop 'Five years of IPBES – reflecting the achievements and challenges and identifying needs for its review towards a 2<sup>nd</sup> work programme' was held in Leipzig, Germany. The workshop was the fifth in a series established by the UFZ Science-Policy Expert Group in 2006.<sup>1</sup> With this fifth workshop, the UFZ Science-Policy Expert Group brought together 24 scholars and practitioners with a broad range of inter- and transdisciplinary experiences with IPBES. The objectives of the workshop were to

- discuss the current status of IPBES (with a focus on procedures and governance challenges),
- get an overview about recent research on IPBES,
- identify potential needs for the ongoing IPBES review, and
- strengthen collaborations among scholars working on IPBES as well as among these scholars and experts involved in IPBES so that scholarly work may effectively inform the review process.

The aim of this report is to support the discussions on the next steps for IPBES and to inform the external review process by steering reviewers' attention towards key developments in IPBES and to systematically account for its impacts and implications. Participants of the

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ufz.de/index.php?en=38009> for information on all workshops including background papers and outputs.

workshop considered that the external review is an excellent opportunity to bring attention to the following themes:

- balance of functions
- participation and representation
- multiple knowledge systems
- institutional reflexivity and learning

The close attention to and scrutiny of these themes could inform alternative pathways and future directions that would strengthen IPBES in terms of governance structure, and procedures for the second work programme.

## Balance of functions

There was a widely held view during the workshop, that a fundamental challenge that would need to be addressed in the upcoming review is the balanced implementation of each of IPBES' four functions: assessments, capacity building, policy-support, and knowledge generation. Thus far, IPBES has prioritized the assessment function, with almost 70% of the budget for the implementation of the work programme allocated to assessments (Brooks, Lamoreux and Soberón 2014). The prioritization of the assessment function is a result of several internal and external factors. One of these factors is path dependency, and particularly the legacy of the IPCC which counts as the 'gold standard' for global environmental assessments and has served as a template for IPBES (Larigauderie and Mooney, 2010) . The IPCC had already developed sophisticated rules of procedures on how to conduct scientific assessments (such as quality control and conflict of interest policies) which could be easily transferred to IPBES. Such well-established procedures were not available for the other functions (e.g. capacity building or policy support) which have led to the implementation of those functions lagging behind. Budget and resource constraints have also been an easy legitimization for prioritizing assessments over the other functions. Yet, the prioritization of assessments at the cost of the other functions has potentially reduced IPBES' political relevance and legitimacy to inform decision-making on the ground and consequently threatens its ability to achieve its ambitious aims. The key challenge for IPBES is how it can move beyond assessments and meet its original ambitions and how it can achieve an appropriate balance in the implementation of its four functions in the future work programme.

## KEY CONSIDERATION FOR THE IPBES REVIEW PROCESS

- To **improve the balance of functions**, IPBES could ask governments and stakeholders to provide their requests more explicitly for all functions (not only for the assessment function), and to provide arguments for the requests. The solicitation and scoping processes can benefit from longer periods of time, including additional feedback loops and informal spaces for interactions among policy makers and stakeholders. This is necessary to identify the needs to develop the four functions with respect to different thematic foci. A better share and allocation of resources among the different functions would also be essential to accomplish a balanced implementation of all IPBES functions.

## Participation and representation: levels and mechanisms for engagement

IPBES intends to encompass different disciplines and knowledge systems, engage with broad and diverse stakeholders, and achieve regional and gender balance among its contributing experts. The balanced representation of genders and regional backgrounds was considered important and that should continue to be upheld. It was furthermore noted that the Open-ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders seemed to be a good way to inform IPBES decisions but that it is often perceived as a 'loose satellite', and that IPBES should be more transparent and more explicit about knowledge gaps in individual chapters of the assessments earlier on in the process.

Workshop participants also pointed out specific suggestions for the different types of participants in IPBES activities:

### 1. National focal points

The potential for the engagement of national focal points (NFPs) at different levels of IPBES can foster the uptake of the final products (i.e. summary for policy makers and assessments' reports): on the national level, focal points could facilitate dialogue across policy sectors; regionally, existing mechanisms/meetings that trigger science-policy interactions could be employed; at the global level, innovative ways to lead informal discussions with the same

people as in the IPBES Plenary but in a “Trondheim-type<sup>2</sup>” setting could be explored. The need for informal spaces for interaction in a more flexible setting where no formal decisions are made was seen as a prospective way to enhance a dynamic collaboration with policymakers.

NFPs can also increase the involvement of policymakers in the work of IPBES. This involvement can help improve the impact and relevance of IPBES by focusing on questions regarding the role of governments and policymakers within IPBES and on what forms of evidence are needed for decision-making. This suggests that a more explicit employment of a co-production/co-creation approach in the scoping stage could be beneficial, in which policy makers, scientists and other stakeholders jointly reflect on the needs, and so contents and key questions to be covered in IPBES’s planned deliverables.

In this regard, a two-stage solicitation process would allow some ideas to be discussed at both the national and regional levels. An increased allocation of time to the solicitation and scoping processes, however, would be necessary for this.

Regarding the involvement of policymakers in IPBES functions, it was emphasized that there is a need to find entry points for policymakers in the processes for identifying and developing policy-tools, not necessarily linked with assessment results, and in capacity-building activities to discuss IPBES outputs. This would enable the identification of what can or cannot be used in policymaking. With regard to reviewing policy support tools, it was considered very important to not only document best practices, but also inadequate practices, as these could be of great interest to policy makers for mutual learning and improvement. This would enable policymakers to make better informed decisions on the choice of tools and methods based on a more sound consideration of potential obstacles and pitfalls associated to the specific tools under different situations.

Finally, NFPs and national delegations are highly heterogeneous in their composition and engagement. For example, it is difficult for small delegations to follow all parallel contact groups during plenaries. Nevertheless, the crucial role of NFPs requires greater acknowledgement, specifically their importance for a number of other mechanisms such as supporting the review and policy uptake of deliverables and the nomination of experts.

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<sup>2</sup> The Trondheim biodiversity conferences (about every 3 years) are multi-actor open conferences to discuss major biodiversity issues aiming to inform the Convention of Biological Diversity and other global processes (<http://www.trondheimconference.org/>)



## 2. Involved experts

Regarding the maintenance and enhancement of engagement of experts in IPBES via different mechanisms, the following considerations were outlined:

### 2.1 Nomination and selection of experts

The nomination and selection procedures for the identification of experts were widely considered to lack transparency and diversity of experts' profiles. This is partly due to the fact that operational criteria (e.g. if people are able to fulfil the task of coordinating) have to be taken into consideration alongside the official criteria for a balanced representation (e.g. gender, discipline, regional coverage). Furthermore, while in terms of numbers, nominations are sufficient, they are not sufficiently diverse, with male experts and natural science experts being overrepresented (Montana and Borie, 2016; Heubach and Lambini, 2017; Timppte *et al.*, 2017). Scholarly work analyzing nomination and selection of experts within IPBES, has proposed that increase the diversity of profiles within the pool of nominated experts from which the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP) can do the final selection of experts (Montana and Borie, 2016; Heubach and Lambini, 2017) is worth considering. It also highlights the need to refine communication strategies (Opgenoorth, Hotes and Mooney, 2014; Reuter, Timppte and Nesshöver, 2016; Heubach and Lambini, 2017) that convey clear messages of the role that different disciplines, knowledge forms and set of experiences can add to IPBES activities at different levels. More generally, the ultimate goal should be to aim for a broad diversity of views -yet targeted – in a specific context (e.g., a thematic working group) rather than an overly 'formalized' representation of 'all' groups considered so far (regions, genders, disciplines) in all IPBES processes.

### 2.2 Authoring deliverables

Experts engaged in the authoring of deliverables often diverge significantly in the amount of time they can dedicate to collaborative work. This creates significant inequalities as well as tensions among authors and can act as a "mechanism of exclusion". Suggestions were made during the workshop that NFPs have a role to play in resolving this through their nominations choices and the governmental and institutional support provided to experts. A further idea envisaged the creation of a fund able to provide resources to those authors who could not obtain financial support for their time either from the IPBES Trust Fund, from their national governments, or their host institutions.

In addition, the need for a "service point" or similar apparatus was identified, which would coordinate and mediate among authors, and provide information and clarification on organizational matters and timelines, for instance informing them with regard to the particular deliverables expected of them at any given stage. In some cases this is done by the TSUs (Technical Support Units) of the assessments, but these tend to be under-staffed.

### 2.3 Peer review process

The peer review of IPBES draft deliverables was widely recognised to have substantial shortcomings, due partly to the tight deadlines for delivering drafts which leads to drafts being sent out when they are not yet mature enough for review. This can lead to a waste of time for reviewers, review editors and authors. Furthermore, comments are sometimes also not properly taken into consideration. These issues derive from an underlying conflict between the review processes on the one hand and timing and deadlines on the other, with the timeframe often being far too tight to allow for a comprehensive review. For instance, the time allocation for the internal review that is meant to ensure coherency among chapters has usually been only one month. Therefore, more time, and particularly better time management, is needed. Here too, a "service point", as outlined above, was considered potentially useful.

### 2.4 Fellowship program

The contributions of early-career researchers to IPBES' work were highly valued by the workshop participants. However, their work must receive greater recognition. Their inputs should be promoted and their number increased, a strategic vision of these experts as "leaders of the future" should be encouraged (see Lim et al. 2017).

### 2.5 Scholarly engagement in IPBES

Workshop attendees indicated that better acknowledgement of scholarly engagement is needed. Scientific papers, (contributions to) conferences, and events that are not officially organized by IPBES can present directly or indirectly (e.g. via discussions or outputs generated at events) a significant added value to the IPBES process and their consideration can also avoid duplication of work.

Beyond recognition of scholarly work, participants asserted that a more proactive role on the part of IPBES in engaging external knowledge holders would be highly beneficial, for instance by communicating requests for data and knowledge considerably in advance.

### 2.6 Online interactive platforms

Regarding interactive online platforms, workshop participants noted that their existence was a good first step, but that further efforts were needed to streamline their use and increase their impact. Greater scholarly involvement with these platforms will lead to greater attention (and potentially resources further down the line). A very good example is the "Catalogue of Policy Support tools" (<https://www.ipbes.net/policy-support>) which still needs to be populated (especially by a wider variety of experts, from different disciplines and regions). It was also noted that it would provide more transparency if comments from reviewers were readily available on the IPBES website after each review round.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE IPBES REVIEW PROCESS

- To **foster the representation of disciplines, regions and genders** and to avoid the current overrepresentation of particular voices and disciplinary perspectives, the diversity of profiles of nominated experts should be increased.
- To improve **transparency of nomination and selection procedures** for experts, nominations could include recommendation letters. Also maintaining publicly available the information of selected and non-selected experts can increase transparency in selection processes.

## Multiple knowledge systems

From the outset, it has been a clear principle of IPBES to ‘recognize and respect the contribution of indigenous and local knowledge to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems’ (Busan Outcome, 2010: 6). In line with this, attention must be paid to the mobilization, validation (within knowledge systems, see Löfmarck and Lidskog 2017; Tengö et al. 2017) and use of Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) in IPBES assessments. Specifically, more attention must be paid to local knowledge, since there has been an emphasis on the *indigenous* component of ILK – though, indigenous knowledge is still regarded by some participants as far underrepresented in the assessments, compared to scientific knowledge. The challenge of knowledge plurality in IPBES deliverables was also highlighted, as there was a gap between the representation of ILK in assessments chapters and the summary for policy makers in the first assessments that have been completed, where there is a general lack of references to ILK. Nevertheless, the ongoing procedural improvement for bringing and recognizing ILK from the pollination assessment through the regional assessments and towards the global assessment was also acknowledged. The crucial contribution of social science and humanities to better understand cultural and social dimensions of biodiversity was also stressed. These disciplines remain markedly underrepresented (Montana and Borie, 2016; Morin *et al.*, 2016; Heubach and Lambini, 2017; Timpte *et al.*, 2017).

A considerable body of multiple-evidence-based (MEB)<sup>3</sup> material as well as highly relevant work stemming from the New Zealand workshop<sup>4</sup> and ILK dialogues workshops<sup>5</sup> exists.

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<sup>3</sup> See Tengö et al. 2014 and Tengö et al. 2017

These processes and outputs should be extensively used and maintained in future developments. In light of the large and diverse nature of these resources, a 'master document' that compiles and synthesizes these materials would be useful; serving as an authors' starter pack on inclusion of ILK.

The composition of the ILK task force was also considered in need of improvement, for example, by bringing in more diverse profiles/expertise, decreasing the number of scientists and increasing the number of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) members (i.e. ILK holders and ILK experts, not only experts on ILK). Opening up to other forms of knowledge and clarifying the nuances between the different sources of ILK (i.e. differences of knowledge from diverse ethnic groups and local communities around the world) could be productive for the normative goal of producing assessments.

The need for innovation with regard to the management of diverging views was also highlighted. For example, there should be a greater readiness to embrace and record dissensus and conflicting opinions (see also Turnhout, 2012), as it can be productive, if managed correctly and channeled into the right settings. Recording and reflecting on dissent may be very helpful when working on ways to accommodate conflicting views within IPBES. A creation of the role of a "dissent facilitator" who could draw on the experience of coordinating lead authors, lead authors and chairs of assessments (by interviewing them) and review and report on the process and implications of the decisions made for keeping - or removing- dissent would allow lessons to be learned. New authors could make use of these previous experiences. All participants agreed that better dialogue was needed, particularly with regards to managing expectations of achievable goals when taking part in the IPBES process.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE IPBES REVIEW PROCESS

- To realize **synergies between knowledge systems**, the uptake of *non-indigenous* local knowledge and practical knowledge should be encouraged (parallel to the mobilization of indigenous knowledge) given that less attention has been paid to this type of knowledge and most focus has been on scientific knowledge and indigenous knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> Visions for nature and nature's contributions to people for the 21<sup>st</sup> century - Report from an IPBES visioning workshop held on 4-8September 2017 in Auckland, New Zealand. Accesible at: [https://www.niwa.co.nz/static/web/coasts-and-oceans/IPBES-Nature-Futures-report\\_2017.pdf](https://www.niwa.co.nz/static/web/coasts-and-oceans/IPBES-Nature-Futures-report_2017.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/ilk-biodiversity/ipbes/workshops>

- To **bring ILK more effectively into the assessments** and increase the overall representation of IPLCs in the assessment processes the nomination and selection of IPLCs members as authors should be encouraged and a fellowship program dedicated to IPLC could also enhance their engagement.
- To **promote the engagement of social sciences and humanities**, their participation should be encouraged from the outset in the overall discussion of the work programme and the development of deliverables, namely during the scoping phase, in order to allow the co-definition of relevant questions, concepts and deliverables. This should also enable social sciences and the humanities to get more easily engaged in later stages of the work.
- To **improve ways to accommodate conflicting views** the review should also record, reflect and propose the use of different knowledge synthesis methods. IPBES could also add the role of a “dissent facilitator”, which could help to incorporate dissensus into assessments with strongly contested elements.

## Reflexivity and criteria for the review of IPBES

There is a unique opportunity of institutional reflexivity and learning through the internal and external review processes. IPBES is a promising example of what may be achieved in terms of openness; yet its institutional design (e.g. issues of accountability towards observers such as scientific organizations) and its procedures (e.g. stakeholder engagement) and its workings will need continuous evaluation and organizational reform (Beck *et al.*, 2014). However, because the ongoing negotiation for the second work programme (to be concluded at IPBES-7 in 2019) and the external review process (to be conducted during 2018 and presented at IPBES-7 as well) are not linked in a systematic way, there is a risk that the results of the external review process may not be systematically taken into account in the development of the 2<sup>nd</sup> work programme.

The external review should assess IPBES’ performance in terms of the delivery of its four functions and focus on their credibility, relevance and legitimacy, as outlined by the 2010 Busan Outcome. This could very usefully begin from an assessment of outcomes from the IPBES’s work, explored through interviews with sufficient, representative samples of the target audience (e.g. specific policy makers). The internal and external factors constraining and enabling IPBES in achieving effective outcomes on policy then have to be among the main foci of the review. The external evaluation has to explore the effects that constraints (in

level and mechanisms of engagement of governments, experts, ILK, stakeholders [including businesses] have had on the performance of IPBES in terms of the credibility, legitimacy and salience of its outputs and the delivery of the four functions. Therefore, it is important to focus not just on the extent to which IPBES has fulfilled its ambitions but also on the efficiency with which it has done this, and on the potential unintended effects of decisions. The review should consider the unintended effects of decisions such as prioritization of the assessments at the cost of other functions. In doing so, it can usefully draw on existing research on IPBES which has analyzed the performance of various aspects of IPBES including the participation of experts and stakeholders (Montana and Borie, 2016; Morin *et al.*, 2016; Heubach and Lambini, 2017; Timpte *et al.*, 2017; Vadrot *et al.*, 2018) and its conceptual framework and general approach (Beck *et al.*, 2014; Turnhout, Neves and De Lijster, 2014; Löfmarck and Lidskog, 2017; Obermeister, 2017; Tengö *et al.*, 2017).

To improve its future performance, IPBES has to take into account and openly address the constraints that will inevitably remain in terms of available capacity to undertake emerging tasks, trade-offs between conflicting aims (e.g. between demands for broad participation and for scientific integrity) and political expectations that may limit the implementation of institutional design options. With the experiences gained in these first years of work, the review can outline how to readapt the IPBES structure, procedures and working processes to optimize their efficiency and effectiveness. It should pay attention to the legitimacy of IPBES as perceived by governmental members and stakeholders, for example by creating incentives to engage. The review has to critically look at the capacities and skillsets within the Secretariat in order to ensure progress is made beyond the assessments regarding the other IPBES functions. Finally, it is important to recognize the inequalities between different authors engaged in the assessment writing process (e.g. financial resources to attend meetings, time available, among others). These factors should not be forgotten during the review process, particularly as they risk being missed if reviewers focus only on the extent to which IPBES has met its ambitions.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE IPBES REVIEW PROCESS

- To make **the review most pragmatic and usable**, internal and external factors constraining and enabling IPBES in achieving effective policy support have to be among the main foci of the review. The external review has to explore the effects that constraints (in level and mechanisms of engagement of governments, experts, ILK, stakeholders ([including businesses]) have had on the performance of IPBES in terms of the credibility, legitimacy and relevance of its outputs and the delivery of the four functions.

- **To improve the performance of IPBES**, the external review is to be set up in a responsive and future-oriented way so that it does not just assess past performance but also facilitates learning and identifies new pathways for IPBES. To achieve its initial ambitions, strengthening the (mainly global-scale) scientific knowledge base behind assessments is necessary but not sufficient. To meet a much broader set of goals, it is required to pay critical attention to all aspects of policy support and capacity-building, including the meaningful participation of IPLCs and the incorporation of local and indigenous knowledge. This will require building synergies between knowledge systems, promoting the engagement of the social sciences and humanities, and addressing current challenges in the nomination and selection procedures for the identification of experts.
- The external review also opens up space **to identify a full range of alternative options** and choices that are available when reforming IPBES. For example, during the assessment of how the IPBES has achieved outcomes on policy, the review can explore the scope of the target audience and the various pathways to reach them effectively that the IPBES has, or hasn't, used to date. The review has to engage in real-world dialogues and liaise closely with partners from research, policy and practice as well as with national platforms and local actors.

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