



Science and Policy
for People and Nature

**Pilot online dialogue on the use of IPBES
assessments in policymaking in Africa**
18 March 2021



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Online – 18 March 2021

Summary of key discussions and lesson learnt

I. Background

Objective 4 (a) of the IPBES rolling work programme up to 2030, “advanced work on policy instruments, policy support tools and methodologies”, includes a focus on enabling the uptake of the findings of IPBES assessments in decision-making. To address this, the task force on policy tools and methodologies has identified the promotion and support in the use of findings of IPBES assessments in policy and decision-making as one of the deliverables in its interim workplan.

As part of this work, the task force identified the need to provide a space where relevant stakeholders could share their experiences on how the findings of IPBES assessments are being used in decision-making. One of the key activities under this deliverable is to convene a series of dialogues with actors at the science-policy interface in different sectors, engaging with existing platforms and networks and to the extent possible, organized as part of or back to back with an existing regional or subregional meeting.

For that purpose, the task force proposed piloting one event for the African region to test possible approaches that could be useful for the implementation of this activity for other regions/subregions, using an online or face-to-face modality depending on the circumstances at the time and the availability of resources.

A brief summary of discussions and key lessons learnt identified as a result of the pilot online dialogue is presented below. The full agenda of the event is available in annex I. The presentations delivered are available on the IPBES website at: <https://www.ipbes.net/events/regional-pilot-workshop-enhance-uptake-completed-ipbes-assessments-decision-making>.

II. Summary of key discussions

A. Opening remarks and setting the scene

The meeting was facilitated by Dr. Luthando Dziba, Co-chair of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel. It gathered 58 participants, including IPBES national focal points and other government representatives,

IPBES experts, members of the Bureau and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel, and members of the task force.

Dr. Anne Larigauderie, Executive Secretary of IPBES, provided **opening remarks**. She outlined the strong knowledge base for decision making that IPBES has developed. She noted that the IPBES reports were prepared in response to requests from governments and with their close involvement, and therefore sit at the interface between science and policy. Increasingly, IPBES assessments were being used, starting to generate impacts, and strengthening awareness about the importance of considering biodiversity in policymaking.

Dr. Larigauderie emphasized the interest of IPBES in hearing how the assessments had been received in the African region and in specific countries and institutions, if the assessments had informed policymaking, and if they could be improved at any level. Finally, she highlighted the importance of the dialogue as it would serve the ultimate goal of continuously improving IPBES.

While the discussion was open to cover any of the IPBES assessments that had been completed at the time of the meeting, the scene was set to focus on assessments reports that were key for the region: the **Regional Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Africa**, and the **Assessment Report on Land Degradation and Restoration**. Prof. Emma Archer (co-chair Regional Assessment for Africa) and Prof. Robert Scholes (co-chair Land Degradation and Restoration Assessment) presented selected findings of relevance to the region.

Prof. Emma Archer stressed the uniqueness and richness of Africa's natural assets and pointed out how they were traditionally under-accounted in policy and decision-making. She explained how Africa's biodiversity was under pressure by direct and indirect drivers that were projected to increase in the future. She also highlighted a series of options available for protecting biodiversity in some areas, including some measures that had already been successful (e.g., expansion of protected areas, control of invasive species, and restoration of ecosystems).

Prof. Robert Scholes presented some of the key findings of the assessment report on land degradation and restoration, through an African lens. He started by clarifying that the land degradation assessment was a global thematic assessment as opposed to a comprehensive regional assessment. One of the findings of the assessment was that land degradation was not a problem of Africa exclusively, but actually a problem that could be found in every ecosystem everywhere in the world. He mentioned that Africa was quite early in its process of land transformation and thus was in a position to make choices about its future. Prof. Scholes explained that the main driver behind land degradation in Africa was consumption growth on and outside of the continent, which created an increased demand for products such as timber or crops from Africa. He concluded by saying that a third of the global population (close to 3 billion people) was negatively affected by land degradation, making it the single most important issue in the world today. He added that, in that sense, degradation avoidance was more cost effective than allowing degradation and subsequently conducting restoration efforts; while addressing degradation once it had occurred was still cost effective compared to inaction.

Follow up questions from the audience addressed the following issues:

- Level of awareness of African countries with regard to IPBES and the findings of its assessments;
- Examples of policies (e.g., National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and climate change adaptation strategies) from African countries that had been informed by the IPBES assessments;
- Successes and difficulties in incentivizing communities at the local level and the private sector to carry out land restoration actions; and
- Africa's options for development, and how the IPBES assessments could help development plans in the region.

B. National experiences using IPBES assessments for policymaking

To kick off the moderated discussion, representatives of four countries¹ had the opportunity to share their experiences of using IPBES assessments.

First, Dr. Francois Hiol Hiol presented on the **experience of Cameroon** concerning the development of their national ecosystem assessment. The assessment, developed adapting the IPBES assessment process and conceptual framework to national circumstances, had supported policy processes at the regional and national levels. At the regional level, the assessment team participated in capacity-building activities organized by the Commission of Central African Forests (COMIFAC) for the Central Africa subregion. At the national level, the assessment's platform had contributed to and benefitted from a range of areas and activities of policy relevance, including:

- Development of Cameroon's sixth national report to the Convention on Biological Diversity;
- The organization of the national day on biodiversity in 2019;
- Strengthening capacities of authors and stakeholders;
- Consideration of elements from a range of ongoing policy processes such as the national development vision and the national decentralization reform, the post-2020 global biodiversity framework; and
- Identifying ways to address COVID-19 making use of traditional knowledge.

Then, Mr. Hyacinthe Tié shared the **experience of Cote d'Ivoire**. In particular, the presentation focused on the work through the West African Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (WABES), which had resulted in a number of capacity-building workshops on the various IPBES assessments, targeted to national focal points of countries in West Africa. He also mentioned some of the activities carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, including regularly sharing information within the organization and with stakeholders to inform them of progress made in IPBES work, and encouraging experts in the country to take part in IPBES assessments.

Some examples of the use of IPBES assessments in policymaking included the development of a bill on biological diversity, initiatives to promote the use of payment for ecosystem services, and the revision of the environment code. Some challenges were also highlighted, including the Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainable Development's lack of means to perform their functions, the language in which IPBES documents were made available, and issues around confidentiality of draft documents that created challenges when trying to request for feedback and inputs from others within the administration. These made it difficult to raise the attention of decision-makers at the local level.

Prof. Taleb Mohammed Sghir shared **Morocco's experience**, including the following specific examples:

- As a result of the invitation from IPBES for countries to develop their national assessments, Morocco had recently launched the development of their own, adapting the IPBES conceptual framework to the national circumstances. The national assessment would include a process for internal and external review, and it is expected that it would, once finalized, be validated and approved by different governmental agencies;
- Development of the fourth national communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), with a particular focus on involvement of local communities and the integration of traditional knowledge to tackle climate change;

¹ Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi and Morocco.

- Work relating to the conservation of pollinators in the face of climate change. Morocco had carried out studies to build the capacities of researchers;
- Other activities supported by the use of IPBES assessments included: integration of biodiversity in territorial planning, establishment of a national scientific committee for IPBES, and strengthening communication and sensibilization of IPBES work.

With regards to **Malawi's experience**, Ms. Lilian Chimphepo indicated that, in its efforts to enhance the implementation of ecosystem restoration efforts, the assessments had helped the country to better understand the drivers of land degradation. In this context, she mentioned that the assessments were useful in informing planning and monitoring actions.

Ms. Chimphepo also expressed that the key messages of the summaries for policymakers had contributed to improving policymakers' knowledge and understanding of the causes of biodiversity loss and degradation and facilitated the sharing of that information with the general public. She pointed out that the assessments had influenced various interventions on restoring degraded ecosystems, addressing issues of invasive alien species, and implementing nature-based solutions to face emerging challenges such as climate change.

Finally, Ms. Chimphepo mentioned that the assessments were, at the time of the meeting, informing the 2020 Human Development Report and helping mainstream biodiversity into social impact assessments. She outlined that the IPBES methodology and reports would be used as part of the development of their national ecosystem assessment that was starting.

III. Moderated discussion

Building on the experiences shared by the four countries, the moderated discussion was structured around the following areas:

- Other examples of how IPBES assessments have been used in different countries;
- Challenges faced in using IPBES assessments in policymaking; and
- Ideas on how IPBES can help overcome those challenges, and what can be done to improve IPBES assessments to support policymaking.

The following are some of the key inputs of the discussion (a summary is included in Table 1):

A. Other examples of how IPBES assessments have been used in different countries

Participants agreed that the IPBES assessments had led to the identification of knowledge gaps and, in some occasions, to the decision to develop national ecosystem assessments. This had been the case for countries such as South Africa and Cameroon. In other countries of the region, like Cote d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the IPBES assessments had led to the development of other types of analysis to inform policymaking. Participants also indicated that the IPBES assessments had served as a basis to create and strengthen institutional arrangements with competences in the biodiversity field. For instance, it was mentioned that Morocco had recently created a new inter-ministerial committee to deal with climate change and biodiversity. Also, it was mentioned that IPBES assessments had been successful in informing biodiversity-related policies and programmes, such as South Africa's white paper on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and Cote d'Ivoire's national programme on agricultural investment. Finally, participants highlighted the special role that the assessments had in raising awareness and strengthening the capacities of decision-makers and the general public (including local communities), which seemed to have had some degree of impact on resource mobilization.

B. Challenges faced in using IPBES assessments in policymaking

On this topic, some participants perceived that the IPBES assessments could further incorporate information produced at the regional and national levels. It was stated that, despite the efforts of organizations such as the COMIFAC and national experts to produce tailored data on the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services, these data did not seem to be sufficiently taken into consideration in IPBES assessments. Participants pointed out that the problem might be that, although the data exist, it might not be visible or accessible to IPBES experts.

C. Ideas on how IPBES can help overcome those challenges, and what can be done to improve IPBES assessments to support policymaking

For the IPBES assessments to consider information being produced at the regional and national levels, some participants suggested that the development of national platforms could offer a space in which different actors could share their work and promote exchange of views and experiences. The platforms proposed would help compiling existing data, making it easier for IPBES to access it.

Finally, participants also indicated that further support was required to develop assessments at the local level.

Table 1. Summary of inputs

Examples of how IPBES assessments have been used		Challenges faced in using IPBES assessments	Ideas to help overcome identified challenges
Identification of knowledge gaps	Awareness raising	Information produced at regional/national levels not incorporated into assessments	Development of national platforms
Development of national ecosystem assessments	Capacity development		Provision of support to develop assessments at local level
Creation of new institutional arrangements	Resource mobilization		
Provision of information for national policies and programmes			

IV. Key lessons learnt identified through the pilot online dialogue

Further to promoting the exchange of experiences among national focal points and experts from the region, the pilot online dialogue was aimed at gathering key lessons learned that would inform future activities of the task force on policy tools and methodologies.

Below are some of the key lessons that resulted from the planning phase as well as running of the meeting:

- (a) **Importance of guidance and inputs from members of the Bureau and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel of the relevant region since the start of the planning process.** This helps to identify the most effective ways to reach out to the experts and national focal points as well as to identify potential case studies/examples of relevance to the specific region;
- (b) **Need to explore new ways of engaging national focal points and other government officials.** Representatives from the 54 countries in the Africa region were invited. From those, 18 national focal points and 6 representatives from other government agencies attended. Higher participation of national focal points and other government officials in future dialogues would ensure a wider representation of each region and, therefore, a better understanding of the use of IPBES assessments and more precise findings to inform them. The TSU is proactively looking for alternative ways to encourage the participation of these stakeholders in the upcoming dialogues;
- (c) **Importance of including regional organizations from the relevant region.** Some of the experiences shared during the online pilot dialogue show that regional organizations in the African region are playing an important role in supporting countries to respond to their needs related to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and in monitoring the implementation of actions taken. Inviting regional organizations to future dialogues could provide a more robust view of the challenges faced by every region and promote coordinated responses to address them;
- (d) **Value of the space provided to a dialogue between national focal points and other government representatives and experts of IPBES assessments in the region.** The pilot online dialogue provided national focal points, other government representatives, and IPBES experts with a unique space to freely exchange their diverse perspectives on the utility of IPBES assessments for policymaking in the African region. Further, the dialogue resulted in concrete examples of the impacts led by the assessments and specific limitations encountered at national and subnational levels. Following a similar format, future dialogues will aim at providing a flexible and friendly environment that encourages participants to express their views, needs and propose solutions;
- (e) **Importance of offering simultaneous interpretation into other languages.** The pilot online dialogue offered simultaneous interpretation English↔French, which seem to have encouraged wider and more active participation. In view of this, future dialogues should continue to offer, within the scope of available resources, simultaneous interpretation into the relevant United Nations languages depending on the specific region(s) being targeted;
- (f) **Utilization of additional virtual tools to promote attendees' participation.** Several attendees to the pilot online dialogue chose to take the floor to share their experiences and suggest ways of moving forward, while others preferred to use the chat. However, it is acknowledged that many participants would rather share their ideas using alternative tools such as, for example, online whiteboards. In order to promote further interaction, the technical support unit is exploring the benefits of utilizing these kinds of complementary tools for future dialogues;
- (g) **For online meetings, finding a stable internet connection helps to make the dialogue more interactive and participatory.** This is also essential for the provision of interpretation when this is provided. During the dialogue, some of the participants,

including speakers, experienced some internet disruptions, which caused them to drop off the meeting in occasions. While in many occasions this is outside of the control of individuals, it is important to recognize this limitation and try to identify ways to mitigate it. For example, by requiring attendees to test their internet speed before the event starts and proposing ideas on measures that could potentially improve their connections (e.g., relocating, switching cameras off);

- (h) **Speakers and participants of future online dialogues will be offered a brief training on the platform used to host the event.** Several people had trouble understanding how to use the different features of the platform utilized to host the event (Zoom), particularly with the interpretation audio channels. As a result, some audio difficulties were experienced by those that chose to use the interpretation service. In order to minimize these problems in the coming dialogues, quick training sessions for speakers and participants will be organized and offered prior to the online event;
- (i) **Consider inclusion of a presentation of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) in the agenda for the dialogues.** Based on the interventions of various participants, it seems that not all available resources that can help implement the findings of the IPBES assessments are widely known. In that sense, the agenda can incorporate a 5-minute presentation on the BES-Net and how countries could access its services.

Annex I

Pilot online dialogue to promote the use of findings of IPBES assessments in policymaking in Africa

Provisional agenda

Connection details

1.The dialogue will be held using the platform Zoom. Connection details will be shared with registered participants by email.

2.French<>English interpretation will be provided. To ensure that the best possible interpretation service is provided, participants are encouraged to take the following into consideration:

- Check your internet connection in advance of the meeting (try joining 15 minutes before the start). The internet connection tends to be stronger when using an ethernet cable or a dedicated Wi-Fi connection.
- Use headsets with a microphone if possible
- Please check you have the latest version of zoom downloaded: *Version: 5.5.4* and check for any Zoom software updates. Further information can be found [here](#).

Objective of the meeting

3.To promote and support the use of findings of IPBES assessments in policymaking. This work contributes to objective 4(a) of the IPBES rolling work programme up to 2030, entitled: “advanced work on policy instruments, policy support tools and methodologies”.

4.For this purpose, the dialogue will promote an exchange of views between different stakeholders from the African region in order to better understand the current use of IPBES products in the development and implementation of their national and regional policies, plans and initiatives, in order to increase their effective use in the future.

Tentative schedule

Time (CET)	Session
12:45-13:00	Join meeting (connection details will be sent by email)
13:00-13:15	Opening of the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luthando Dziba, Co-chair of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel• Anne Larigauderie, IPBES Executive Secretary
13:15-13:35	Brief overview of the Regional Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Africa and the Assessment of land degradation and restoration <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emma Archer – Co-chair, Regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa• Bob Scholes – Co-chair, Assessment report on land degradation and restoration
13:35-13:45	Q&A
13:45-14:10	Examples of how the IPBES assessments have been used to support policymaking processes at national level <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Malawi: Lilian Chimphepo – IPBES national focal point• Cote d’Ivoire: Hyacinthe Tié – IPBES national focal point• Morocco: Prof Taleb Mohammed Sghir – MEP member• Cameroon: Dr. Francois Hiol Hiol – Co-chair of national ecosystem assessment (<i>to be confirmed</i>)

Time (CET)	Session
14:10-15:10	<p>Moderated discussion:</p> <p>a) Identify further examples of how IPBES assessments have been used in policymaking at the national level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have IPBES assessments been used in your country or at the regional level to support policymaking? If so, which ones and how? • At which levels (national, subnational or local) are IPBES assessments being used the most? Why do you think that is the case? • Which specific parts of the IPBES assessments have you used to support policy processes and why? (e.g., summaries for policymakers, chapters (any chapter in particular?)) • Have the IPBES assessments been used only by environment agencies or also by governmental agencies in other sectors? Which ones? • For what purpose have you used the IPBES assessments? (e.g., to formulate policy and technical measures, elaborate technical reports, promote capacity-building and awareness raising) <p>b) Discuss challenges and opportunities for increasing the use of ongoing and future IPBES assessments in policymaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the key challenges that you and your colleagues have faced in using IPBES assessments for policymaking? • What are the key benefits that you have experienced of using IPBES assessments to support policy processes? <p>c) Identify how IPBES can help overcome some of the challenges mentioned and engage a wider range of national agencies in using those findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could be done to further promote and facilitate the use of IPBES assessments in supporting policymaking? • How can the challenges identified earlier be most effectively addressed, and by whom? • How can IPBES build on and further promote sharing of experiences of countries in using IPBES assessments most effectively?
15:10 – 15:20	Final wrap up and closing remarks

Key information resources

- [The regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa \(full report\)](#)
- [The regional assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services for Africa \(summary for policymakers\)](#)
- [Assessment report on land degradation and restoration \(full report\)](#)
- [Assessment report on land degradation and restoration \(summary for policymakers\)](#)
- [Assessment report on pollinators, pollination and food production \(full report\)](#)
- [Assessment report on pollinators, pollination and food production \(summary for policymakers\)](#)

- [IPBES Regional Assessments \(video\)](#)
- [IPBES Regional Assessment of Africa \(video\)](#)
- [IPBES Assessment of Land Degradation and Restoration \(video\)](#)
- [The Critical Importance of Pollinators \(video\)](#)