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Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
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Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda*

**Communications and stakeholder engagement:
guidance on strategic partnerships**

Guidance on the development of strategic partnerships

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In decision IPBES/1/2, the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services requested the Bureau to prepare, in consultation with the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and supported by the secretariat, guidance on the development of strategic partnerships with different categories of partners such as with multilateral environmental agreements, and academic, scientific and United Nations system organizations, focused on supporting implementation of the work programme.
2. This request is consistent with the first of the operating principles set out in the functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of the Platform, which states that in carrying out its work the Platform will collaborate with existing initiatives on biodiversity and ecosystem services, including multilateral environment agreements, United Nations bodies and networks of scientists and knowledge holders, to fill gaps and build upon their work while avoiding duplication.¹
3. During meetings that led to the establishment of the Platform and during the first session of the Plenary, reference was made to the wide range of organizations whose work relates to the Platform and many such organizations have participated in these meetings. Several of the information documents prepared for the session provide useful examples of potential collaborating organizations and identify possible means of engagement. These information documents include the Platform's gap analysis² and

* IPBES/2/1.

¹ UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/9.

² Gap analysis for the purpose of facilitating the discussions on how to improve and strengthen the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services (UNEP/IPBES/2/INF/1).

various information documents on the work programme.³ In addition, two information documents specifically addressed building on the work of existing institutions.⁴

4. In order to help ensure delivery of the Platform's work programme, it may be necessary for the Platform to enter into formal partnership arrangements with a number of these existing institutions. Such partnership arrangements would be strategic where they significantly support delivery of the Platform's work programme. Strategic partnerships need to be seen as a special case where a carefully defined and formally endorsed relationship is particularly important for ensuring the efficient and effective delivery of the Platform's work programme.

5. The present draft guidance on the development of strategic partnerships should be considered alongside the stakeholder engagement strategy. There is no doubt that a wide range of mechanisms might be used to engage stakeholders, and these mechanisms may include strategic partnerships.

6. The Platform's Plenary also requested the secretariat to open a widely publicized process of consultation involving members, observers and stakeholders on the guidance on strategic partnerships, and to present it for the consideration of the Plenary at its second session. The document was made available for review from 17 June to 28 July 2013, and has subsequently been revised by the secretariat to take account of comments received.

7. This draft guidance on the development of strategic partnerships should be considered in the context of the draft communications and outreach strategy (IPBES/2/12) and the draft stakeholder engagement strategy (IPBES/2/13).

II. Purpose of strategic partnerships in supporting the Platform's work programme

8. The primary purpose of any strategic partnership would be to support implementation of the Platform's work programme through one or more of the following means, recognizing that these might be applied differently depending on the area of work or the Platform's functions. These means might include:

(a) *Increasing alignment of activities.* Coordinating with existing institutions may help to align the different activities that are currently being undertaken relevant to the delivery of the Platform's work programme, to fill gaps and build upon their work while avoiding duplication of effort. This might include, for example, coordination of relevant capacity-building activities. In working alongside those institutions already undertaking activities in areas related to the Platform's work programme, the Platform is much more likely to add value and avoid duplicating existing work;

(b) *Providing direct support.* There is a range of activities that the Platform could agree to provide or commission other organizations to provide as part of the institutional arrangements for supporting the delivery of the work programme. These might include, for example, providing a technical support function, contributing specific knowledge and experience, coordinating areas of work in which an organization has particular expertise, providing administrative support, engaging in outreach and communication functions, increasing access to data and analytical methods, and promoting and catalysing capacity-building;

(c) *Building and managing relationships.* Ensuring effective sharing of knowledge and building of mutual understanding may be important in developing good working relationships between the Platform and other intergovernmental processes in particular, and certainly with multilateral environmental agreements related to biodiversity and ecosystem services. This may include collaboration in building the capacity of the Platform members to participate fully and effectively in the Platform's activities;

(d) *Facilitating stakeholder engagement.* It is widely recognized that the Platform will need to engage with a broad range of stakeholders, and this is addressed in the stakeholder engagement strategy. With respect to implementation of the work programme, engagement with scientists and other knowledge holders is particularly relevant. Strategic partnerships with organizations that can assist with facilitating and promoting stakeholder engagement may be helpful.

³ UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/INF/3/Add.1; UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/INF/4/Add.1; UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/INF/5/Add.1; and UNEP/IPBES.MI/1/INF/6/Add.1.

⁴ UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/INF/15 and UNEP/IPBES/3/INF/11.

9. Such strategic partnerships may be relevant at the global level, but they may also serve a useful purpose in supporting delivery of the Platform's work programme within particular regions in order to increase cooperation, and to increase access to data, information and knowledge. In this regard, needs may vary from one region to another.

10. It is important to recognize that strategic partnerships are not necessary for every action that the Platform may undertake with other organizations and individuals. In particular, the following actions might be sufficient, and in most instances could be undertaken, without entering into more formal partnership arrangements:

(a) *Liaising and communicating.* Given the breadth of organizations involved in biodiversity and ecosystem services, it is essential for the Platform to effectively communicate what it is doing (through a range of mechanisms including national focal points), to indicate potential opportunities for involvement, and to liaise with relevant organizations known to have particularly relevant interests;

(b) *Recognizing what others produce or do as contributions to the Platform.* Some organizations are already carrying out activities directly relevant to the Platform that could be readily accepted or adopted as contributions to the Platform. Consideration could be given to ways to identify and appropriately recognize these activities and products. This would need to be handled through an open and transparent process and addressed in the rules of procedure;

(c) *Promoting cooperation and coordination.* The Platform could provide the necessary impetus for increased cooperation and collaboration among organizations working on similar issues, so that they can together deliver more effectively a product or service to meet the needs of the Platform;

(d) *Adopting decisions that recognize and support the relevant work of others.* As an intergovernmental body, the Platform may be able to adopt decisions that recognize and provide support to existing organizations and activities that would enable those organizations and activities to be more effective, for example through increased access to expertise or funding. This may require the development of criteria so as to ensure transparency and balance;

(e) *Informing and potentially influencing the priorities of others.* Priorities identified by the Platform are likely to be taken into account in the planning and prioritization processes of many organizations, networks, programmes and processes relevant to the Platform;

(f) *Informing and potentially influencing working practices.* Promoting the use of standard methodologies, frameworks and tools and access to information on lessons learned would support the working practices of a range of organizations. Each of these has the potential to increase harmonization in approaches, so that organizations doing things in similar ways can more easily share the resulting data, information and experience.

III. Possible categories of strategic partnership

11. There are two categories of institutions that are already recognized as being a part of the Platform, and are explicitly referred to in the resolution establishing the Platform⁵ and in Plenary decisions. The Platform might want to establish strategic partnerships with institutions within these two categories in order to promote and support delivery of the work programme, while continuing to maintain the independence of the Platform. These are:

(a) *United Nations system.* The Platform's Plenary has already requested the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to establish an institutional link with the Platform through a collaborative partnership arrangement for the work of the Platform and its secretariat (decision IPBES/1/4). UNEP, FAO, UNDP and UNESCO are well placed to support implementation of the Platform's work programme, drawing on their specific areas of expertise and competence. Other parts of the United Nations system might also be relevant to specific elements of the work programme;

(b) *Multilateral environmental agreements.* It may be sufficient for the relationship between the Platform and biodiversity and ecosystem services related to multilateral environmental agreements to

⁵ UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/9, annex I

rely on the process of making requests to the Platform, and through close liaison, for example, with the chairs of the multilateral environmental agreement scientific advisory bodies sitting as observers in the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel. Strategic partnerships may be appropriate, however, in helping to clarify and codify what is expected of the relationship and formalize the engagement of the chairs of those scientific advisory bodies (and possibly also secretariats).

12. There is a range of other types of institution and processes with which the Platform might want to establish strategic partnerships in order to promote and support delivery of the work programme. These include:

(a) *Other processes relevant to the Platform's functions.* It may be valuable to seek opportunities for collaboration between the Platform and other global, regional and thematic processes relevant to its work programme (such as other assessments), in order to ensure alignment and build synergies. It may also be necessary to agree on boundaries to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure that there are no unnecessary gaps. For example, if one assessment is to contribute to another, then there may need to be mutual agreement between the bodies responsible for leading the assessments on timing and process, so as to ensure that the appropriate procedures are being followed and operating principles applied, and also potentially on conceptual framework and methodology;

(b) *Stakeholder engagement organizations and networks.* A number of organizations and networks could support the Platform in reaching out to certain stakeholder groups in ways that are relevant to supporting implementation of the work programme, and help to achieve the aims of the stakeholder engagement strategy. Strategic partnerships with one or more of these organizations or networks might clearly define their roles and responsibilities with respect to promoting and facilitating stakeholder engagement, thus helping to implement the stakeholder engagement strategy;

(c) *Institutions with relevant expertise.* Organizations, programmes and networks that have expertise relevant to specific parts of the work programme, and in particular academic and scientific organizations, may need to be engaged as part of the institutional arrangements for ensuring key deliverables, and this engagement may be achieved through partnership arrangements. In addition to this, the Platform may wish to enter into partnerships that secure access to relevant expertise;

(d) *Institutions that manage and provide access to data, information and knowledge.* It is likely that a range of the Platform's activities will use specific data sets, or the indicators and metrics that are derived from them. In addition, improved access to existing data, information and knowledge has been identified as a major capacity-building need. This group of institutions ranges from long-term observation and monitoring programmes to those institutions that provide open access to the scientific literature. Strategic partnerships might be valuable in helping to secure long-term access to relevant data, information and knowledge and also to analytical techniques and modelling.

13. For these categories, strategic partnerships may relate to activities at regional or subregional levels rather than at the global level. Strategic partnerships with institutions working at the regional and subregional levels could be particularly important in increasing engagement in all regions in delivery of the Platform's work programme and addressing the four functions of the Platform. This needs to be considered in the light of priorities and available resources, however, and any future regional governance arrangements.

IV. Key considerations to be taken into account in establishing strategic partnerships

14. Careful consideration on a case-by-case basis is required as to whether a strategic partnership is appropriate and necessary. Given the fact that the Platform is a new and evolving entity there are many organizations that might wish to form partnerships with it in order to try to secure their own roles in its future. The Platform should therefore be prudent in its approach in developing partnerships and give very careful consideration to the value and implications of such partnerships.

15. Taking account of the previous paragraphs, criteria that could be used in identifying whether a strategic partnership is appropriate and necessary include:

(a) Necessity of using a formal partnership approach rather than one of the other available mechanisms identified in paragraph 10;

- (b) Relevance of the potential partnership to delivery of the work programme agreed upon by the Plenary, including consideration of any priorities agreed upon by the Plenary;
- (c) Opportunity to achieve the Platform's work programme activities more effectively, efficiently, economically and ethically;
- (d) Experience and capacity of the potential strategic partner in fields relevant to the Platform and its willingness to collaborate in delivering the Platform's work programme;
- (e) Achievement of a more appropriate regional or thematic balance in the delivery of the Platform's work programme.

16. Assuming that a strategic partnership is thought to be both necessary and appropriate, consideration would need to be given to the potential roles and responsibilities of the different partners, any specific deliverables and terms of reference, and the necessary time frames. In this regard, a partnership might cover a narrow range of activities or be quite broad, and it might be time-bound or open-ended (while noting the need for regular review highlighted in paragraph 20).

17. Any partnership arrangements entered into would be established within the existing partnership rules and policy of UNEP, as the institution administering the Platform's secretariat, which would ensure that appropriate generic legal, ethical and financial issues were fully addressed.

18. In established strategic partnerships, consideration will need to be given to the issues that are normally addressed in contracts between organizations, a number of which may already be included in the Platform's policies and procedures. Most of these issues will need to be considered whether or not there is a contractual arrangement, and whether or not there is written agreement. These include:

- (a) Purpose and objective;
- (b) Obligations of each party;
- (c) Conflict of interest;
- (d) Liability;
- (e) Intellectual property rights;
- (f) Confidentiality;
- (g) Representation and use of logos;
- (h) Amendment;
- (i) Entry into force;
- (j) Termination;
- (k) Settlement of disputes.

19. Finally, consideration will need to be given to ensuring that the Platform's procedures and operating principles are fully taken into account when developing strategic partnerships, and in particular to ensure that those operating principles are being applied in an appropriate manner both in choosing partnerships and in the manner in which those partnerships are implemented. Specifically, there will need to be:

- (a) Transparency and accountability in deciding on and entering into partnerships, so that the reasons for doing so are obvious and it is clear what each party will gain;
- (b) Application of all relevant Platform procedures and operating principles by partners, so that this does not become a mechanism for circumventing agreed approaches;
- (c) Clear and understood quality control and quality assurance of processes and outputs, through implementation and monitoring using appropriate mechanisms;
- (d) Equity of access to collaboration with the Platform across regions, Platform functions or among a variety of stakeholders;
- (e) Steps taken to ensure that the development of a strategic partnership with one organization does not lead to reduced involvement of other organizations or stakeholders.

20. In order to ensure and maintain public confidence, partnerships should be the subject of regular review by the secretariat, Multidisciplinary Expert Panel, Bureau and Plenary to ensure that they continue to serve the purpose for which they were intended and to check that they remain relevant to delivery of the Platform's work programme. Any partnership arrangements, including terms of reference, should allow for such periodic review and adjustment.

V. Mechanisms for establishing strategic partnerships

21. While strategic partnerships would be entered into under the authority of the Plenary following the guidance provided in this note, mechanisms for establishing strategic partnerships in a timely manner need to be established in order to allow efficient delivery of the work programme. The following process is therefore recommended:

- (a) The secretariat, in consultation with the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel, identifies and proposes to the Bureau strategic partnerships necessary for supporting implementation of the work programme, noting that:
 - (i) Where this involves strategic partnerships for supporting work at the regional level, the advice of members in those regions will be sought;
 - (ii) Where the most appropriate strategic partner is not obvious, this may necessitate an invitation or call for tender through an open and transparent process;
- (b) The Bureau authorizes the secretariat to establish the partnership on behalf of the Platform, and specifies the form that the partnership should take;
- (c) The secretariat develops the partnership arrangements and subsequently oversees any joint activities in consultation with the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel;
- (d) The secretariat reports to each session of the Plenary on the partnership arrangements that have been entered into, and the benefits anticipated and delivered to the Platform.

22. The form that such strategic partnerships assume might vary considerably. For example, intent to collaborate might be established through a letter of agreement or a memorandum of understanding which can be used for defining strategic alliances, declaring agreement on intent, agreeing on areas of common interest, agreeing on cooperation in terms of project and programme implementation, and the sharing of responsibilities for joint programming (recognizing that there are potential costs and benefits to both parties). They are essentially frameworks through which the parties to the agreement confirm that they share a common understanding.

23. In order to operationalize such agreements a project document of some form, or a jointly agreed programme of work, which would spell out how the intent to collaborate would be realized, might be established. Such documents would provide more detailed definitions of activities, timetables and deliverables, and would be likely to include implementation plans and potentially also budgets. These more detailed documents may cover the whole period of the agreement or could be periodically updated while the agreements are in force.

24. Letters of agreement and memorandums of understanding should not imply any exchange of funds, and it would be assumed that the legal entities involved would provide the necessary resources for their own activities (which may well be activities that they intended to carry out anyway). The agreements might be used, however, as a vehicle to help find additional funding from elsewhere, and this should be considered when they are drawn up.

25. There may also be cases where a legal agreement in the form of a contract is necessary in order to ensure timely delivery of a product or service necessary for the efficient implementation of the work programme. The form that the contract takes may well vary depending on the type of organization, and the institutional relationship between the Platform or UNEP and the organization concerned.