

**Intergovernmental Science-Policy  
Platform on Biodiversity and  
Ecosystem Services**

Distr.: General  
28 October 2014  
Original: English

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**Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy  
Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services****Third session**

Bonn, Germany, 12–17 January 2015

Item 8 (c) of the provisional agenda\*

**Communications and stakeholder engagement:  
guidance on strategic partnerships****Guidance on the development of strategic partnerships and  
other collaborative arrangements****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the Bureau to prepare, in consultation with the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and supported by the secretariat, draft guidance on the development of strategic partnerships with various categories of partners, such as multilateral environmental agreements and academic, scientific and United Nations system organizations, focused on supporting the implementation of the work programme. The draft guidance was made available for review by Governments and other stakeholders from 17 June to 28 July 2013, and revised guidance on the development of strategic partnerships taking account of the comments received was then made available to the Plenary at its second session (IPBES/2/14).

2. During discussion at the second session, general support was expressed for the value of developing strategic partnerships with a limited range of organizations, in particular United Nations bodies and multilateral environmental agreements. It was recognized that strategic partnerships would need to be developed on a case-by-case basis and it was emphasized that strategic partnerships were not the only approach to helping ensure the support of other organizations in implementing the work programme. Following the discussion, the Chair proposed that the secretariat develop a revised version of the draft guidance for consideration by the Plenary, but, owing to the shortage of time, the Plenary decided to defer further consideration of the draft guidance to its third session.

3. Following the second session, the Bureau has given further consideration to the guidance on strategic partnerships, and in particular to the importance of recognizing that there is a range of possible approaches to helping ensure the support of other organizations in implementing the work programme. The revised draft guidance takes those considerations into account, and also includes a new section, on categories of strategic partnership and other arrangements and processes for their identification, so as to increase alignment with the work programme and its deliverables. It should be noted that there has also been some reordering of the document.

4. This draft guidance on the development of strategic partnerships and other collaborative arrangements should be considered in the context of the draft communications and outreach strategy (IPBES/3/15) and the draft stakeholder engagement strategy (IPBES/3/16), and also in the context of

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\* IPBES/3/1.

delivery of the work programme for the period 2014–2018 (decision IPBES-2/5, annex I). It is presented to the Plenary for adoption.

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

5. The primary purpose of any strategic partnership would be to support implementation of the work programme of the Platform 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:

(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 work programme, thereby filling gaps and building 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 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 and, in particular, 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. Engagement with scientists and other knowledge holders is particularly relevant to the implementation of the work programme. Strategic partnerships with organizations that can assist with facilitating and promoting stakeholder engagement may be helpful.

6. Such strategic partnerships may be relevant at the global level, but they may also serve a useful purpose in supporting delivery of the 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.

7. 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 used by the Platform. Consideration could be given to ways of identifying and appropriately recognizing 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 and 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. The task force on knowledge and data is dedicated to prioritizing gaps in knowledge and discussing these priorities with the scientific community and other knowledge holders;

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

8. Careful consideration on a case-by-case basis is required as to whether a strategic partnership is appropriate and necessary. Given 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. In such a situation the partnership arrangements of the Platform should be purpose-driven and centred around the need for effective implementation of its functions and work programme. The Platform should therefore be prudent in its approach to the development of partnerships and give very careful consideration to the value and implications of such partnerships.

9. 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 7;

(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 perform 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 work programme;

(e) Achievement of a more appropriate regional or thematic balance in the delivery of the work programme.

10. Assuming that a strategic partnership is deemed 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 (noting the need for regular review highlighted in paragraph 14).

11. Any partnership arrangements entered into would be established within the existing partnership rules and policy of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as the institution administering the Platform secretariat, which would ensure that appropriate generic legal, ethical and financial issues were fully addressed.

12. In establishing 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 policies and procedures of the Platform. 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.

13. Finally, consideration will need to be given to ensuring that the procedures and operating principles of the Platform 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.

14. In order to ensure and maintain public confidence, partnerships should be the subject of regular review by the secretariat, the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel, the Bureau and the 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 work programme. Any partnership arrangements, including terms of reference, should allow for such periodic review and adjustment.

#### **IV. Form of strategic partnerships**

15. 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, on areas of common interest and 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.

16. In order to operationalize such agreements, consideration might be given to drawing up 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. 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.

17. While in a number of cases memorandums of understanding would involve the transfer of funds to support a particular set of tasks, this is not necessarily always the case. Letters of agreement and memorandums of understanding could also be established with no implied exchange of funds. In some cases 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.

18. 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.

## V. Categories of strategic partnership and processes for their identification

### Bodies identified in the functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of the Platform

19. The following two categories of institutions are already recognized as being a part of the Platform, and are explicitly referred to in the resolution establishing the Platform<sup>1</sup> and in Plenary decisions. Establishment by way of a Plenary decision of some form of strategic partnerships with institutions in those two categories will help promote and support delivery of the work programme through improved collaboration and cooperation.

(a) *United Nations system.* Through decision IPBES-2/8, the Platform has already established a collaborative partnership with UNEP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. In addition, the Bureau will keep under consideration whether other parts of the United Nations system should be included within such a collaborative partnership;

(b) *Multilateral environmental agreements.* It is in the interests of both the Platform and the multilateral environmental agreements related to biodiversity and ecosystem services that the agreements work closely together and with the Platform. It is therefore suggested that the Bureau work with the appropriate governance body (or bodies) for each of the multilateral environmental agreements in order to develop a collaborative partnership arrangement similar to that for the United Nations bodies, which can be adopted by the Plenary and by the appropriate governance body concerned.<sup>2</sup>

### Technical support for implementation of the work programme

20. Some arrangements, whether they are known as strategic partnerships or not, will be necessary to provide technical and administrative support for implementation of the work programme. These arrangements essentially provide additional support to the secretariat in a time-bound manner relating to one or more defined deliverables. By decision IPBES-2/5 (sect. X, para. 3), the Plenary mandated the Bureau and the secretariat to establish the institutional arrangements necessary to operationalize technical support for the implementation of the work programme. This will continue as necessary throughout the duration of the work programme. It should be recognized that, while such arrangements may reduce the overall workload, the work of formalizing and managing such partnerships will in itself require the time and attention of the secretariat.

21. The following approaches aim to help ensure the alignment of strategic partnerships and other collaborative arrangements with the delivery of the work programme, placing the responsibility for identifying potential strategic partnerships and other collaboration arrangements with those most directly involved with each deliverable:

(a) *Supporting the work of task forces.* The terms of reference of the three task forces (decision IPBES-2/5, annexes II–IV) explicitly ask each task force to advise on strategic partnerships that would help to deliver support in the area for which the task force is responsible – namely, engagement with scientific and observing communities; indigenous and local knowledge communities; and key capacity-building initiatives. It is recommended that the task forces identify both strategic partnerships and other collaborative arrangements that are necessary for delivery of their responsibilities, and review their proposals with the Bureau. A range of different types of relationship will be proposed and the Bureau will decide which relationships may proceed and which will need the approval of the Plenary;

(b) *Supporting thematic and global, regional and subregional assessments.* It is recommended that the expert group appointed to scope each assessment advise on strategic partnerships and other arrangements that would be valuable in helping with the conduct of the assessments. The suggestions would then form part of the scoping document or its accompanying documentation, which would be reviewed and adopted by the Plenary. In addition, however, it may be necessary to establish strategic partnerships or other appropriate arrangements with other assessment processes or bodies responsible for those assessment processes, in particular in thematic areas specific to certain regions. In this case the Bureau, working with the secretariat, should define the type of

<sup>1</sup> UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/9, annex I.

<sup>2</sup> To this end, a memorandum of cooperation was signed in October 2014 between the Platform secretariat and the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

relationship required. A range of different types of relationship will be proposed, and the Bureau will decide which relationships may proceed and which will need the approval of the Plenary;

(c) *Policy support, including that related to methodological assessments.* Two types of advice could come from the expert groups working on methodological assessments. It is recommended that any expert group scoping a methodological assessment make recommendations to the Plenary regarding strategic partnerships or other arrangements that would be valuable in carrying out the assessments, as part of the scoping document or other associated documentation. It is also recommended that when the assessment – or guide – is presented to the Plenary, the expert group carrying out the assessment advise on any strategic partnerships or other arrangements that would be valuable in the future development and implementation of policy support tools arising from the assessment;

(d) *Communications, outreach and stakeholder engagement.* It is recommended that the Bureau, working with the secretariat, identify strategic partnerships and other arrangements that would be valuable in helping to carry out communication, outreach and stakeholder engagement activities. A range of different types of relationship may be considered, and the Bureau will decide which relationships may proceed and which will need the approval of the Plenary.

22. In deciding whether or not it is appropriate to consult the Plenary before entering into any form of partnership arrangement, the Bureau will keep in mind the following considerations:

(a) High-level partnerships with bodies identified in the functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of the Platform will normally be approved by the Plenary;

(b) Partnerships with institutions providing technical support for implementation of the work programme will normally be approved by the Bureau following any generic or specific guidance provided by the Plenary;

(c) The Bureau will consult the Plenary prior to entering into a partnership agreement where for any reasons further guidance is required.

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