



IPBES

An Introduction for Stakeholders

Axel Paulsch

second edition



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Bundesamt** 



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Foreword

This booklet was developed as part of an advisory assistance project by the German Institute for Biodiversity Network (ibn) as part of a capacity building project by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and the German Environmental Agency through funds from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection. It is an introduction to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for anybody who is interested in the structure, work and products of this platform. As IPBES is an active body and working permanently, any overview of products and ongoing activities can only reflect the status quo at a given point in time. This second edition of the booklet reports on the status of mid-2022, after the 9th plenary session of IPBES.

IPBES – an introduction for stakeholders

What is IPBES?

Established in 2012, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an intergovernmental body that assesses the state of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The objective of IPBES is to strengthen the science-policy interface and thereby support long-term human well-being, sustainable development, and biodiversity conservation. In other words, IPBES provides a scientific basis for global environmental decision making. It plays a similar role for global biodiversity-related multilateral agreements as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for the UN Climate Framework Convention. IPBES relies on the work of scientists and experts from different disciplines, including natural sciences and social sciences. Its reports compile as much knowledge as possible on a given topic. In its assessments, IPBES utilizes different knowledge systems, including scientific and indigenous and local knowledge, peer reviewed literature, grey literature or oral tradition.

How is IPBES organized?

Plenary

The Plenary is the main decision-making body of IPBES. As IPBES is an intergovernmental body, its Plenary consists of the representatives of member states (139 as of August 2022). The Plenary works by consensus in matters of substance. Disagreements in such matters get discussed until the Plenary can find a compromise that no member state will oppose. Occasional voting is only foreseen in matters of procedure (e.g., in choosing between several offers to host the secretariat in the founding meeting in 2012).

The Plenary has several responsibilities:

- it elects the officers for the bodies of IPBES, e.g., for the Bureau and the MEP (see below);
- it decides on the work program;
- it decides on the rules of procedure;
- it allocates the money from the trust fund to the different tasks;
- it approves the products of IPBES before they get officially published.

The IPBES Plenary has met annually since 2012. Where the meetings take place is also decided by the Plenary. States can offer to host a meeting and the Plenary can accept such offers. If no offer is made, the Plenary takes place at the seat of the secretariat in Bonn, Germany.

The meetings of the Plenary are not only open for member state representatives but also for registered observer organizations and states. These observers may only speak in Plenary when no representative of a member state wants to take the floor. They have no voting rights, and their consensus is not needed. However, their statements can be supported by a member state and thereby taken up.

As a regional economic organization, the European Union was granted a so-called enhanced participation as observer. This is not a full membership, but it gives the EU the right to speak and reply in turn, and to make text proposals. The EU, however, has no right to vote or block consensus.

All Plenary decisions can be found under:

<https://ipbes.net/documents-by-category/Decisions>

Bureau

The IPBES Bureau is an administrative body. It consists of 10 people: two from each of the five UN regions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, and Others). Each region nominates one administrative officer and one vice chair. The Plenary elects one of these five vice chairs to be the chair of IPBES for a three-years term. Chairmanship rotates among the regions with every new election. The first chairmanship was held by the Asian-Pacific region, the second by Western Europe and Others (WEOG) and the third and current chair is Ana Maria Hernandez Salgar from Colombia for Latin America and the Caribbean States (GRULAC).

The responsibilities of the Bureau include:

- addressing requests related to IPBES' program of work and products that require attention by IPBES between sessions of the Plenary,
- overseeing communication and outreach activities,
- reviewing progress in the implementation of decisions of the Plenary,
- monitoring the secretariat's performance,
- organizing and helping to conduct sessions of the Plenary,
- reviewing the observance of IPBES' rules and procedures,
- reviewing the management of resources and observance of financial

- rules and reporting thereon to the Plenary,
- advising the Plenary on coordination between IPBES and other relevant institutions,
- identifying donors and developing partnership arrangements for the implementation of IPBES' activities.

The Bureau meets regularly, at the margins of Plenary sessions as well in the intersessional period as needed.

More information about the Bureau and the current members can be found under:

<https://www.ipbes.net/bureau>

Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP)

The Multidisciplinary Expert Panel oversees and steers the scientific functions of IPBES. It consists of five scientists from each UN region. These 25 scientists are joined by the IPBES chair and the four vice chairs. Like the Bureau, the MEP is balanced not only geographically, but also in terms of scientific disciplines and gender. Each region has the right to nominate its five MEP members who then get elected by the Plenary. Members serve three-year terms and can be reelected once.

The responsibilities of the MEP include:

- providing advice to the Plenary on scientific and technical aspects of IPBES' program of work,
- providing advice and assistance on matters of technical and/or scientific communication,
- managing IPBES' peer-review process to ensure the highest levels of scientific quality, independence and credibility for all products delivered by IPBES at all stages of the process,
- engaging the scientific community and other knowledge holders with the work program while maintaining the discipline and gender balance and encouraging effective participation of experts from developing countries,
- assuring scientific and technical coordination among structures set up under IPBES and facilitating coordination between IPBES and other related processes to build upon existing efforts,
- exploring ways and means to bring different knowledge systems, including indigenous knowledge systems, into the science-policy interface.

The MEP meets regularly, at the margins of plenary sessions as well in the intersessional period as needed.

More information about MEP and the current membership can be found under:

<https://www.ipbes.net/multidisciplinary-expert-panel>

Secretariat

The Secretariat serves as the official address of IPBES and performs the day-to-day work of this multilateral agreement. A vote at the founding plenary in 2012 placed the secretariat in Bonn, Germany. It is administered and staffed by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The Secretariat is headed by an Executive Secretary, the first and current one being Dr. Anne Larigauderie from France. She and her team are responsible for all logistical aspects of the Plenary or MEP/Bureau meetings and meetings of assessment author teams. They prepare the documents for such meetings, document the discussions, and distribute the final documents after the meetings. The Secretariat assigns one of its staff for each IPBES product (e.g., an assessment) or IPBES function (e.g., capacity building) who helps the MEP, Bureau, and author teams to fulfil their respective tasks.¹

Another task of the Secretariat is to inform member states and observer organizations about steps and procedures within IPBES, such as calls for nominations for experts or the dates for the review of draft versions of assessment. Furthermore, the Secretariat is responsible for communicating to the public about finalised IPBES products. Keeping the web page of IPBES up to date is also a responsibility of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat's staff are the only people in IPBES whose work is paid for by IPBES. All other positions like Bureau- or MEP-members or assessment authors are unpaid. The working time has to be provided by the institutions or organizations the respective persons work for.

More information about the Secretariat and the current membership can be found under:

<https://www.ipbes.net/secretariat>

¹ Information on who is assigned to which task can be found under: <https://www.ipbes.net/secretariat>.

Task forces

Task forces are temporary expert groups established by the Plenary to fulfil a given task. For example, the second Plenary established a task force with the mandate to develop procedures on how to integrate indigenous and local knowledge into the work of IPBES. When the task force had done so, its mandate was extended to test the implementation of these procedures. Task force members are nominated by member states and observer organizations. They are led by MEP members.

Technical Support Units (TSU)

Member states and organizations can also offer to host Technical Support Units (TSU) to support IPBES with specific products or functions. Offers have to be accepted by the Plenary. When, for example, the Plenary decided to undertake four parallel regional assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services, a country in each of these regions offered to host a TSU. The staff of such a TSU is paid by the host country or organization. They serve as a kind of task-specific secretariat, arranging meetings and providing background information. TSUs are time bound according to the specific IPBES product or function they were established to support. The Plenary also decides on work plans for TSUs, e.g., for the TSU for capacity building hosted by the Norwegian Environment Agency.

Strategic partnerships

IPBES formalizes its cooperation with other bodies in strategic partnership agreements. Currently, such partnerships exist with four bodies of the UN system – UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO and FAO. This allows the UN bodies to send personnel to work in the IPBES secretariat (paid by the UN body), or to host a Technical Support Unit, like UNESCO does for indigenous and local knowledge, or to engage in a certain IPBES function, as UNDP does in capacity building.

Partnerships can also be established in the form of a memorandum of cooperation or memorandum of understanding with other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). Such memorandums have been agreed with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), the Convention on International

Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Ramsar Convention and the science organization Future Earth.

For more information see:

<https://ipbes.net/collaboration-partnerships>

How is IPBES financed?

Although most of the work within IPBES is not paid for by IPBES itself, the platform needs some funds for day-to-day operations like holding meetings and paying travel costs, producing information material and to paying the secretariat's staff. Such funding comes from a trust fund administered by UNEP. The fund accepts exclusively voluntary contributions. There are no financial obligations associated with IPBES membership. This principle allows countries to become members even if they are not able to contribute financially to the work of IPBES. In principle, the trust fund can receive contributions from everybody, not only states, but also organizations and the private sector. These voluntary contributions cannot be earmarked for certain tasks or products or given under certain conditions. This makes it impossible for certain products to be 'bought.' It is the Plenary only who decides (by consensus) on the tasks to which the trust fund money is allocated. Of course, IPBES also accepts in-kind contributions, such as an offer of a country to host a plenary meeting.

So far, the highest contributions have come from developed countries and only about 25 of the 139 member states have contributed at all.

Where are the basic principles laid down?

In order to guide its own work IPBES, like other intergovernmental bodies, laid down basic principles, the so called 'Rules of Procedures', where the roles of the different bodies like Plenary, Bureau, MEP etc. are defined. These rules also define election procedures, the clearance process for IPBES products or the admission of observers. If necessary, the Plenary has the authority to adjust these rules of procedure or add new rules. The current version of these rules can be found under:

<https://ipbes.net/documents-by-category/policies%20and%20procedures>

What does IPBES do?

Since the Platform's inception, IPBES activities have clustered around four main functions: assessments, capacity building, knowledge and data management, and the development of policy tools.

Assessing knowledge

The most well-known function of IPBES is to provide assessments that compile and analyze all available knowledge on a given topic. This compilation is explicitly not restricted to published scientific sources, but also includes indigenous and local knowledge that might not be published in scientific journals. Such assessments can be regional or global in scope, and their topics can be related directly to biodiversity (e.g., pollinators or invasive alien species) or be more methodological, e.g., about the use of scenarios and models in political decision making.

Once IPBES products have been approved by the Plenary, they are made publicly available on the IPBES web page. Launches are announced at media events, press conferences and via press releases, as well as numerous newsletters. National launch events have been organized, i.a. for the regional assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

All IPBES assessments follow the same logic and standards, which allows comparing their results in different regions and at different scales. The 'Guide on the Production of Assessments,' which experts and author teams can make use of, provides this baseline. The guide is seen as a living document which is updated from time to time. It can be found on the IPBES web page under:

<https://www.ipbes.net/guide-production-assessments>

Finished assessments

The first of these assessments was approved at IPBES 4 in 2016 and focused on the status and role of pollinators, as well as the drivers of their loss and possible actions to improve the situation.² In 2016, IPBES published a methodological assessment on scenarios and models of biodiversity and ecosystem service. Fol-

² <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/pollinators>

lowing a proposal by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), an assessment on land degradation was undertaken and approved at IPBES 6 in 2018.³



Fig. 1: IPBES assessments

In the same year four regional assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Developed in parallel, they focused on the regions of Europe and Central Asia, Asia and the Pacific, the Americas and Africa were launched.⁴ Making use of the findings of the four regional assessments a ‘Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services’ was developed and approved by IPBES 7 (2019).⁵

Two further assessments have already been finished and launched at IPBES 9 in July 2022. The first of these, the assessment on the diverse values and valuation of nature is a methodological assessment started after IPBES 6 in 2018. This assessment investigated different worldviews and value systems to arrive at balanced methods for the valuation of nature, taking disparate interests into account. You can find the summary for policy makers for this assessment on its

³ <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/ldr>

⁴ Europe and Central Asia: <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/eca>

Asia and the Pacific: <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/asia-pacific>

Americas: <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/americas>

Africa: <https://www.ipbes.net/assessment-reports/africa>

⁵ <https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment-report-biodiversity-ecosystem-services>

landing page on the IPBES website.⁶ The second assessment report approved at IPBES 9 concerns the sustainable use of wild species, including the status and trends of their use, conditions for sustainability and pathways towards it. The SPM has been published on the IPBES website.⁷ The texts of these assessment report will be made available on the IPBES website in fall 2022.

IPBES maintains a catalogue of assessments (including those produced by other organizations). This catalogue can be found and searched under:

<http://catalog.ipbes.net>

Ongoing and future assessments

The undertaking of four further assessments has been approved by the IPBES Plenary and these assessments are currently in development. These upcoming assessments focus on the following themes: invasive alien species, the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food and health, transformative change as well as business and biodiversity.

Work on the invasive alien species assessment began in 2019. The author team for this assessment is currently working the summary for policy makers, with the line-by-line approval of the SPM for IPBES 10 in 2023.

Work on the so-called “Nexus assessment” that will compile existing data on the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food and health started after IPBES 8 (held virtually 2021). That plenary session also saw the approval of the commencement of a thematic assessment on transformative change. This assessment aims to look into the cultural, social, economic and behavioral factors that can be leveraged for transformative change. Expert nominations for both assessments have already been submitted. You can track the progress on these assessments on their respective landing pages on the IPBES website.

Finally, IPBES plans to produce a methodological assessment on the impact and dependence of business and biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people. One major goal of this assessment is the identification of criteria and indicators for measuring that relationship.

The work program is set up as a rolling program, allowing for the uptake of new topics. In preparation for IPBES 10 there is a call for requests of new topics for future assessments, which might be requested by countries, regions or MEAs.

⁶ <https://ipbes.net/the-values-assessment>

⁷ <https://ipbes.net/sustainable-use-assessment>

Capacity building

Capacities for using IPBES products and contributing to the work of IPBES vary from country to country. Scientific infrastructure, data availability, the capacity to use policy tools like scenarios and models are not globally uniform. Therefore, capacity building was established as a function of IPBES. The function, however, is in bundling or guiding existing capacity building programs and activities to the benefit of countries and organisations in need, not in financing them.

One example of IPBES' work in this area is a fellowship program that allows people early in their careers to work with the more senior scientists in assessment author teams. Furthermore, IPBES produces webinars on various topics, such as the process of preparing an assessment and the IPBES conceptual framework.

The capacity building work of IPBES can be accessed under:

<https://www.ipbes.net/deliverables/1a-and-1b-capacity-building>

Working with knowledge and data

IPBES assessments collate and analyze a lot of data. They also highlight gaps in existing knowledge. Data and knowledge management is therefore an important component of the Platform's work. To support this and to bring more attention to knowledge gaps, IPBES has established a task force to coordinate data management and knowledge generation. Another task force is focused on integrating indigenous and local knowledge systems into the assessment processes.

While scientific knowledge is permanently growing, IPBES assessments often reveal knowledge gaps in their topics. Such knowledge gaps might be of general nature (e.g., missing knowledge about certain ecosystem functions which are not yet understood) or of more local nature (e.g., missing data about a species in a certain area). Although IPBES is not a mechanism to fund research, the identification of knowledge gaps might inform and trigger research funding.

More information can be found under:

<https://ipbes.net/03-strengthening-knowledge-foundations>

Policy support

The Platform's work in this sphere is broken down into two main categories. On the one hand, IPBES develops policy instruments and methodologies that can be used to support knowledge-based decision making. On the other hand, it works to support and encourage the use of scenarios and models of biodiversity and ecosystem functions.

IPBES policy support tools and methodologies can be used in many spheres of policymaking. Their uses vary from working with data and knowledge to encouraging public discussion and involvement, to capacity building, innovation, and adaptive governance. These tools and supporting information can be found under: <https://ipbes.net/policy-tools-methodologies>

IPBES work on scenarios and models builds on its 2016 methodological assessment on the same topic. This work is carried out by a dedicated task force. It has already resulted in the introduction of the Nature Futures Framework (NFF), a new scenario-building tool that combines qualitative narratives with a quantitative model output. The methodology builds on visions of functional future relationships between humanity and nature with a view to biodiversity and ecosystem services. It then develops the variables and indicators that help apply quantitative modelling methods to these “storylines” to produce concrete recommendations. The framework was adopted at IPBES 9 (2022) and can be found in the meeting report IPBES 9/14 in Annex VI of decision 9/1 (pages 37 and following) under:

<https://ipbes.net/events/ipbes-9-plenary>

How does IPBES work?

Work program

The IPBES work program determines the concrete activities that take place as the Platform performs these four core functions, as well as assessment topics. The first IPBES work program ran until 2019 and has been superseded by a rolling work program adopted at IPBES 7.

Assessment topics come from member states and organizations and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA). There is a set of criteria for such requests. Topics must be relevant in the context of IPBES and there must be

knowledge available for assessment. It should also be clear that there is no other ongoing assessment tackling the same questions. The most powerful request come from MEAs like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UNCCD or the Ramsar Convention. If, e.g., the 196 member states of the CBD jointly back a request to IPBES, it is highly likely that the IPBES Plenary, which consists of 139 states, mainly also members of the CBD, will take up such a request.

After a request is received, the Bureau and the MEP will conduct a preliminary scoping of the topic and propose it to the Plenary if it meets the criteria above. If the Plenary agrees, a scoping team is formed to prepare a scoping report. Such a report lists the questions the assessment should investigate in detail, outlines the chapters, and gives an estimate on the time needed to perform the assessment and the costs involved. It is then up to the Plenary to decide if and when to start the assessment.

The production of an assessment

An assessment is a collaborative product of a team of authors. Authors are nominated by IPBES member states and organizations. The MEP then selects the best candidates. Author teams should be geographically balanced and with balanced gender, fields of expertise and scientific background. The team is structured into contributing authors (which can be several dozens), some lead authors per chapter, coordinating lead authors and two co-chairs, who oversee the whole team. Co-chairs and lead authors are expected to dedicate most of their working time to this task. The support of the research institute or organization at which they are employed is crucial because all this work for IPBES is unpaid. The IPBES trust fund only supports travelling to authors meetings for eligible countries but does not pay scientists for their work on assessments or any other IPBES products.

The production of an assessment is an iterative process. Reports go through several drafts which undergo external reviews by governments and experts. Everyone can register as a reviewer for one or more chapters of a given assessment draft and comment on the draft text. The comments are passed on to the authors team who, for example, take up any new evidence provided by the reviewers.

The author team also formulates a Summary for Policy Makers (SPM). These documents list key messages and findings of the assessment (about 30 pages compared to the up to 800 pages of the full assessment report). Unlike full as-

assessment reports, SPMs must be approved the IPBES Plenary word by word. This approval can be a time-consuming procedure where co-chairs and lead authors try to answer questions around their findings and messages and seek for understanding and consensus at this science-policy interface.

Steps of the production of an assessment are visualized in material provided under:

<https://ipbes.net/guide-production-assessments>

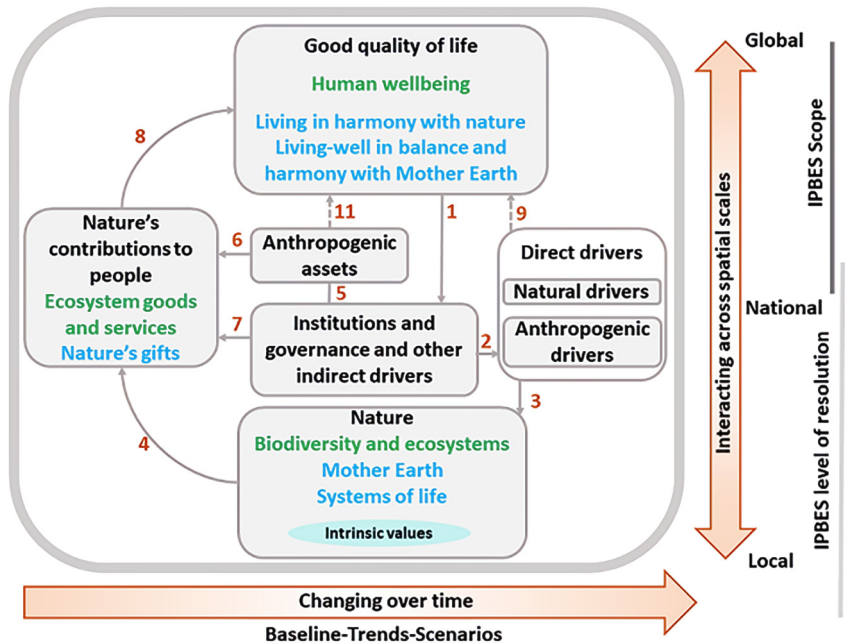


Fig. 2: Conceptual framework of IPBES⁸

IPBES conceptual framework

IPBES operates based on a conceptual framework (see figure 1), which depicts the relationships between Nature, Nature's Contributions to People and Good Quality of Life, as well as drivers that influence these systems. This framework is meant as a help to structure the work on assessments which normally include a chapter describing the status quo (nature or ecosystems), the services (or benefits) and the drivers that led to the current situation. Assessments investigate

⁸ <https://www.ipbes.net/conceptual-framework>

what consequences a business-as-usual scenario or certain changes in the drivers might have with respect to the ecosystems and the respective services and finally the quality of life. Authors are encouraged to formulate options which should be policy relevant but not policy prescriptive.

The IPBES webpage provides an e-learning tool on the conceptual framework:

<https://www.ipbes.net/e-learning>

IPBES impact

IPBES assessments collate all available data on a subject, which makes them a valuable aid when formulating national policies and measures to fulfil the aims of international conventions. Assessments have also contributed to the work of other international bodies, such as the CBD.

On the national level, thematic assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services (2019) can be used when developing biodiversity strategies. The same is true for the assessment on land degradation (2018) and strategies to combat land degradation. Assessments can also help states fulfil their ambitions and obligations that come from other international conventions, such as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). Regardless of IPBES membership, any state can use their findings. Methodological assessments can also be of great use in conducting state- and sub-national level thematic research.

IPBES assessments have also impacted international biodiversity governance. In the case of the IPBES assessment on Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production the scientific sub-body of the Convention on Biological Diversity discussed which parts of the findings would be relevant to the work of the CBD. At the following COP (in the same year as the assessment was approved) the CBD took on board all the key messages of the pollinators assessment and encouraged its 196 Parties to take action to implement them. At the same COP meeting in 2016 some countries formed a 'Coalition of the Willing' to promote pollinators (compare <https://promotepollinators.org/>). In the wake of this rise of political awareness, some countries, e.g., Germany, started to develop national pollinator strategies and related regulations/laws.

It was also the CBD who requested IPBES to do a global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services in time to prepare its post-2020 global biodiversity framework. Therefore, the IPBES Global Assessment, finalized in 2019,

has been a major source of information for the formulation of this new strategic framework under the CBD.

The UNCCD at its 14th COP meeting in September 2019 took up the findings of the Land Degradation and Restoration assessment which it had request IPBES to undertake and formulated policies along key-messages of the IPBES assessment.

The IPBES secretariat tries so enhance the impact by raising awareness through press releases, information material and assessment launch events. It provides an impact tracking tool under:

<https://ipbes.net/impact-tracking-view>

How you can take part

In addition to state participation, IPBES welcomes the cooperation of organizations, individual experts and knowledge holders. In fact, IPBES sees everyone who is interested in its work as a stakeholder. There are numerous ways in which you can contribute to and benefit from the Platform's work. You can find more information on stakeholder roles, the registration process, as well as a stakeholder registry on the IPBES website under <https://www.ipbes.net/stakeholders>. Having registered, you will receive regular updates related to the platform. Below, you will find a short engagement guide for the different levels of engagement.

Participation as a State

Every UN state has the right to become a member of IPBES. A formal letter issued on behalf of the relevant state authority is all that is necessary to join. The IPBES Secretariat is responsible for processing such requests. A state's membership in IPBES cannot be blocked by existing members. Becoming an IPBES member state grants full participation rights in all IPBES forums, including the right to speak and vote in Plenary as well as the right to block consensus. Participation as a state can yield numerous benefits. The most obvious benefit is the chance to influence the IPBES work program, as well as the assessment production process.

To participate in IPBES plenary sessions, states send delegations, whose members then have the right to speak on behalf of their countries. If a country

does not want to become a member but wants to follow Plenary meetings nevertheless, it can do so as observer (see below), without speaking or voting rights.

Every IPBES member state also appoints a national focal point. This person serves as a contact point in matters related to IPBES and shall coordinate IPBES matters nationally. Usually, national focal points are based in the ministry for the environment of the respective country.⁹

Participation as an observer organization

Any organization with a justified interest in IPBES can apply as an observer. This can be states that do not want to become full members, international UN organizations (e.g., UNEP, FAO, UNDP, UNESCO) or other conventions (e.g., the Ramsar convention or UNCCD), international environmental organizations (e.g., Friends of the Earth or WWF), national organizations, scientific entities (e.g., universities or specific departments), civil society organizations and organizations of indigenous peoples and local communities. To be accepted, the organization must contact the secretariat and hand in some information about its structure and purpose, as well as its interest in IPBES. Observer organizations also appoint focal points. Once this information is cleared by the Bureau, a recommendation is made to the Plenary, whether to accept the organization as a new observer. The Plenary usually follows this recommendation and accepts the list of new observers at the beginning of each Plenary session.

Observer status includes the right to follow Plenary meetings and the opportunity to speak if no member state wants to speak. While observer organizations cannot vote, they can still greatly benefit from participating. Observer organizations can send their own delegations to IPBES Plenary meetings. Direct access to the decision-making process can be valuable in that it allows the organization to see in advance, what IPBES and its TSUs are going to be focusing on that year. Such advance knowledge can highlight funding opportunities and synergies with others. Additionally, observer organizations can take the floor at IPBES Plenaries when no representative of a member state wishes to speak. This allows observer organizations to influence the IPBES agenda by making arguments and suggestions. This extends not only to assessments, but also to the work of the TSUs. This can be an excellent opportunity to bring attention to an issue or cause that you feel is neglected or underfunded. Observer organiza-

9 A list of national focal points of all member states can be found under:
<https://www.ipbes.net/national-focal-points>

tions can also nominate members for assessment author teams and IPBES task forces. The proportion of such nominations in the final author teams, however, cannot exceed 20%.

The upcoming assessment on the impact and dependence of business and biodiversity and nature's contributions to people would also greatly benefit from private sector organizations, who, in turn, can use this as an opportunity to present their interests to the international community.

Participation as a scientist or expert

All content, such as assessments, is produced by scientists of different disciplines and holders of other forms of knowledge. The secretariat issues a call for nominations for each IPBES product that the Plenary decides to produce. States and organizations then nominate candidates and the MEP selects from these nominations to form the authors team.

Individual scientists who want to participate in an assessment can hand in their personal application to the national focal point, who then forwards the nomination. Depending on the specific role (e.g., contributing or coordinating author or co-chair), the investment of working time can be quite significant. This work is not paid for by IPBES, meaning that the institutions for which the individual scientist or expert is working would have to agree to the dedication of such working time for the IPBES task. Another way of involvement for scientists is to be nominated and accepted as MEP member for one of the five UN regions. Scientists and experts can also join the delegations of states and observer organizations. IPBES finances the travel and accommodation costs for up to two members of delegations from eligible countries to take part in Plenary meetings.

IPBES stakeholder networks

IPBES has a large and diverse stakeholder base. From states to civil society and private sector organizations, to individual scientists working in relevant fields, many can benefit from the Platform's work. Currently, two stakeholder networks coordinate these disparate interests – the Open-Ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders (ONet, <https://onet.ipbes.net/>) and the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (<https://iifb-indigenous.org/>).

org/). These networks facilitate two-way communication between their members and IPBES, promote IPBES activities and raise awareness about the Platform.

These networks want to bring interested stakeholders together, serve as discussion for a in the preparation of Plenary meetings, inform about IPBES activities and organize stakeholder days directly before a Plenary. Both networks prepare statements on the different agenda items of Plenary meetings and are given the chance to read them out and thus become part of the meeting report.

Common misunderstandings: What is IPBES NOT doing?

Since IPBES was first discussed and then formally set up in 2012 there are expectations that IPBES cannot fulfil as they would exceed the actual mandate of the Platform. To avoid common misunderstandings some points should be listed on what IPBES is NOT doing:

- IPBES is not doing research. An IPBES assessments collects existing knowledge from different sources on a certain topic but it does not undertake research by itself. Of course, the identification of knowledge gaps by IPBES can guide further in-depth research done by respective institutions.
- IPBES is not a research funding mechanism or institution. As explained above IPBES is not doing research. Nevertheless, international or national research funding organizations can use the knowledge gaps identified by IPBES assessments to focus their funding programs.
- IPBES does not formulate environmental policies. IPBES assessments contain key messages and provide scenarios on which kind of action or absence of action would most probably have which consequences and what could be done to reach certain envisaged results in the future. Such options should be relevant for policy making but not prescribe the policies as such. The task to agree on global environmental policies lies with conventions like the CBD, UNCCD or the Ramsar convention. On the national level the responsibility for policies lies with national governments. Of course, also non-member states can make use of IPBES findings and options for action.
- IPBES does not implement any measures on the ground. IPBES collects the knowledge and proposes options for actions, but the actions have

to be taken by respective actors on the appropriate level from global to local.

- The knowledge collected in IPBES assessments is not restricted on coming from member states only. The author teams try to collect all knowledge available, published in different languages and gathered all over the world (or a specific region for a regional assessment). Therefore, if a country is not a member to IPBES that does not mean that accessible data and knowledge from that country is not reflected in an assessment.