

## Appendix II

### Report on progress in piloting a community of practice for the social sciences and humanities

#### Mandate

1. The external review of IPBES at the end of its first work programme found that “IPBES still appears to have difficulty in engaging expertise beyond experts in the fields of biodiversity and ecosystem services. “There are well-identified gaps in expertise, notably in the social sciences, that can potentially compromise its capacity to meet its overall mandate and influence policy” (IPBES/7/INF/18, finding 14). In line with this finding, the external review panel recommended that “IPBES needs to diversify and be more explicit about the different kinds of expertise needed for different activities, and the criteria applied for expert selection, to strengthen the policy dimension within IPBES. In addition to the existing criteria for regional, gender and disciplinary diversity/scientific credentials, criteria aiming to strengthen the capacity of IPBES to operate at the interface between data, science, policy and practice should be included” (IPBES/7/INF/18, recommendation 8).
2. In decision IPBES-7/2, the Plenary requested the Bureau, the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and the Executive Secretary, in accordance with their respective mandates, to take the recommendations made by the external review panel into account in the implementation of the rolling work programme of IPBES up to 2030 and to identify solutions and/or issues for the Plenary to consider at its 8<sup>th</sup> session.
3. The Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and Bureau, at their 14<sup>th</sup> meetings in January 2020, endorsed the concept of a pilot IPBES social sciences and humanities community of practice. The purpose of the community of practice is to enhance the contributions of the social sciences and humanities to IPBES. It was decided to establish a pilot for such a community for the period January 2020 - December 2022, with a view to it becoming a permanent community should the pilot period prove successful. The community of practice would be supported by the IPBES task force on capacity-building in the pilot period.

#### Summary

- The piloting of a social sciences and humanities community of practice has resulted in the establishment of a social sciences and humanities network as a subgroup in Onet;
- The contributions of social sciences and humanities to IPBES could be further enhanced;
- The social sciences and humanities network could contribute to a better understanding of and engagement with a broader spectrum of disciplines, research fields, approaches, etc. from social sciences and humanities in IPBES.

#### Rationale

4. Nature and human culture are inextricably linked. As a consequence, meaningful assessments of the state of biodiversity, and potential policies, practices and technologies to conserve and sustainably use it require the integration of knowledge on genes, species and ecosystems with knowledge on humans and societies. Moreover, an integrative approach is crucial to produce policy relevant knowledge for the achievement of global targets such as those under the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In order to accomplish the objective of IPBES “to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development”, the value of engaging researchers from the social sciences and humanities in the work of IPBES has been acknowledged both inside and outside IPBES, as have the challenges encountered in the efforts of achieving such involvement (Stenseke and Larigauderie 2018; Vadrot et al. 2017). IPBES requires expertise in theory, methods, and empirical data from the social sciences and humanities.

5. This acknowledgment of the importance of knowledge from social sciences and the humanities for exercising the functions of IPBES has led to improvements in the nomination of researchers that can provide it, but success is partial and more needs to be done. The gap in expertise in social sciences and humanities was identified in the internal review (IPBES/6/INF/32) as well as in the external review of IPBES at the conclusion of its first work programme (IPBES/7/INF/18). Gaps in expertise in social sciences and humanities also have implications for addressing other findings of the external review. The external review and academic literature (e.g. Timpte et al., 2018) have recommended some measures to address the challenges of engaging and integrating experts from social sciences and humanities into IPBES. Shortcomings in IPBES' efforts to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy, and effectively navigate the interface between data, science, policy and practice (finding 6) would be improved by expertise in social sciences and humanities on biodiversity governance and the science-policy interface. The same is true for findings 22 and 23 of the external review. Increased contributions by experts in indigenous and local knowledge and inter-/transdisciplinarity from social sciences and humanities would enhance practical integration of different sources of knowledge and diverse world views to inform Platform outputs. The review found that two of the unique features that constitute major strengths of IPBES are its inclusiveness of all sources of knowledge and openness to the participation of stakeholders, as well as its experiments in using different worldviews to inform its outputs (finding 3). However, it also identified shortcomings in the operationalization of these aspects in finding 12, finding 30, and finding 31.

6. In spite of an improvement in the nominations of experts from the social sciences and humanities, the shortage identified by the external review panel continues. As a consequence, the procedure for filling gaps in the availability of expertise, as adopted by the Plenary in decision IPBES-3/4 had to be applied frequently. As the procedure involves the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and potentially assessment co-chairs suggesting candidates for nomination to fill the identified gaps, the procedure is to some degree dependent on their networks.

7. IPBES, in acknowledging the importance of knowledge from the social sciences and humanities for achieving all its four functions, strives to further strengthen engagement of researchers that can provide such knowledge. The capability to reach out to and attract scholars from social sciences and the humanities is particularly important considering the assessments included under the IPBES rolling work programme up to 2030, which explicitly address societal issues related to the link between biodiversity and health, food security, societal transformation and business. By enhancing the contributions of the social sciences and humanities, the work and outputs of IPBES will benefit, in particular when it comes to knowledge on social, cultural and governance aspects of biodiversity conservation and socioecological systems.

### **Process towards a pilot community of practice**

8. Following their initial idea, work towards piloting a community of practice for social sciences and humanities has been led by Marie Stenseke (co-chair, Multidisciplinary Expert Panel), Marla R. Emery (co-chair, assessment of the sustainable use of wild species) and Håkon B. Stokland (fellow, assessment of the sustainable use of wild species), with the latter serving as main coordinator of the pilot community of practice.

9. 2020 has been a strategy development phase for the community of practice, with two online meetings, while 2021 and 2022 are planned to be dedicated to its full establishment, ensuring the success of the pilot phase.

10. The first, exploratory workshop was held on 16 and 17 June 2020, on the theme “Enhancing the contributions of the social sciences and humanities to IPBES – toward creating a community of practice.” It was aimed at mapping internal as well as external challenges for enhancing the contributions of social sciences and humanities in IPBES, and was structured around three themes: 1) Challenges and possibilities related to IPBES framings and concepts; 2) challenges and possibilities related to IPBES structure and arrangements; and 3) challenges and possibilities in reaching out to a wider set of scholars from social sciences and humanities.

11. The second meeting was arranged as a seminar and held online on 6 November 2020. The theme of the seminar, potential functions which the social sciences and humanities can provide that IPBES needs, resulted from the discussions at the first workshop. The seminar programme included three short presentations: Alice Vadrot presented a literature review of potential functions of social sciences and humanities in IPBES, Esther Turnhout presented on the different understandings of transformative change, and HyeJin Kim presented on the role of scholars from social sciences and

humanities in the modelling of scenarios of nature futures. The subsequent discussion also addressed the way forward for the community of practice.

12. Experts from social sciences and humanities currently or previously engaged in IPBES, as well as scholars from these fields that have studied IPBES were invited to the meetings and participants selected by the leaders of the piloting initiative, in consultation with the technical support unit for capacity-building and with consideration taken to regional, disciplinary and gender balance as well as roles in IPBES. It was challenging to achieve representation from all UN regions, an issue that was also discussed at the meetings. The workshop had 12 participants; the seminar<sup>14</sup>. In addition, the technical support unit on capacity-building attended the meeting.

13. As a result of the meetings as well as of communications with the IPBES secretariat on possible formats for establishing the community of practice, a dialogue was initiated with the Open-Ended Network of IPBES Stakeholders (ONet), and in the end of 2020, the community of practice formally became a subgroup of ONet, named The Social Sciences and Humanities Network (<https://onet.ipbes.net/node/43>). Becoming a part of ONet made it possible for the network to utilize facilities provided by ONet and to effectively function as a meeting place for scholars from the social sciences and humanities engaged in IPBES, interested in engaging in IPBES, having IPBES as a study object as well as scholars with a general interest in themes addressed in the IPBES work programme. In this way, the network can work simultaneously as a platform for exchanging experiences, a forum for stimulating experts to review IPBES draft reports and as an attractor for engaging more scholars from social sciences and humanities in IPBES.

14. For the future, it is anticipated that the network will engage a large number of experts, and carry out activities such as organized seminars, virtual meetings to review assessment drafts or scoping documents, establishing nodes in regions and disciplines with low IPBES engagement, conference presentations and papers to reach out, liaising with existing social sciences and humanities networks in the field of biodiversity conservation (such as the Social science working group within The society for conservation biology) as well as key relevant disciplinary organizations.

15. For the first half of 2021, thus far two seminars are planned. They will be broadly announced.

### **Summary of discussions at the meetings**

16. The main points raised in the two meetings described above are presented below under five overarching themes:

#### **1. Possibilities and challenges related to IPBES framings and concepts**

- Social sciences and humanities have made considerable contributions to the work of IPBES; the visibility of these contributions could be improved;
- Social sciences and humanities can offer a more reflexive understanding of the political aspects of knowledge. Explicit discussions of power and ethics have been largely absent in IPBES assessments finalized until 2019, including in their presentation of frameworks for policy options. Moreover, political aspects of knowledge were rarely considered in the assessments;
- Social sciences and humanities can foster a plurality of disciplines, approaches and actors in IPBES. The social sciences and humanities network could contribute to a better understanding of and engagement with a broader spectrum of social sciences and humanities research, disciplines, research fields and approaches;
- Social sciences and humanities can offer a more complex view of society;
- Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies provided by social sciences and humanities can contribute to the work of IPBES;
- The conceptualization of evidence in IPBES assessments finalized by 2019 is not fully compatible with some perspectives prevalent in social sciences and the humanities, for example with regard to the generalization of knowledge, addressing non-linear change, modelling, and the drivers, pressures, state, impact and response model of intervention;
- Social sciences and humanities are often more context sensitive than natural science constituting a challenge to their integration, as evidenced in discussions around the concept of “nature’s contributions to people”;

- Social sciences and humanities can play a variety of roles in the work of IPBES, including but not limited to what is often regarded as social dimensions (e.g. values, ethics, governance) in accordance with the nature/culture or conceptual/material dichotomies. For example, approaches from the social sciences and humanities are relevant for categorizations, definitions, how problems are formulated, practical management issues, material practices supporting or undermining social-ecological systems, and material-semiotic networks involving actors across biodiversity and human societies;
- Social sciences and humanities can play a role in addressing different epistemologies, ontologies, knowledge systems and paradigms addressed in the work of IPBES.

## **2. Challenges and possibilities related to the structure and processes of IPBES**

- Options for fostering the inclusion of social sciences and humanities in the work of IPBES include capacity-building activities such as meetings or webinars familiarizing assessment experts with relevant perspectives and concepts from social sciences and humanities or the preparation of methodological guidance which authors can use;
- One of the strengths of social sciences and humanities is their recognition and expression of multiple voices, from which IPBES can benefit, as IPBES assessments are intended to clearly identify disparate views for which there is significant scientific, technical or socioeconomic support;
- One of the operating principles of IPBES is to take an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach that incorporates all relevant disciplines, including social and natural sciences and the procedures for the preparation of IPBES deliverables state, inter alia, that the group of assessment experts should reflect the range of scientific, technical and socioeconomic views and expertise. Nonetheless, interdisciplinary work and addressing different knowledge sources and systems is challenging in practice and further support could be provided to IPBES experts, including to facilitate equal engagement with experts, approaches, data and knowledge sources from different disciplines and to foster epistemological pluralism;
- Social sciences and humanities could also play a role in enhancing the policy-support function of IPBES at different levels;
- Further ways to bring IPBES to the attention of experts from the social sciences and humanities and engage them in the work of IPBES would need to be identified.

## **3. Challenges and possibilities in reaching out to a wider set of scholars from social sciences and the humanities**

- IPBES assessments on topics more directly associated with natural sciences may not attract sufficient numbers of experts from social sciences and humanities, where the relevance of the work of IPBES to their fields of work and the relevance of their expertise to the work of IPBES is not clearly articulated;
- IPBES calls for the nomination of experts regularly result in comparatively fewer nominations of experts from the social sciences and humanities, and even fewer of such experts from some regions such as Eastern Europe and Central Asia. This could be due to a number of reasons, including a stronger relationship between national focal points and the natural science community as well as the cost of participation, especially for experts from Western Europe and Others Region.

## **4. Potential functions a network could perform in order to enhance the incorporation of social sciences and the humanities in the work of IPBES:**

- Establish a pool of experts from social sciences and the humanities which may be interested in seeking nominations as experts for various IPBES deliverables, could contribute to the review of draft IPBES scoping documents and assessments, and could engage in outreach activities to bring the work of IPBES to the attention of more experts in the field, among other activities;
- Make the case for the relevance of IPBES work to experts and institutions in the fields of social sciences and humanities;

- Develop options for ways and methods which can support IPBES in better integrating social sciences and humanities in its work;
- Develop materials and tools for biophysical scientists to introduce them to perspectives and concepts from social sciences and the humanities and support their work with experts in these fields;
- Stimulate new IPBES-relevant research and propose new research agendas in social sciences and the humanities;
- Provide success stories illustrating where specific contributions from social sciences and the humanities made a significant contribution to the work of IPBES;
- Reflect and provide feedback for continuous improvement on the role of social sciences and humanities in IPBES;
- Allow for the exchange of scholars from the social sciences and humanities across IPBES deliverables;
- Identify and consider key areas where social sciences and humanities could support IPBES, e.g., the context-specificity or political aspects of knowledge;
- Prepare scientific publications on matters related to the work of the network.

#### **5. Options for the organization and structure of the network:**

- Options for the structure of the network included a nested network model, which would allow to tap into existing professional societies and national academies of sciences, among other existing structures; as well as an umbrella network, with smaller groups based on topics of interest;
- Both benefits and challenges were noted to be associated with the establishment of the network within or outside of formal IPBES structures;
- The degree to which success of the network may depend on the availability of resources and expectations from participating experts needed to be clarified; as there were arguments for both a smaller and for a larger group of participants. A hybrid model would have included a core group and a larger network. The size of the network could also have been planned to be expanded over time. The network could have been created as open to all interested or criteria for participation could have been set. Independent of the size of the network, incentives for active participation were found key;
- Participants in the network were suggested to reflect the breadth of the social sciences and humanities community, while also identifying specific relevant disciplines and sub-groups. Efforts were suggested to focus on engaging disciplines not well represented in IPBES.
- The network was also suggested to address the role of social sciences and humanities experts to contribute indirectly to IPBES through the publication of relevant research.

#### **References**

Stenseke, Marie & Anne Larigauderie (2018) The role, importance and challenges of social sciences and humanities in the work of the intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES), *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 31:sup1, S10-S14, DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2017.1398076

Timpte, Malte, Jasper Montana, Katrin Reuter, Maud Borie & Jascha Apkes (2018) Engaging diverse experts in a global environmental assessment: participation in the first work programme of IPBES and opportunities for improvement, *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 31:sup1, S15-S37, DOI: 10.1080/13511610.2017.1383149

Vadrot, A. et al 2017. Why are social sciences and humanities needed in the works of IPBES? A systematic review of the literature. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 31:1, 78–100.

---

**List of Participants in the two workshops**

Elizabeth Barron	Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Silke Beck	Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research - UFZ, Germany
Eduardo Brondizio	Department of Anthropology, Indiana University, USA
Marla R. Emery	U. S. Forest Service Research & Development, USA
HyeJin Kim	German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv), Halle-Jena-Leipzig, Germany
Rolf Lidskog	Environmental Sociology Section, Orebro University, Sweden
Michelle Lim	Adelaide Law School, The University of Adelaide, Australia
Jasper Montana	School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
Irene Ring	Technische Universität Dresden, International Institute Zittau, Germany
Camilla Sandstrom	Department of Political Science, Umeå University, Sweden
Marie Stenseke	Department of Economy and Society, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Peter Stoett	Faculty of Social Science & Humanities, Ontario Tech University, Canada
Håkon B. Stokland	Department of Terrestrial Biodiversity, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research, and Department of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway
Esther Turnhout	Department of Environmental Sciences, Wageningen University, the Netherlands
Alice Vadrot	Department of Political Sciences, University of Vienna, Austria