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**Report of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy
Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services on the work of
its fifth session**

Annex II to decision IPBES-5/1

Approach to recognizing and working with indigenous and local knowledge in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

I. Overall framework

1. The present approach to working with indigenous and local knowledge in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is multifaceted; applies across the four functions of IPBES; considers various scales, from local to global; and involves activities to be undertaken or catalysed by IPBES (see section II below).
2. The present approach will be undertaken in line with the approved rules and procedures of IPBES and in accordance with internationally recognized rights of indigenous peoples and relevant commitments related to local communities.
3. Indigenous and local knowledge experts selected by IPBES for the preparation of IPBES deliverables will engage in the approach, which will, in addition, involve a wide community of stakeholders via the participatory mechanism for working with indigenous, local and diverse knowledge systems set out in section III below.
4. The approach is based on a number of overall considerations, understanding of terms and the identification of challenges as described in the following paragraphs.
5. In terms of **overall considerations** regarding the mandate, functions, means and operating principles of IPBES, the approach will:
 - (a) Rely on activities undertaken by IPBES at the global, regional and, where appropriate, subregional levels, using available knowledge, which will be gathered, synthesized, reviewed and evaluated, and rely on the promotion and catalysis of activities by appropriate partners such as the mobilization of knowledge that is not readily available, the generation of new knowledge or capacity-building activities;
 - (b) Besides funding that may be available from the trust fund, rely on in-kind support from, and collaborative activities with, strategic partners;
 - (c) Involve collaboration with relevant initiatives and build on appropriate work, guidelines and best practices that have been developed and agreed on by relevant multilateral agreements and/or other entities;
 - (d) Use clear, transparent and credible processes for the exchange, sharing and use of data, knowledge, information and technologies from all relevant sources.
6. The approach is based on the following **understandings** of key terms, concepts and categories:
 - (a) Indigenous and local knowledge systems are in general understood to be dynamic bodies of integrated, holistic, social and ecological knowledge, practices and beliefs pertaining to the relationship of living beings, including people, with one another and with their environments. Indigenous and local knowledge is grounded in territory, is highly diverse and is continuously evolving through the interaction of experiences, innovations and various types of knowledge (written, oral, visual, tacit, gendered, practical and scientific). Such knowledge can provide information, methods, theory and practice for sustainable ecosystem management. Many indigenous and local knowledge systems are empirically tested, applied, contested and validated through different means in different contexts;
 - (b) Maintained and produced in individual and collective ways, indigenous and local knowledge is at the interface between biological and cultural diversity. Manifestations of indigenous and local knowledge are evident in many social and ecological systems. In this context, the approach understands “biocultural diversity” as biological and cultural diversity and the links between them;
 - (c) The approach does not intend to create or develop new definitions of what constitutes “indigenous and local knowledge” or “indigenous peoples and local communities”, as these definitions are often context specific and vary within and across regions;

(d) *Indigenous and local knowledge holders* are understood to be persons situated in the collective knowledge systems of indigenous peoples and local communities with knowledge from their own indigenous peoples and local communities; *indigenous and local knowledge experts* are understood to be persons from indigenous peoples and local communities who have knowledge about indigenous and local knowledge and associated issues (they may also be indigenous and local knowledge holders); and *experts on indigenous and local knowledge* are understood to be persons who have knowledge about indigenous and local knowledge and associated issues, not necessarily from indigenous peoples and local communities.¹

7. Engaging indigenous and local knowledge in a dialogue with other knowledge systems can bring important new perspectives to IPBES. This dialogue will need to respect the following **best practices**:

- (a) An effective dialogue will require the building of mutual trust and confidence between indigenous and local knowledge holders and natural and social scientists through cultural respect and sensitivity;
- (b) The approach will need to provide opportunities for dialogue with indigenous peoples and local communities focusing on topics relevant to IPBES, through the development of initiatives by and/or in collaboration with IPBES members and existing networks of indigenous peoples and local communities and of experts on indigenous and local knowledge;
- (c) The approach should acknowledge the time needed for decision-making by customary and traditional institutions through dialogues at various levels (for example, extended family groups, women, elders and youth and indigenous peoples who may hold different rights with respect to knowledge) with relevant institutions in order to identify common goals in the development of IPBES deliverables;
- (d) The approach should work in culturally appropriate environments, respecting diverse and interactive styles of engagement, using effective tools and strategies to allow effective dialogue across diverse knowledge systems;
- (e) The approach should promote a participatory and empowering dialogue based on non-discrimination, inclusiveness and the recognition of social, cultural, economic and political plurality in the world;
- (f) The approach should recognize, strengthen and promote the conservation of the *in situ* knowledge systems of indigenous peoples and local communities where knowledge is gathered, used, applied, renewed, enhanced, tested, validated, transmitted, shared and governed, as well as the dialogue between knowledge systems as an iterative two-way process. It should deliver policy-relevant knowledge and policy options to indigenous peoples and local communities in meaningful and useful forms.

8. The approach seeks to address a broad range of **general challenges**, including the following:

- (a) *Scale*. Scale matters in the definition, collation, compilation and aggregation of knowledge both horizontally (e.g., across local communities) and vertically (scaling knowledge up and down). While most indigenous and local knowledge is inherently local and contextual, IPBES operates at the regional and global levels and critically evaluates policy-relevant knowledge. Mobilizing relevant indigenous and local knowledge, and ensuring validation through the indigenous and local knowledge system from which it comes, while avoiding the loss of legitimacy, represents a major challenge. Related challenges include representation and participation (addressed in subparagraph (b) below) and analytical challenges, as the type and level of complementarity across knowledge systems will vary according to the context, the issue addressed and the desired outcomes;
- (b) *Participation and representation*. Meaningful participation and engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities play an important role in working with indigenous and local knowledge. The challenge is to find ways and means that allow for meaningful participation and adequate representation, including regional and gender balance, within the existing mandate, rules and procedures and available resources of IPBES;

¹ In the “Procedures for working with indigenous and local knowledge systems” (Decision IPBES-4/3, annex), the terms “indigenous and local knowledge experts” refer both to “indigenous and local knowledge experts” and to “experts on indigenous and local knowledge” according to the understanding of those terms set out in the present paragraph.

(c) *Formats.* Indigenous and local knowledge exists in many languages, often in written formats other than peer-reviewed literature, such as grey literature, or in other forms, such as ritual, ceremonial, oral, dance, song and visual manifestations, including symbols, documentaries and artwork. Sometimes knowledge holders have not recorded their knowledge in any form, or their knowledge has been transmitted in a non-tangible form. The variety of formats and the difficulty of accessing them pose a major challenge;

(d) *Methods and tools.* Many of the methods and specific tools needed for this work, such as guidance and methods for addressing the variety of available indigenous and local knowledge formats, do not yet exist and may need to be developed by IPBES, to the extent that doing so falls within its mandate and within available resources, or by appropriate partners, taking into account all of the above.

9. This approach, which is breaking new ground, should be understood as a first step in an iterative process in which indigenous peoples and local communities are key partners. The approach should be evaluated as part of the review of the Platform.

II. Overall approach to recognizing and working with indigenous and local knowledge

10. The approach described in the present section, which applies across the four functions of IPBES, sets out activities for each of the four functions.

11. Within the approach, free prior informed consent will be sought, as appropriate, for accessing indigenous and local knowledge, and the activities should not occur where they would prejudice the internationally recognized rights of indigenous peoples and interests of local communities as affirmed in paragraph 2. Best practices and ethical guidelines, as appropriate, should be consulted to make decisions regarding the use of indigenous and local knowledge.

A. Assessments

12. Assessing available knowledge forms the backbone of this approach. It includes four phases:

13. The **first phase**, the collaborative definition of problems and goals, is to be realized during the scoping of an assessment and should result in the development of key questions specific to the assessment. In general, it is suggested that the following broad groups of questions may be considered and adapted as necessary to the specific subject of the assessment:

(a) What are the contributions of indigenous peoples and local communities in terms of their knowledge, practices and world views to the management and conservation of nature, the delivery of nature's contributions to people and ensuring a good quality of life at the regional and global scales?

(b) What are the most important pressures and factors undermining these contributions, as well as affecting the quality of life of present and future generations of indigenous peoples and local communities?

(c) What policy responses, measures and processes exist for strengthening and improving the governance of nature and nature's contributions to people with regard to indigenous peoples and local communities and their knowledge and practices?

14. The **second phase**, occurring once the undertaking of an assessment has been approved, is about synthesizing, and incorporating into the assessment, a wide array of evidence and data from multiple sources of indigenous and local knowledge related to the assessment itself, including, as appropriate:

(a) Literature reviews, synthesis reports, geospatial data and sources of indigenous and local knowledge documented in accessible written form;

(b) Recorded, referenceable and accessible indigenous and local knowledge manifested in forms such as ritual, ceremonial, oral, dance, song and visual manifestations, including symbols, documentaries and artwork;

(c) Compilations of literature, data and cases from other IPBES assessments and related reports;

(d) Reports, including meta-analysis and data from international research centres and institutions and relevant regional centres;

(e) Spatially explicit data and geospatial data sources.

15. The **third phase** focuses on appropriately engaging indigenous peoples and local communities in the review of the various drafts of a specific assessment.

16. The **fourth phase** aims at sharing knowledge and insights gained through an assessment with indigenous peoples and local communities once the assessment is concluded.

17. Important procedural components and activities of these **four phases** include:

(a) Appropriate representation of indigenous and local knowledge experts and experts on indigenous and local knowledge in the expert groups scoping and performing an assessment in line with the procedures for working with indigenous and local knowledge and the principles presented above;

(b) A series of broad web-based consultations via the participatory mechanism during the first, second and third phases to ensure broad participation by indigenous peoples and local communities, and reflection of their perspectives and of indigenous and local knowledge, in the scoping exercise (first phase); the fine-tuning of questions to be addressed by an assessment and the identification, mobilization and gathering of relevant indigenous and local knowledge where such knowledge exists in recorded, shareable and referenceable form (second phase); and the review of the successive drafts of the assessment (third phase);

(c) Dialogue workshops, to allow for direct exchanges on the scope and the content of drafts. These workshops would bring together the indigenous and local knowledge experts of the scoping expert group (first phase) or of the indigenous and local knowledge liaison group (third phase) with a representative selection of experts on indigenous and local knowledge and representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities. The format (in person or virtual), number and timing of the dialogue workshops should take into account financial considerations;

(d) The synthesis, during the second phase, of the indigenous and local knowledge gathered in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of the Platform's deliverables, using established methods such as the reflection of confidence levels as defined in the guide for assessments (IPBES/5/INF/6), seeking to balance large-scale synthesis and spatial upscaling of literature and geospatial data sources with a rich illustration of cases from different parts of the world portraying the practices, world views, voices and faces of indigenous peoples and local communities. This synthesis would include the description of different understandings resulting from different epistemologies and/or ontologies;

(e) The promotion and catalysis of activities to be undertaken by appropriate partners, such as local dialogue workshops to fill knowledge gaps when relevant knowledge does not exist in readily available formats (first and second phase), or the building of the capacity of indigenous peoples and local communities to engage in and benefit from IPBES (throughout all four phases). These efforts are part of the knowledge mobilization and capacity-building approach to indigenous and local knowledge (further described in paragraphs 18 and 20 below).

B. Knowledge and data

18. In line with its mandate regarding knowledge and data, IPBES will within the present approach:

(a) Identify, in coordination with indigenous and local knowledge holders, indigenous and local knowledge experts and experts on indigenous and local knowledge, a set of practices to help manage evidence and data that will be collected in the assessments;

(b) Facilitate, as appropriate, via the IPBES web-based infrastructure, the accessing and management of available sources of indigenous and local knowledge, both for internal use in developing assessments and for decision makers and scholars drawing on the work of IPBES to support their own work, in line with relevant standards and conventions;

(c) Promote and catalyse the mobilization of indigenous and local knowledge, as appropriate, where such knowledge does not exist in readily available formats in ways that reflect the concepts of parallel validation or co-production processes, with the support of appropriate partners, focusing on gaps that emerge during each phase of an assessment; and

(d) Take into account appropriately those aspects relevant to indigenous and local knowledge and indigenous peoples and local communities in the list of indicators, classifications of units of analysis and classification of nature's contributions to people,² including ecosystem services and nature's gifts.

C. Policy support tools and methodologies

19. In line with its mandate regarding policy support tools and methodologies, IPBES will within the present approach:

(a) Identify, describe and facilitate the use of relevant tools and methods for implementing the four phases of the proposed approach. Where such tools and methods still need to be developed, IPBES will promote and catalyse their development with appropriate partners;

(b) Ensure that policy responses, decision-making instruments and processes relevant to indigenous and local knowledge and indigenous peoples and local communities are reflected in IPBES assessments.

D. Capacity-building

20. In line with its mandate regarding capacity-building, IPBES will, within the present approach:

(a) Identify, prioritize and build capacity critical to its implementation, within the means available, through, for example, training workshops and webinars on the approaches to and procedures for recognizing and working with indigenous and local knowledge in assessments or participation in the fellowship programme; and

(b) Promote and catalyse the undertaking of capacity-building activities in support of broader capacity-building needs involving, among other mechanisms, strategic partnerships where such needs go beyond the means of IPBES. In this context, the participatory mechanism could strengthen the ability of indigenous peoples and local communities to take part in, contribute to and benefit from IPBES deliverables.

III. Institutional arrangements and the participatory mechanism supporting the implementation of the approach

21. In order to implement the approach outlined in section II, IPBES will draw on relevant existing arrangements, which will need to be complemented by the participatory mechanism.

A. Existing arrangements relevant to the implementation of the approach

22. The **Multidisciplinary Expert Panel** will oversee the implementation of the approach and any further developments under it.

23. **Indigenous and local knowledge liaison groups** will be established for each assessment. Such groups will comprise the indigenous and local knowledge experts and experts on indigenous and local knowledge selected for the various chapters of each individual assessment. The groups will be responsible for developing the key questions and topics pertaining to indigenous peoples and local communities to be covered in each assessment, for synthesizing all relevant knowledge and for ensuring that each assessment adequately reflects the perspectives resulting from different knowledge systems in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of the Platform's deliverables.

24. **Other task forces and expert groups** will also provide support for the implementation of the approach.

25. The **secretariat, including its technical support units**, will provide support for the implementation of the approach.

B. Participatory mechanism for working with indigenous and local knowledge systems

26. The objective of the participatory mechanism for working with indigenous and local knowledge systems is to facilitate the effective and meaningful engagement of indigenous and local knowledge holders, indigenous and local knowledge experts and their organizations or networks in order to strengthen their ability to contribute to and benefit from IPBES at all scales.

² Referred to in the guide for assessments (IPBES/5/INF/6).

27. In line with the rules and procedures of IPBES, the participatory mechanism is to achieve this objective by inter alia:

(a) Providing a *web-based platform* to facilitate the effective and meaningful engagement of existing networks of indigenous peoples and local communities and relevant experts and allowing new, perhaps self-organizing, networks to develop;

(b) Promoting, through *consultations*, a dialogue with various networks, relevant experts and policymakers to mobilize inputs and disseminate results during all four phases of the assessment process, including both web-based consultations and dialogue workshops;

(c) Creating opportunities for shared learning and exchange through dedicated *discussion forums* on the web-based platform or in the context of the contribution to and use of the catalogue of policy support tools and methodologies; and

(d) Supporting IPBES, by means of *strategic partnerships*, in promoting and catalysing activities by appropriate partners that build the capacity of indigenous peoples and local communities to engage effectively and meaningfully in IPBES and that mobilize indigenous and local knowledge in formats accessible to IPBES when such knowledge is missing.

28. The central component of the participatory mechanism will be a **web-based platform**, managed by the secretariat and hosted on the IPBES website <http://www.ipbes.net/ilk-participatory-mechanism>, comprising the following elements:

(a) A *registry* linked to the IPBES stakeholder registry, inclusion in which is mandatory for all actors wishing to participate, including individuals, social organizations, institutions and networks;

(b) A *roster* including all registered individuals or entities as well as, with their consent, all indigenous and local knowledge experts currently or formerly involved in IPBES. This roster will be searchable according to a variety of criteria and will be publicly available;

(c) A *repository of relevant resources of indigenous and local knowledge* displaying a broad range of relevant sources of information, knowledge and data sets related to indigenous and local knowledge, or links to such information, knowledge and data sets, and thus forming an institutional database to facilitate the mobilization of data and knowledge relevant for gap-filling and dialogue. This repository and these links must comply with the conditions set out in paragraph 11;

(d) A *display of ongoing activities* pertaining to indigenous and local knowledge, including those described in section II above, such as web-based consultations, dialogue workshops, capacity-building activities and activities mobilizing accessible indigenous and local knowledge;

(e) A *discussion forum* creating opportunities for shared learning and exchanges between indigenous and local knowledge systems and other knowledge systems;

(f) A *place to self-organize* for registered individuals or entities, including for subgroups that members may seek to establish, such as dedicated groups providing support for specific IPBES assessments.

29. The participatory mechanism will support the dedicated **consultations** foreseen as part of the four phases.

30. Through the participatory mechanism, IPBES will engage in **strategic partnerships** to:

(a) Promote the broad reach of and engagement in the online consultation and dialogue workshops;

(b) Promote and catalyse the mobilization of indigenous and local knowledge in accessible formats to address gaps identified by appropriate partners;

(c) Promote and catalyse the undertaking of capacity-building activities that strengthen the ability of indigenous peoples and local communities to take part in, contribute to and benefit from IPBES deliverables;

31. Raise awareness and understanding of indigenous and local knowledge systems and the application of the IPBES approach to recognizing and working with indigenous and local knowledge.