

Ambitious scoping for a global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services

An analysis of the scoping document for the IPBES global assessment by *Carsten Neßhöver (NeFo)*, originally published as part of the NeFo blog on IPBES-4

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Work programme of the Platform: scoping report for a global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services

Scoping report for a global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services (deliverable 2 (c))

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. At its third session, in its decision IPBES-3/1 on the work programme for the period 2014–2018, the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services approved a scoping process for a global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services, for consideration by the Plenary at its fourth session, in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of Platform deliverables as set out in the note by the secretariat on the initial scoping report for a global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES/3/9). In response to the decision, a scoping document was developed by an expert group, which met in Bonn, Germany, from 5 to 7 October 2015, in accordance with the procedures for the preparation of the Platform's deliverables. The present note constitutes the scoping report developed by the expert group.

2. In the same decision, the Plenary agreed to consider at its fourth session the option of undertaking a regional assessment for the open ocean region. Open oceans are included in the scope of this global assessment. The present note therefore provides background information for the consideration of open oceans by the Plenary. Additional information on the work of the expert group is available in the note by the secretariat on the scoping process on the global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES/4/INF/8).



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One major element of the IPBES work programme is to deliver a generic global assessment (GA) on biodiversity and ecosystem services (deliverable 2c). For this, a global expert group delivered a scoping report that, if accepted by IPBES-4, will guide the according work ([IPBES/4/8](#)). Already from the start of the work programme it was clear that this global assessment would not be a separate endeavour but heavily build on all other assessments, whether methodological, thematic or, most importantly, the four regional assessments. The scoping presented is ambitious and widens the perspective of IPBES towards human well-being and the sustainable development goals.

The proposal

As stated in the introductory sentence of the scoping report ([IPBES/4/8 para 3](#)), the “global assessment will critically assess the state of past, present and possible future multi-scale interactions between people and nature. It will assess the status, trends (past and future), drivers, values and response options regarding nature [...], nature’s benefits to people [...], and their interlinkages.” The timeframe for this will go back about 50 years, look into the future to 2020 and include projections up to 2050.

An according set of generic “policy-relevant” questions is derived from this (IPBES/4/8 para 6), with a strong reference to the [2020 Aichi biodiversity targets of the CBD](#) (Convention on Biological Diversity) and the SDGs (UN-[Sustainable Development Goals](#)). Accordingly, the approach proposed is very integrative making strong use of the IPBES conceptual framework, putting the benefits of nature to people and their impacts on quality of life at its heart, and less so the status and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem services in a biophysical sense.

Accordingly, the six proposed chapters of the GA put an emphasis on human-nature interactions and opportunities for sustainable development. When it comes to status and trends (chapter 2), it is proposed that the GA will strongly build on the regional assessments. Chapter 3 will focus directly on the knowledge needed to analyse the 2020 Aichi targets and the SDGs. As these issues will not be covered entirely by the regional and thematic assessments, this will need additional work. Chapters 4 and 5 will strongly build on scenarios and models to make projections for the future. Although the [methodological assessment of scenarios and models](#) (to be adopted at IPBES-4) showcases many substantial gaps in this field, the GA scoping does not propose the development of new specific IPBES scenarios as done for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment back in 2005. The final chapter 6 aims at looking on opportunities for decision making at all levels, based on the scenario analysis in chapter 5.

Not another Millennium Ecosystem Assessment – good or bad – your choice.

For a long time, IPBES was perceived as the tool to repeat the widely recognized, but only one-off effort of the [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment](#) that delivered a broad assessment of status and trends analyses on biodiversity and ecosystem services, including a number of dedicated synthesis reports (e.g., on [biodiversity](#), [water and wetlands](#), [health](#)). With the even more integrated approach of IPBES, this picture has changed, and the GA is now rather becoming a “synthesis of syntheses” that builds on the other diverse deliverables on IPBES. Yet, it already acknowledges that additional work will be needed when it comes to the global perspective, e.g. by including the open oceans which don't have an own workflow in IPBES (although it covers 70% of Earth...).

Since the focus is on CBD and the SDGs, the focus is much more on the human perspective than on a biophysical/ nature one. Whether this will be accepted at IPBES-4 remains to be seen, as IPBES also raised strong expectations for delivering regular assessment on the status of biodiversity (which is also needed for many of the Aichi targets) and ecosystem services that build on the MA and that helps further developing the set of biodiversity related indicators. With respect to relevance, this may seem less important, as the SDGs will be the major tool for implementing sustainable policies across the world. But, on the other hand, not including such status and trend analyses of global biodiversity and ecosystem services also risks losing a substantial share of stakeholders that have a more “classical” conservation and environmental management perspective.

Some more clarity needed – ocean perspective and a sound approach to opportunities for decision makers.

From my perspective, two weaknesses remain in the ambitious and valuable scoping document. How the open oceans will be substantially tackled, remains to some extent unclear. Although the coastal and marine perspective is always mentioned (next to terrestrial and freshwater), the extent of its coverage remains a subject of doubt. The reference is made to the [recently published World Oceans Assessments](#) but whether this source will be sufficient for the highly integrative approach of the GA needs a proper analysis.

Secondly, chapter 6 on opportunities for decision makers remains very vague beyond listing a number of potential target audiences. Here, this part of the GA risks a similar fate like the according chapter in the Millennium Assessment, which stood back in depth behind the status and trends analyses. Instead, chapter 6 of the GA should have a clear and explicit link to the [“catalogue of policy tools and methodologies”](#) (IPBES/4/INF/14) of IPBES and the scoping should include a (short) plan on how the global assessment will help populating this catalogue - because in order to really make a difference, the GA outputs will need to be translated (jointly with the other assessments) to the appropriate scale of action.

IMPRESSUM

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For more information about the NeFo-Project and the NeFo-Team visit www.biodiversity.de.

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