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NATIONAL ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY: OUTLINING INITIAL IMPACT

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. Decision [14/1](#) of the Conference of the Parties (COP) urged Parties and invited other Governments, as appropriate, to consider undertaking national assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services. It also called for providing financial and technical support for parties to undertake these assessments on a national level. Recommendation 22/4 of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) also highlighted the value of assessments conducted by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and urged Parties to undertake national assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, noting ongoing work in this regard undertaken in the context of BES-Net with technical support from the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).
2. The Executive Secretary is pleased to circulate herewith, for the information of participants in the twenty-fourth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, an information document detailing progress on work coordinated by UNEP-WCMC on national ecosystem assessments, and outlining initial impacts on national implementation of the Convention. This work consists of building capacity for national ecosystem assessment in 11 countries, as well as facilitating knowledge exchange (Tranche I: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia and Viet Nam. Tranche II: Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Grenada. Tranche III: Dominican Republic, Malawi and Thailand), and in so doing, specifically addressing one of the capacity-building priorities adopted by the IPBES Plenary.
3. The information document further summarizes the role that national ecosystem assessments can play in supporting implementation of the Convention at the national level across six thematic areas: (a) biodiversity planning; (b) national reporting; (c) technical & scientific cooperation; (d) capacity development; (e) communication, education and public awareness; (f) resource mobilization for biodiversity.
4. The report is being circulated in the form and language in which it was submitted to the Secretariat.

* CBD/SBSTTA/24/1.



National ecosystem assessments support implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity: Outlining initial impact

UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
written in collaboration with national partners

Key messages

- National ecosystem assessments provide countries with an up-to-date, comprehensive and critical synthesis of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services framed around key policy questions. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and developing interdisciplinary capacities to provide policymakers with the best information available, national ecosystem assessments can support implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the national level.
- The Conference of the Parties (COP) urged Parties and invited “*other Governments, as appropriate, to consider undertaking national assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services*” (Decision 14/1) ¹. Decision 14/1 also calls for providing financial and technical support for Parties to undertake these assessments on a national level. Recommendation 22/4 from the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) also echoes Decision 14/1 encouraging Parties to undertake ecosystem assessments.
- UNEP-WCMC National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative (NEA Initiative) supports countries conducting national ecosystem assessments with a highly qualified, multi-cultural and interdisciplinary team, which provides technical and administrative backing to partners throughout their assessment process and on the integration of key findings into policy and decision-making.
- Countries conducting national ecosystem assessments with the support of UNEP-WCMC are demonstrating initial impact in national implementation of the CBD and its Protocols, particularly across six thematic areas: i) Biodiversity planning; ii) National reporting; iii) Technical & scientific cooperation; iv) Capacity development; v) Communication, education and public awareness; vi) Resource mobilisation for biodiversity.
- The assessment process has strengthened national competences in stakeholder engagement and wider communications. In some countries, it has facilitated the integration of knowledge and perspectives of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs).
- The NEA Initiative is part of a consortium which includes UNDP, UNEP-WCMC and UNESCO, working under the umbrella of UNDP’s Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net). It is building a community of practice around the science-policy-practice interface and facilitates national

¹ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-01-en.pdf>

engagement in the global discussion around biodiversity and ecosystem services. UNEP-WCMC aims to expand its reach and welcomes contact from Parties interested in conducting a national ecosystem assessment.

1. Bringing biodiversity closer to decision-making

Nature underpins societal development and supports human wellbeing. Nonetheless, biodiversity continues to decline at an alarming pace, risking the provision of key ecosystem services to populations worldwide². Faced with the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, governments are increasingly recognising the crucial role that nature plays in food and water security, public health and socio-economic stability³, thus calling for tools and approaches that enable the full consideration of nature's values in decision-making at large.

Examples around the world show that bridging the gap between science and policy is crucial to fulfil this need, whilst supporting progress against globally agreed goals and targets such as those under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ecosystem assessments, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (2010) have been fundamental to understand the impacts of biodiversity loss on human wellbeing and the economy^{4,5}. Building on these, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) conducts policy-relevant evaluations based on science and other knowledge types, including indigenous and local knowledge (ILK)⁶. Responding to requests by member states, IPBES carries out global, regional, thematic and methodological assessments, which aim at providing answers to key policy questions and consider options for further action based on the best available knowledge. Since 2012, IPBES assessments have been paramount to integrate biodiversity considerations into global, regional and national policy agendas⁷.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) urged Parties and invited “*other Governments, as appropriate, to consider undertaking national assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services*” (Decision 14/1)⁸. Decision 14/1 also calls for providing financial and technical support for parties to undertake these assessments on a national level. Recommendation 22/4 of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) also highlights the value of IPBES assessments and encourages Parties to undertake such evaluations at the national level with the assistance of partner organizations⁹. National ecosystem assessments can support the consideration of nature's values into decision making at the country level. They also support the implementation of commitments under the CBD and other biodiversity-related agreements and processes (Box 1), as well as the integration of biodiversity considerations into other sectors (e.g., agriculture, water, tourism, trade) and cross-sectoral plans and processes (e.g. climate change mitigation/adaptation, poverty reduction)¹⁰.

The UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) hosts the National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative (NEA Initiative) which supports countries conducting national ecosystem assessments by developing capacity, facilitating knowledge exchange and compiling lessons learned (Section 3).

2 <https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>

3 <https://www.cbd.int/gbo5>

4 Reid, Walter V., et al. (2005) Ecosystems and human well-being-Synthesis: A report of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. Island Press.

5 TEEB (2010) The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Ecological and Economic Foundations. Kumar, P. (Ed). Earthscan.

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

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

8 <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-01-en.pdf>

9 <https://www.cbd.int/doc/recommendations/sbstta-22/sbstta-22-rec-04-en.pdf>

10 Including the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the World Heritage Convention (WHC).

Box 1 National ecosystem assessments can support CBD implementation

UNEP-WCMC is working in collaboration with the Secretariat of the CBD to develop guidance focusing on how national ecosystem assessments as a tool, can support implementation of the Convention at national level. The outputs of the assessment process can also contribute to several of the draft elements under the long-term approach to mainstreaming¹¹. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and developing interdisciplinary capacities to provide policymakers with the best information available, national ecosystems assessments can enable activities on six key areas that are fundamental to achieve the CBD objectives:

- Provide knowledge base for the development and update of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), thus catalysing **biodiversity planning**;
- Identify, use and develop relevant datasets and indicators and provide a coordinated process for data and knowledge management, therefore being important tools for **national reporting**;
- Foster long-term cooperation and collaboration among national institutions and individuals aiming to break silos, hence strengthening **technical and scientific cooperation** at different levels;
- Develop and put into practice skills in handling and using data, information and knowledge, engaging stakeholders, building new and nurturing existing relationships, and identifying further needs, thus playing an important role for **capacity development**;
- Provide information base and tools to engage different audiences and purposefully translate findings into summaries for policymakers, therefore being important channels for **communication, education and public awareness**;
- Identify existing and potential financial and non-financial resources that can be leveraged to address drivers of change, thus enhancing **resource mobilisation**.

Building on IPBES assessments: tailoring to national contexts

An ecosystem assessment is an expert evaluation of the current knowledge about the interactions between people and nature¹². Drawing on scientific research and other knowledge systems, ecosystem assessments provide a critical synthesis of the information available on biodiversity and ecosystem services framed around key policy questions (Box 2)¹². IPBES developed a process to produce these types of assessments, which can be applied across geographical scales and thematic areas^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}. The IPBES assessment process can be tailored to country needs to guide the development of national ecosystem assessments.

National ecosystem assessments adapting the IPBES process aim to provide a credible, legitimate and relevant evaluation of the current knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services at the country level. Focused on key policy questions identified and developed at the national level based on the country's priorities, they also contribute towards bridging the gap between science, policy and practice. Transparent processes for knowledge-gathering, diversity in knowledge types and disciplines, balance in gender and geographical representation; combined with consistent methods of analysis and thorough peer review, are crucial elements of a robust national ecosystem assessment. Assessment findings and identified knowledge gaps are to be policy relevant but not prescriptive. Thus, a continuous exchange between stakeholders throughout the assessment process is essential, strengthening the dialogue between science, policy and practice. Assessment authors can also help foster interaction between government representatives and other key stakeholders, creating not only ownership of the assessment process and its outcomes, but also building national capacities and encouraging wider collaboration (Box 1).

¹¹ [Long-term Approach to Mainstreaming: SBI-3, Item 11 on the Provisional Agenda](#)

¹² IPBES (2018) [IPBES Guide on the production of assessments](#). Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Box 2. Key policy questions in national ecosystem assessments

A crucial step early in the development of a national ecosystem assessment is the selection of the key policy questions to be addressed in this process. These define the mandate and scope of the work ahead, and kick-start a dialogue between science, policy and other knowledge systems. This dialogue can produce key policy questions upon which assessments deliver knowledge that meets the needs of different decision-makers. The process of producing key policy questions promotes ownership and encourages discussion about the relevance of assessment findings across multiple sectors and can also foster national discussions on the implementation of other multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

Countries supported by UNEP-WCMC's NEA Initiative have developed their own specific sets of policy-relevant questions. Examples of some of these questions include the following:

- **Cameroon:** *How can biodiversity and ecosystem services contribute to transformational change in the emerging Cameroon policy and governance options?*
- **Colombia:** *How does the knowledge of the status and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem services, analysed through the lens of diverse knowledge systems, contribute to decision-making to improve people's quality of life?*
- **Ethiopia:** *What is the contribution of indigenous knowledge on conservation and sustainable use of selected ecosystems (forests; rangeland; wetland and aquatic ecosystems; and agroecosystems and mountains)?*
- **Viet Nam:** *What is the state of awareness of key stakeholders (policy makers, protected area managers and media) on forests, wetlands, and marine and coastal ecosystems goods and services and their contribution to human well-being?*

Strengthening capacity and supporting policy

Many national ecosystem assessments are developed within the framework provided by the IPBES rolling work programme up to 2030¹³. One of the core objectives of the work programme is to build capacities to strengthen national and regional capacities in the science-policy-practice interface. This includes generating guidance and encouraging the growth of networks and interdisciplinary platforms around biodiversity and ecosystem services. National ecosystem assessments provide a mechanism for knowledge exchange by bringing together researchers, government and private sector representatives, practitioners and other types of knowledge holders. They can also connect authors and the implementing team to a wide network of experts, which can enhance their capacities on assessment-related subjects and methods. All of this in turn support different components of the implementation of the CBD and its Protocols (Box 1).

2. National ecosystem assessments contribute to CBD implementation

As of 2020, 11 countries across five continents are part of UNEP-WCMC's NEA Initiative: Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia and Viet Nam (Tranche I), Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Grenada (Tranche II) and Dominican Republic, Malawi and Thailand (Tranche III). Countries are at different stages of their assessment process and are sharing knowledge and lessons learned through national experience, thereby building a strong community of practice on national ecosystem assessments. This section presents examples of the initial impact these assessments are showing relevant to CBD implementation (Box 1). This is not a comprehensive account but serve as an illustration of the potential role of national ecosystem assessments in supporting the CBD and its Protocols.

¹³ <https://ipbes.net/work-programme>

Biodiversity planning

National ecosystem assessments are starting to inform a range of processes to enhance biodiversity planning, for example relating to the update of biodiversity strategies and plans. In Viet Nam, assessment findings are being used to advise the revision and development of the Law on Environmental Protection and the National Strategy on Environmental Protection and are projected to inform the revision of the Biodiversity Law in 2021. The assessment process has fostered cross-sectoral synergies between departments, including natural resources and environment and planning and investment amongst others. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ethiopia and Viet Nam, the assessment is expected to inform the revision of their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to capture the goals and targets of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. In Cameroon, assessment findings will inform plans and decisions by the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development. Finally, Cameroon, Colombia and Viet Nam are scheduled to develop a work plan to deepen the integration of their assessment findings into sectoral and multisectoral planning within the coming two years.

National reporting

National ecosystem assessments help identify relevant datasets and indicators, contributing to the development of a coordinated process for data and knowledge management on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The assessment process can therefore support countries with national reporting on CBD implementation as well as biodiversity-related commitments at large. Cameroon's national ecosystem assessment contributed significantly to the development of the country's sixth National Report to CBD. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cambodia are planning to use their assessment to inform the next round of CBD national reports after the adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Technical and scientific cooperation

The national ecosystem assessment process can help foster long-term cooperation and collaboration among national institutions and knowledge holders, aiming to break silos and to strengthen technical and scientific cooperation across levels and sectors. The national Trialogues¹⁴ organised in Cameroon created opportunities to share assessment practices and to build long-term collaboration at the country level. Colombia adopted BES-Net's Triologue methodology to integrate the knowledge and perspectives of indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs). As a result, traditional knowledge holders helped shape the critically important Chapter 5 on ILK of Colombia's assessment report¹⁵.

Countries' science-policy platforms established or strengthened as part of the assessment process are also intensifying these opportunities, whilst facilitating the integration of assessment findings into decision-making. The assessment process in Cameroon resulted in the establishment of a National Platform for Science Policy Interface on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (NP SPBES) charged with supervising and validating assessment data and findings on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Azerbaijan, for example, has launched its national biodiversity platform in cooperation with the Service of Protection of Biodiversity, responsible for the management of protected areas and biodiversity conservation. The platform is planned to increase participatory approaches of relevant agencies and ministries on biodiversity issues and the project team is working towards increasing participation of stakeholders at different levels within the platform.

Capacity development

National ecosystem assessments have facilitated the development of national capacities for conducting credible, legitimate and relevant syntheses about the state of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Cameroon, Colombia and Viet Nam are currently finalising their assessment reports, providing a critical evidence base about the trends in biodiversity and ecosystem services in each country according to

14 [A Triologue](#) is a face-to-face communication and capacity development methodology promoted by the Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) and are implemented to support the use and uptake of ecosystem assessments.

15 <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/news/colombia-highlights-the-importance-of-biocultural-diversity>

their policy information needs. These processes have helped raise national capacities for fostering stakeholder engagement and encouraging dialogue between science, policy and practice.

The assessment process has also strengthened competencies for scoping information needs, evaluating and synthesising evidence from different sources, recognising knowledge gaps, communicating findings and using specific methods or tools to analyse data (e.g. scenarios). Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Grenada and Cambodia have produced scoping reports identifying key policy questions to frame their assessments¹⁶. In Cameroon, scenario and modelling training for authors has been instrumental in understanding outcomes of alternative policy options to strengthen the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Through a fellowship program, this country also built the capacity of fellows to act as lead authors in their assessment.

The assessment process helps countries participate more effectively in IPBES as well as other intergovernmental processes. The Cameroon team have shared assessment-related knowledge and experiences in IPBES regional and global meetings, as well as with the Biodiversity Working Group for Countries of the Central African sub-region. Bosnia and Herzegovina is developing national capacities to work with data and build large databases as one expert in the assessment team is part of the IPBES task force on knowledge and data.

Communication, education and public awareness

Countries have developed useful communication strategies to accompany their assessment process. Colombia¹⁷ and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁸ have kept the general public informed about the progress of their assessments by establishing dedicated internet spaces. The IPBES assessment process has been adapted to national needs in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cambodia, by working closely with stakeholders, experts and governmental representatives at the scoping stage. During this stage, Grenada conducted six country-wide consultations to include the island's diverse communities, various geographies and different age groups; creating public awareness on changes to its ecosystems¹⁹. Cameroon developed and adopted a communication strategy to inform and influence decision-making based on key findings on their assessment report. Cambodia carried out national and sub-national workshops bringing together a wide range of stakeholders including policymakers, local authorities, community representatives and experts.

Furthermore, countries are planning to develop Summaries for Policymakers (SPMs) to accompany their assessment report. In 2020, Colombia launched a public consultation for this output encouraging the general public to share their views on Colombia's national ecosystem assessment findings²⁰.

Resource mobilization

In its third report²¹, the CBD's Panel of Experts on Resource Mobilization highlighted three essential components for resource mobilisation: i) Reducing or redirecting resources causing harm to biodiversity; ii) Generating additional financial resources from all sources to achieve the objectives of the convention; and iii) Enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of resource use. National ecosystem assessments can contribute to these components of resource mobilisation as they can help identify where financial resources are causing harm to biodiversity and how they may be redirected to benefit nature. The Summaries Policy Makers produced for the assessments can also help draw public attention to the need to address the

16 <https://www.besnet.world/four-more-countries-complete-first-step-national-ecosystems-assessments>

17 <http://humboldt.org.co/evaluacion-nacional/index.html>

18 <https://www.proccjenaprirode.ba/otvoren-poziv-za-ucescce-u-multidisciplinarnom-autorskom-timu-za-proccjenu-stanja-prirode-i-upravljanja-prirodnim-resursima-u-bosni-i-hercegovini/>

19 <https://www.unep-wcmc.org/news/one-grenada-many-voices--telling-the-story-of-people-and-ecosystems>

20 <http://humboldt.org.co/es/actualidad/item/1257-convocatoria-evaluacion-ipbes-colombia>

21 CBD's Expert Panel on Resource Mobilization – [Third Report \(2020\)](#)

underlying drivers of loss to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and in turn help generate more national resources from different sectors for biodiversity. Finally, national ecosystem assessments highlight gaps in knowledge, capacities and resources, which can help directing national resources towards filling these gaps. Similarly, increased capacities within the biodiversity community can positively contribute to enhancing the efficiency of resources used for biodiversity.

3. UNEP-WCMC's National Ecosystem Assessment Initiative

The Initiative

True to its mission of placing '*biodiversity at the heart of environment and development decision-making*', UNEP-WCMC supports countries conducting national ecosystem assessments through its NEA Initiative. The Initiative brings together a highly qualified, multi-cultural team of interdisciplinary practitioners to provide a technical and administrative platform backing national partners throughout their assessments process and the integration of key findings into policy and decision-making.

The NEA Initiative is part of a consortium that includes UNDP, UNEP-WCMC and UNESCO, each providing specialized support and resources for the assessment processes. The Initiative works under the umbrella of UNDP's Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net)²² and receives financial support from the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU). BES-Net contributes to evidence-based and informed decision-making for the sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystem services in line with the IPBES work programme. It supports the establishment of national platforms on biodiversity and ecosystem services alongside capacity development to undertake national ecosystem assessments in target countries. In particular, the application of the "Triologue" methodology has helped ILK holders and representatives of IPLCs with the use of IPBES assessments and the implementation and drafting of national ecosystem assessments. UNESCO joined BES-Net in 2020, strengthening the inclusion of ILK into national ecosystem assessments.

The NEA Initiative contributes to the IPBES capacity building work programme by:

- Developing country capacities for conducting assessments based on individual needs
- Supporting the establishment or strengthening national biodiversity platforms
- Strengthening stakeholder-driven processes
- Facilitating knowledge sharing between country partners
- Encouraging country partners to participate in regional and global policy processes
- Promoting global exchange on national ecosystem assessments through the Sub-Global Assessment Network (SGAN)
- Communicating the impacts of national ecosystem assessments
- Fundraising for national ecosystem assessment and providing administrative support

All capacity development materials developed as part of the NEA Initiative are made freely available on the SGAN website²³, shaping a community of practice that connects and supports those involved in ecosystem assessments at the sub-global scale. The Initiative is also partnering with the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ, Germany) to develop a guidance for establishing national biodiversity platforms and collaborating with the Secretariat of the CBD to identify opportunities to assist national-level implementation of the Convention (Box 1).

²² <https://www.besnet.world/>

²³ <http://www.ecosystemassessments.net/>

4. Next Steps for the NEA Initiative

By the second quarter of 2021, partner countries of the NEA Initiative will have completed critical milestones of their national ecosystem assessments:

- Cameroon, Colombia, Ethiopia and Viet Nam will have validated and published their assessments and SPMs and engaged with relevant stakeholders to coordinate actions for integrating key findings into decision-making.
- Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Grenada will have engaged with stakeholders, selected authors and started drafting their assessments.
- Dominican Republic, Malawi and Thailand will have initiated their scoping process, and engaged with a series of trainings, workshops and knowledge-exchange activities to support their national ecosystem assessments.

Seed funding and further guidance

Moving forward, BES-Net supported by UNEP-WCMC's NEA Initiative will provide target countries with seed funds, upon the successful completion of their assessment processes to allow national platforms to act on the key messages and recommendations for policy, science and implementation resulting from the assessment reports. Furthermore, building on the experiences and the lessons learned, guidance documents will be produced for the development of national ecosystem assessments, including: (1) the integration of ILK and the knowledge co-generation by scientific experts and traditional knowledge holders; (2) the creation or strengthening of national platforms on biodiversity and ecosystem services; and (3) the role that national ecosystem assessments can play to support the CBD implementation. All this guidance will be made available through the SGAN website.

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