



**Governing Council  
of the United Nations  
Environment Programme**

Distr.: General  
19 November 2009

Original: English



**Eleventh special session of the Governing Council/  
Global Ministerial Environment Forum**  
Bali, Indonesia, 24–26 February 2010  
Item 4 of the provisional agenda\*  
**Emerging policy issues: environment in the multilateral system**

**Intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and  
ecosystem services**

**Report of the Executive Director**

*Summary*

The present report is submitted to the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its eleventh special session and transmits the outcomes of the second ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, held in Nairobi from 5 to 9 October 2009, in accordance with decision 25/10 of the Council. It contains suggested action on the further process to consider such a platform.

\* UNEP/GCSS.XI/1.

## I. Suggested action by the Council

1. The Governing Council may wish to consider adopting a decision along the following lines:

*The Governing Council,*

*Recalling* its main functions and responsibilities set out in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, under which the Governing Council is, among other things, to promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and, as appropriate, to the technical aspects of the formation and implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system,

*Taking note* of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and its follow-up process, the consultative process towards an international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity and decision IX/15 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity,

*Recalling* its decision 25/10 of 20 February 2009,

*Noting* the outcomes of the second ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, held in Nairobi from 5 to 9 October 2009,

*Recognizing* the need to strengthen and improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being, giving consideration to the establishment of a new science-policy platform,

*Having considered* the report submitted by the Executive Director,<sup>1</sup>

1. *Invites* Governments and relevant organizations to finalize in 2010 their deliberations on possible mechanisms to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being and sustainable development;

2. *Requests* the Executive Director to support efforts by Governments and relevant organizations to finalize deliberations on possible mechanisms pursuant to paragraph 1 of decision 25/10, and, in so doing:

(a) To convene, in the first half of 2010, a third and final ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting to negotiate and decide whether to establish an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources;

(b) To transmit, on behalf of the Governing Council, the outcomes of that third meeting to the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session for consideration during the high-level segment on biological diversity in September 2010 and thereafter;

(c) To undertake, within available resources, action to implement the outcomes of that third meeting and relevant resolutions that might be adopted by the General Assembly on the matter, and report thereon to the Governing Council at its twenty-sixth session;

3. *Invites* Governments and organizations in a position to do so to provide extrabudgetary resources for the above-mentioned process.

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1 UNEP/GCSS.XI/7.

## II. Background

2. In March 2008, a concept note was prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) detailing the needs and rationale for an intergovernmental multi-stakeholder platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, based on a request from the international science committee of the International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMOSEB) process and the partners of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up strategy. The note was made available as an information document to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its ninth meeting, held in May 2008.

3. The consultation towards an international mechanism for scientific expertise on biodiversity and the global strategy on Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up both reflect a general agreement on the need for such a platform. This need was further strengthened by decision IX/15 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, by which the Parties welcomed the above-mentioned concept note and agreement of the UNEP Executive Director to convene an ad hoc open-ended intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting to consider establishing an efficient international science-policy interface on biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being, invited Parties to ensure that appropriate science and policy experts were made available to attend and also encouraged the participation of experts from various regions and disciplines.

4. Accordingly, such a meeting was held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 10 to 12 November 2008. Participants generally agreed on the need to strengthen the science-policy interface and recommended that the UNEP Executive Director should report to the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum at its twenty-fifth session on the outcome of the meeting, and that the Governing Council should request the Executive Director to convene a second such meeting.

5. By its decision 25/10, the Governing Council called for the Executive Director to undertake a further process to explore ways and means 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, aiming to report on progress at the special session on biodiversity of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly and other relevant meetings. Specifically, the Governing Council requested the Executive Director to convene a second intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting in 2009.

## III. Outcomes of the second ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services

6. The Executive Director convened that second meeting in Nairobi from 5 to 9 October 2009. It was attended by representatives of 97 countries and of United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations and secretariats of conventions, together with representatives of non-governmental, private sector and business organizations, as detailed in the report of the meeting (UNEP/IPBES/2/4).

7. Representatives considered the findings of the full gap analysis on existing science-policy interfaces on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The discussions focused specifically on the needs for: generating knowledge (for improved collaboration and coordination to generate knowledge for a common and shared knowledge base); assessing knowledge (for regular and timely assessments to generate and disseminate policy-relevant and not policy-prescriptive information); using knowledge (to support policy implementation by providing scientific support in the form of decision-support tools and methodologies); and capacity-building (building capacity to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being). Representatives also exchanged views on the possible functions and governance structure of the potential mechanism.

8. As agreed by representatives, the outcomes of the meeting were presented in the Chair's summary, which has been reproduced in the annex to the present report.

## **IV. Way forward**

9. As recommended at the meeting, Governments and relevant organizations should be invited to finalize in 2010 their deliberations concerning mechanisms to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being and sustainable development on the basis of the outcomes of the meeting. To support such deliberations, the Executive Director should convene, in the first half of 2010, a third and final meeting to negotiate and decide whether to establish a platform, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

10. In follow-up to the meeting, the Executive Director should be authorized by the Governing Council to transmit, on its behalf, the outcomes of the third meeting to the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session for consideration during the high-level segment on biological diversity in September 2010 and thereafter at the session. Furthermore, the Executive Director should be authorized by the Governing Council to undertake, within available resources, action for the implementation of outcomes of the third meeting and relevant resolutions that might be adopted by the General Assembly on this matter, and requested to report thereon to the Governing Council at its twenty-sixth session.

## Annex

### **Second ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services: Chair's summary<sup>2</sup>**

1. Representatives at the second ad hoc intergovernmental and multi stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, held in Nairobi from 5 to 9 October 2009, all acknowledged the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services, which, while critically important for sustainable development and current and future human well-being, particularly for poverty eradication, were currently experiencing significant loss; that the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services must be strengthened at all levels; the importance of ensuring the quality and independence of the science made available; and the importance of active collaboration with relevant United Nations agencies to maximize synergies and build capacity to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services.

#### **I. Findings and needs as identified in the gap analysis**

2. The discussion in the present section is based on the overall needs of a strengthened science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services and not specific to the potential functions of the proposed platform, which are discussed in section II.

3. There was general agreement that the gap analysis provided a basis for considering ways and means of strengthening the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services, but it was acknowledged that the analysis of some issues, such as current and relevant capacity-building initiatives and the assessment landscape at various scales, needed further development.

4. There was agreement that a strengthened science-policy interface needed: scientific independence (credibility, relevance and legitimacy); knowledge generation (collaboration and coordination for common and shared knowledge bases); knowledge assessments (regular and timely assessments to generate and disseminate policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive advice with full and equal involvement of experts from all regions of the world); knowledge use (support for policy development and implementation); and capacity-building to enhance the science-policy interface and mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being (e.g., poverty eradication, food, water and energy security).

5. There was recognition that the science-policy interface could, at least in part, be improved by strengthening existing mechanisms, but that a new mechanism building upon existing and strengthened mechanisms could potentially add significant value in areas in which strengthening was inadequate.

6. There was agreement that no intergovernmental mechanism currently exists to meet all the science-policy needs of the multiple multilateral environmental agreements and processes in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

#### **A. Improved collaboration and coordination to generate knowledge for a common and shared knowledge base**

7. Participants acknowledged the urgent need to strengthen the generation of knowledge at the national, regional and global levels, building upon existing scientific networks. Examples of knowledge generation needs included:

- (a) A review of the adequacy, consistency and transferability of practical indicators and measures for determining the status and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- (b) National and regional frameworks for monitoring biodiversity and ecosystem services;
- (c) Spatially explicit models that predicted the response of biodiversity and ecosystem services to pressures and drivers and the resultant implications for human well-being.

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<sup>2</sup> The Chair's summary has not been formally edited.

8. Participants stressed the importance of local and traditional knowledge, along with other forms of knowledge, to inform policy processes to ensure that the outcomes (research, data and tools and good practices for the sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services) were useful to users at all levels.
9. An interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach beyond the biodiversity community, including social and economic research, was seen as essential. There was also a need to adopt a bottom-up approach in knowledge generation to ensure that it was not only the scientific or policy community that determined the needs, but also the broader user community.

## **B. Need for regular and timely assessments to generate and disseminate policy relevant and not policy prescriptive information**

10. There was a need to provide independent, legitimate, relevant and credible scientific assessments and information to policymakers in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services and to the broader development community.
11. In addition, there was a need for assessments that in general involve Governments and other relevant stakeholders through an intergovernmental process (i.e., a legitimate process), policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive, involving experts from all regions of the world fully and equally (recognizing the need for capacity-building for many developing countries) and peer-reviewed (i.e., credible). Those assessments should highlight the links between biodiversity, ecosystem services and poverty alleviation (e.g., food, energy and water security), encompass the valuation of ecosystems and highlight the drivers for change and emerging issues.
12. Assessments should be demand-driven, based on problem identification and user needs, including the needs of decision makers, all relevant multilateral environmental agreements (e.g., the six biodiversity-related conventions, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Migratory Species, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and the Convention to Combat Desertification) and United Nations agencies; incorporate all forms of knowledge, including indigenous and traditional knowledge; cover all temporal (past, present and future) and spatial scales (local, subregional, regional and global); use a common conceptual framework and methodologies; and be interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. They should tackle thematic and emerging issues; complement, rather than duplicate, existing assessments; learn from the experiences of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and also other international assessment processes, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the Global Biodiversity Outlook, the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development and the “assessment of assessments” of the state of the marine environment; consider value-related and social and economic aspects; and identify knowledge gaps.
13. Processes needed to be agreed to approve the governance structure and scope of such assessments; the nomination and selection of authors and review editors; and the peer review, approval, and outreach and communication processes. The financial and human resource needs for such assessments should be acknowledged and met. Assessments needed to be translated into a language that could be understood and used by end-users, including local communities.
14. Participation of policymakers and relevant stakeholders, in particular at the local levels representing appropriate knowledge systems, was essential to ensuring that the science-policy interface was strengthened.

## **C. Support policy implementation by providing scientific support in the form of decision-support tools and methodologies**

15. While there was a need to support policy formulation and implementation (especially for the six biodiversity-related conventions and the Convention to Combat Desertification), it was also necessary to broaden the client and user base of scientific information to include Governments, United Nations organizations, civil society, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Awareness-raising campaigns for the general public are also needed.

16. Access to and use of knowledge, which should be policy-relevant and not policy-prescriptive, was seen as critically important. It was also important, upon request, to develop tools and methodologies to assist policy formulation, e.g., sub-global assessments with the involvement of end-users; multi-criteria decision analysis tools; cost-benefit analyses; and valuation methodologies for ecosystem services. It was vital for the knowledge base to be interpreted for users.

17. There was also a need to consider the various mechanisms for science and technology transfer to render seamless the delivery to the policy process in an appropriate form.

#### **D. Need for building capacity to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being**

18. There was general agreement on the importance of capacity-building for the generation, assessment and use of knowledge at various levels. Capacity-building for scientists, policymakers and members of civil society, including local communities, should be catalysed to enable them to participate more effectively in the science-policy interface, in addition to increasing the participation and involvement of scientists from developing countries and ensuring that focused technical and scientific support was provided to facilitate that greater involvement.

19. Specific needs identified by participants included but not limited to:

(a) Access to data and knowledge, e.g., free and open online access to journals, virtual libraries, geo-referenced data and satellite data;

(b) Training programmes and opportunities for scientists from developing countries, e.g., the provision of scholarships and fellowships, and access to modelling tools;

(c) Network of focal points to facilitate national and regional assessments, and capacity-building for South-South and North-South cooperation;

20. There was a need to integrate and expand capacity-building into programmes and processes by building upon existing activities, including through bilateral cooperation with, among others, the Global Environment Facility as a financing instrument and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank and regional development banks.

21. There was a need for an improved understanding of the full range of current capacity-building activities, and gaps therein, required to meet the needs of a strengthened science-policy interface.

## **II. Functions of the proposed platform**

22. The proposed platform was intended to strengthen in a cost-effective manner existing, but fragmented and uncoordinated, science-policy interfaces associated with biodiversity and ecosystem services.

23. Most participants endorsed the importance of ensuring scientific independence, i.e., having the governance structure of the proposed platform separate from, but responsive to, the governance structures of multilateral environmental agreements and United Nations bodies in providing credible, legitimate and relevant scientific information on biodiversity and ecosystem services that is policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive.

24. Prior to finalizing the potential functions of a platform, it would be essential to ensure a solid understanding of the current capabilities and ways of strengthening them, in order for the platform to be designed to add value in a cost-effective manner to existing capabilities and not duplicate or replace them. Further analysis was requested for: capacity-building; the assessment landscape; the governance structure and procedures of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; and the potential costs of and options for such a platform. A new platform could play a critical role in coordinating and catalysing existing mechanisms, in addition to performing a number of functions currently not being performed by any other organization or mechanism. Initial ideas for potential platform functions included:

(a) Catalysing an improved collaboration and coordination for the generation of knowledge for a common and shared knowledge base by:

- (i) Identifying and prioritizing key scientific information needed for policymakers at various spatial scales, including through the assessment process;
  - (ii) Creating a mechanism for dialogue between the scientific community, policymakers and funding organizations to catalyse the generation of the required information nationally and in partnership with international organizations such as the International Council for Science and its programmes, such as Diversitas, and the World Conservation Union. The mechanism would not fund or conduct primary scientific research itself;
- (b) Coordinating and performing regular and timely assessments to generate and disseminate policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive information by:
- (i) Identifying the need for, and catalysing the implementation of sub-global assessments (national, sub-regional and regional): that would build on and coordinate with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up;
  - (ii) Synthesizing the findings of sub-global assessments regionally and thematically;
  - (iii) Conducting comprehensive sub-regional, regional and global assessments, building upon the sub-global assessments and other sources;
  - (iv) Undertaking assessments on thematic issues;
  - (v) Disseminating assessment findings to appropriate stakeholders;
  - (vi) Maintaining an up-to-date catalogue of relevant assessments, facilitating collaboration with such assessments, while ensuring no duplication;
- (c) Supporting policy formulation and implementation by identifying policy-relevant tools and methodologies and meeting the needs of policymakers and other users of scientific information. That would include by providing assessment findings at various spatial scales and information on best practice use of the tools and methodologies and where needed catalysing their further development;
- (d) Building capacity to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being by identifying the capacity-building needs (building upon the indicative list above) of scientists and policymakers and other users of scientific information over a range of spatial scales and creating a mechanism, with organizations responsible for capacity-building, including the Global Environment Facility for financing, and activities of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the World Bank and regional development banks, and civil society organizations to facilitate and leverage the delivery of identified needs. Most participants expressed support for enhancing national capacity, especially in developing countries, including improving access to relevant scientific information and technologies, and providing training programmes and opportunities.

### III. Governance structure

25. A number of possible intergovernmental governance structures were discussed, as follows:

(a) There was general agreement that the plenary should comprise representatives from all Governments represented in the United Nations, with participants being invited from relevant stakeholder groups. Some delegates said that participants from relevant stakeholders should be invited as observers, whereas others argued that these participants should be invited according to the modalities to be agreed by a possible platform at its first meeting;

(b) Two views were expressed with regard to an executive body or bureau. One view was that it should comprise elected scientific and technical experts in a manner analogous to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, with appropriate geographic balance and appropriate ad hoc members (e.g., chairs of the scientific subsidiary bodies of the six biodiversity-related conventions and Convention to Combat Desertification). Those participants saw no need for a scientific advisory panel given the scientific and technical excellence of the elected members of the executive body or bureau. The other view was that the members of the executive body or bureau should not be technical experts and should perform administrative functions only, meaning that the body would then need to be complemented by an elected scientific advisory panel to ensure scientific credibility, with appropriate ad hoc members (e.g., chairs of multilateral environment agreement scientific subsidiary bodies).



(c) A range of views were expressed on the relationship between the platform and governing bodies of the six biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements and the Convention to Combat Desertification, and United Nations agencies, with many participants supporting a direct relationship between the agreements and the plenary or executive body, while those supporting a scientific advisory panel preferred the interface of the agreements to be with the scientific advisory body;

(d) There was strong endorsement of operating at all spatial scales, i.e., national, sub-regional, regional and global;

(e) There was general agreement on the need for a small secretariat, but the functions, sponsors and location should be assessed. The United Nations Environment Programme secretariat was requested to assess various types of secretariat institutional arrangements and the criteria to be used to select the secretariat's location;

(f) There were diverging views as to whether the working groups should be ad hoc, time-bound and formed as needed, and therefore indeterminate in number, or whether they should be permanent, but with flexible, demand-driven work programmes. Many representatives who supported permanent working groups suggested that there should be two (assessments and capacity-building). There were, however, conflicting views as to whether regional working groups were needed or whether existing institutional arrangements could be used. There was general agreement that working groups would be established, as needed, at the first plenary meeting;

(g) There was limited discussion of a financing mechanism, beyond the possible establishment of a trust fund, or the level of financial needs, which could not be evaluated until the work programme had been finalized.

#### **IV. Conclusions and the way forward**

26. In general there was strong support expressed for a new intergovernmental mechanism to strengthen the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services, provided that it did not duplicate or substitute the mandates or programmes of work of existing multilateral environmental agreements or mechanisms, where the strengthening of existing mechanisms was inadequate. Most participants endorsed the importance of ensuring the scientific independence of the new intergovernmental mechanism by having its governance structure separate from, but responsive to, the governance structures of multilateral environmental agreements and United Nations bodies. There was a divergence of views as to whether such a mechanism would respond only to the needs of multilateral environmental agreements and their scientific subsidiary bodies, with full and equitable representation from developing countries, and the reports subject to peer review by experts and Governments, or whether it should also respond to the needs of other stakeholders, e.g., United Nations agencies. While participants agreed that it should be intergovernmental, there were divergent views as to whether interested stakeholders should be invited as observers or whether participants should be invited according to the modalities to be agreed by a possible Platform at its first meeting. There was agreement that any reports should have value for the full range of stakeholders.

27. The platform should support and complement the scientific subsidiary bodies of the six biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements and processes and the Convention to Combat Desertification, as explained above. There were, however, diverging views as to whether such a mechanism should also involve appropriate United Nations organizations, the scientific community and other stakeholders, such as relevant non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society organizations.

28. Such an intergovernmental mechanism might play a role in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services similar to that played by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in the field of climate change, but adopt a more holistic approach that included not only assessing knowledge but also catalysing improved collaboration and coordination for the generation of knowledge for a common and shared knowledge base; supporting policy implementation by identifying policy-relevant tools and methodologies to meet policymakers' needs; and building capacity to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being.

29. To ensure that there was no duplication of efforts and that the new mechanism would add value in a manner that could not be accomplished by any other existing mechanism, some participants requested additional information to be able to decide whether to establish a new intergovernmental mechanism. The additional analysis requested included: current and planned capacity-building

activities; the assessment landscape, including the state of play of existing and current indicators; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change governance structure and procedures; options and criteria for a possible secretariat; and information on possible financing needs and possible platform governance structures.

30. Some participants recommended that the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme should inform the Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity at its third meeting about progress achieved at the current meeting in order for it to consider the implications of the work for the Convention on Biological Diversity, including its strategic plan.

31. Participants recommended that the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme should report at the eleventh special session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, in February 2010, on the outcome of the current meeting, and that the Governing Council should request the Executive Director, in cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies, to convene a third and final intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting to negotiate and decide whether to establish an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, the outcome of which should be transmitted to the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly in 2010.

32. Some participants also recommended that further informal consultations between Governments and relevant organizations should be carried out at the bilateral and regional levels to facilitate consultations for the third and final meeting, and invited Governments and organizations in a position to do so to facilitate the holding of such consultations.

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