

Mid-term Synthesis of the Consultative Process towards an IMoSEB

This synthesis is a draft prepared by the IMoSEB Executive Secretariat. It does not necessarily reflect all views from the IMoSEB consultation Executive Committee and should be used as a discussion paper.

For SBSTTA-12 participants

Background

- Following the conference of Paris “Biodiversity: Science and Governance” in 2005, an international consultation was launched to assess the need, scope and possible forms of an International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB). The consultation is an exploratory process, broad and multidisciplinary with numerous parties involved and with a political and media audience. It aims to seek input from a wide array of stakeholders on the need for scientific expertise on biodiversity to assist decision making and action, building on what already exists.

- The Executive Committee (EC) of the consultative process towards an IMoSEB, met in December 2006, and wished to broaden and deepen the consultation by holding consultations on each continent.

- After three regional consultations (North America, Africa and Europe), a broad agreement emerged that the current situation is not satisfactory and that the knowledge/decision-making interface is of critical importance. The consultations underlined also the relevance of scale (local to global) for biodiversity management and governance.

I – Identifying gaps and needs at the biodiversity knowledge and decision-making interface

I.1 The most recent list of needs emerging from the consultations

The regional consultations and the IMoSEB International Steering Committee examined and shared their perspectives on the list of needs for the biodiversity knowledge/decision-making interface identified by the IMoSEB EC in December 2006.

In general, the main categories of needs suggested by the EC were:

- Need for independent scientific expertise,
- Need to expand our capacity and
- Need to improve communication

Each consultation had specific concerns on the identified needs.

- In North America, participants underlined that it will be a very ambitious challenge to fulfill all the needs with one single mechanism. Participants recognized that more science is better but translation of information into action was more important.

- In Africa, participants focused on the difficulty of assessing information and accessing world databases and other sources of information. They also highlighted the need for improved North-South and South-South cooperation.

- In Europe, participants, including private sector representatives, took into account the recommendations from the two previous consultations to produce the following list of needs (the list not being ordered by priority)

1. Improved communication to aid understanding and application of scientific results on biodiversity by all relevant audiences.

2. Independent, synthesized, comprehensive scientific information and advice from all relevant sources to support the work of international conventions and institutions, with a remit for biodiversity management, with particular emphasis on the CBD.

3. Proactive scientific advice on emerging threats and issues associated with biodiversity change identified by the scientific community, or expressed by stakeholders, including economic and social dimensions.

4. Improved access and timeliness of peer-reviewed scientific results on biodiversity so that they can be more readily and more effectively used in decision-making.

5. Promotion of dialogue among diverse knowledge systems and understandings, perspectives and values regarding biodiversity, to help make policy decisions more effective and appropriate.

6. Increased ability at national, regional and global level, to predict the consequences of current actions affecting biodiversity, ecosystem services and how they affect human well-being, to explore alternative scenarios, and to evaluate the effectiveness of measures already taken.

7. Improved, better coordinated, more effective, more operational and timely monitoring and assessments of drivers, pressures, state, impacts and responses relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services, in particular through provision of scientific support to relevant initiatives.

8. Insights from the relevant sciences and other forms of knowledge to bear on local/national decisions on topical issues that affect biodiversity where those decisions have international consequences, and where the knowledge base is particularly weak or unconsolidated.

9. Identification of biodiversity research priorities and gaps implied by decision-makers' concerns at all levels, and promotion/diffusion of these to the scientific community and the science funding agencies.

10. Mobilization of scientific expertise for national and regional level capacity building.

I.2 Is there a need for a new body?

One of the objectives of the regional consultations is also to assess if a new body could meet the needs identified by the Executive Committee.

In North America, skepticism remained about the need and supporting rationale for a new body or if existing institutions could meet these needs with enhanced capacity. Issues on the costs of a new body (in a context of limited resources) and on the duplication of what is already done were raised

In Africa, participants agreed that if a new body is considered, it must not in any case duplicate existing efforts but instead should provide added value to existing bodies. The issue of getting a political consensus to create a new body (that does not exist yet) was underlined.

In Europe, it was recognized that a body built upon and supporting existing mechanisms while considering new structures and initiatives could help to meet the needs and so improve the knowledge-policy interface for biodiversity.

II – Recommendations for the scope of an IMoSEB from the regional consultations

The three regional consultations made a number of general recommendations for the structure and function of a possible IMoSEB, and how it could meet the validated needs based on the options formulated by the Executive Committee. The following section summarizes the recommendations that repeatedly and strongly appeared in at least two of the official reports from the regional consultations.

All of these tasks are possible roles for an IMoSEB, but the task of prioritizing and streamlining remains. Four interrelated themes emerge:

II.1 Support the work of biodiversity related conventions by:

- Acting pro-actively on global biodiversity issues (e.g. invasive species, emerging diseases...) and gathering experts from all fields to quickly provide short assessments and deliver expertise
- Initiating assessments as requested at multiple scales
- Answering requests from the scientific subsidiary bodies of the conventions
- Evaluating science-policy feed back loops

II.2 Capitalize, translate and synthesize all kinds of existing information and know-how (from local people and others various sector including the business sector), and transfer / communicate / put them at decisions makers disposal (private and public) by:

- Encouraging community based approaches
- Utilizing 21st century social networking and collaborative tools
- Providing best and worst practices and lessons learnt from previous experiences
- Focusing on useful tools and approaches for viable long-term management of biodiversity
- Evaluating of risks and financial constraints

II.3 Promote communication and dialogue by:

- Enhancing public awareness of the benefits from biodiversity and costs of biodiversity loss, especially as they relate to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in among constituencies for decision-makers (macroeconomic studies, environmental planning...)
- Getting a worldwide audience (e.g. through a Davos-like World Biodiversity Forum)
- Identifying ways for biodiversity scientists to become more active in existing forums (Long Term Biodiversity Monitoring, "Biodiversity Race"...)
- Establishing / Using tools that promote dialogue between information providers and users (Internet-based wiki for biodiversity management)
- Developing and better integrating models and scenarios (involving economic and social sciences) to engage decision-making

II.4 Increase capacity building by:

- Developing training and education opportunities
- Increasing participation of local actors in biodiversity research and conservation
- Exchanging between communities involved in biodiversity

III – Building a Possible Option

In addition to making general recommendations for the structure and function of a possible IMoSEB, the consultations offered more specific proposals tailored to each region's priorities. Although these specific proposals differed between regions, there was no fundamental conflict between them. The three consultations highlighted the importance for bridging local and global scales, but only began to consider how to do so.

- North America proposed first to examine characteristics of intergovernmental mechanisms addressing successfully the science / policy interface and secondly, cautioned against any structure that would duplicate existing mechanisms and emphasized cost-effectiveness.

- The African proposal envisioned a light, flexible mechanism that would use information and communication technologies to build a meta-network that would build technical capacity among members and rapidly deliver information "to the right place, at the right time".

- A concrete proposal came from Europe, which endorsed the development of a Meta-network. A small governing board would field requests, in particular from the Biodiversity Liaison Group (CBD, Ramsar, CMS, CITES, WHC) and hence ensuring an intergovernmental component. A multi-stakeholder advisory panel and a small secretariat would support the governing board. The Meta-network would benefit from

synergy induced between its different members, who would gain from capacity building in the form of both technical expertise and experience participating in the Meta-network.

Meta-network members would also lead assessments and expertise initiated by the Governing Board under the requests of public and private decision-makers. This Meta-network would be built on low-cost, Internet social networking software.

IV – Questions and debates

Below are some of the most debated questions that have arisen from the consultations, which will need to be addressed over the next few months :

IV.1 Is there a need to create a new body?

If no,

- How to improve existing bodies and enhance their capacity to meet the identified needs?

If yes,

- How would the different bodies interact?
- Is the intergovernmental component of a new body necessary? If not, what can you propose that would strengthen the representation of governments?
- What kind of real benefits can get the business world to participate actively?
- What would be the role of existing organizations dealing with biodiversity (DIVERSITAS, IUCN, EPBRS, GBIF, EOL...) and others (IPCC, WRI...), and how would we make sure to avoid duplications?

IV.2 If we consider the Meta-network option

- How to ensure a secure funding for a long-term commitment towards an IMoSEB?
- Should the organizations belonging to the meta-network be endorsed? If yes, by whom? And by which procedures or requests?
- How to well-develop the information and communication technology access in developing countries?
- How should the various products be reviewed? What mechanism should be put into place?

V – Participate in the consultative process towards an IMoSEB

This document goes alongside with the “needs&options” document produced by the IMoSEB EC

You can contribute to the consultation by providing the Executive Secretariat your views, comments and propositions on the regional consultations report and on the “needs&options” document.

You can also directly express your views through the web-questionnaire.

Reports, documents and a Web questionnaire are available at <http://www.imoseb.net>

Contact the Executive Secretariat at executive-secretariat@imoseb.net