



## *Executive Secretariat Document*

# **The main results of the regional consultations in addition to "Needs and Options" discussions.**

### ***General observations***

Following the conference in 2005 on 'Biodiversity: Science and Governance', an international consultation was launched to examine the need, scope and possible forms of an International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB). The consultation is a broad, multidisciplinary exploratory process that involves a large number of stakeholders and that has a political and media audience. Its aim is the creation of true value-added by fully taking existing features into account. This approach has frequently been appreciated by participants for its originality, openness and inclusive, participative orientation.

The term 'biodiversity' is used here in the broadest sense and covers all interacting living organisms, including microorganisms and the services rendered by ecosystems. Biodiversity is addressed in its relation with major issues such as poverty reduction, food security and potable water security, economic growth, conflicts related to the use and appropriation of resources, human, animal and plant health, energy and the evolution of the climate. This viewpoint implies the linking of biodiversity and human well-being in the spirit of the achieving of the Millennium Development Goals.

The first consultations have made it possible to put forward some lines of reflection for the improvement of the interface between expert appraisal and decision making. At a meeting in December 2006, the Executive Committee of the consultative process towards an IMoSEB decided to broaden and deepen consultations by holding meetings on each continent, while remaining attentive to the institutional reforms and ongoing initiatives. Six regional meetings were held between January and October 2007 (in North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Latin America and Pacific).

The interface between knowledge and decision making was very soon identified as the main challenge to be taken up. The identification of users and their needs is therefore primordial. This consultation also showed to what degree public opinion and decision systems must evolve to fully integrate biodiversity in strategies and actions<sup>1</sup>.

Although the interface between knowledge and decision has clearly been identified as primordial, the difficulty of taking up such a challenge is very real. The 'IMoSEB' consultation has not been the only one aimed at reducing this gap. Whether they are taken by intergovernmental bodies, national bodies, NGOs, enterprises, local authorities or even private individuals, decisions that have direct

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<sup>1</sup> For example, at the "Citoyens de la Terre" meeting, Stavros Dimas, European Commissioner for the Environment, stressed that biodiversity should receive the same attention as climate change and Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends, called for a scientific, technological and economic revolution of the same type as that which put a man on the moon, and talked in terms of the 'Biodiversity Race'.

or indirect interactions with biodiversity are often difficult to take with full knowledge of the facts. Indeed, biodiversity is so closely linked to human activities in the long and short term. This linkage often has local or global consequences whose relations and impacts are difficult to quantify with any accuracy. Furthermore, when information does exist, it is difficult to access, frequently dispersed and often unusable in a raw state.

Many stakeholders still consider the field of data and information on biodiversity to be a competitive area at different levels—especially between scientists, between NGOs, between enterprises and even between countries. This competition is seen in particular for reasons of power and for receipt of funding. Numerous initiatives have been launched in recent years to improve this situation but there is not yet a major, encompassing initiative on a scale of that undertaken for decades in other fields covering physical features (climate, natural catastrophes, etc.), the exploration of space and nuclear power, except in the field of taxonomy.

## ***Points emerging from the consultations***

### **The purpose of an IMoSEB:**

The consultations particularly emphasised the fact that an IMoSEB should contribute true value-addition to existing mechanisms and initiatives and in no way be seen as duplicating existing efforts. The aim of an IMoSEB would not be the development of biodiversity sciences but the improvement of translation of knowledge into action and the links between knowledge and decision processes.

From the outset there has been recognition of the obvious need to improve the interface between knowledge and policies concerning the governance of biodiversity and its management by more effective organisation of the contribution of scientists and other possessors of knowledge to the bodies entrusted with the governance of biodiversity. The need was also recognised for more sustained discussion between the scientific community in the broad sense and systems for the governance of biodiversity.

Even if the process has focused on the interface between knowledge and decision, it has been very widely recognised that other aspects explain the poor governance of biodiversity, such as a lack of political will, decisions that harm biodiversity, questions of the ownership of or access to biological resources and the divergence between the interests of the stakeholders concerned.

The participants frequently indicated that there will be an increasing need to improve comprehension, development and appraisal of the interface between knowledge and policies. The appraisal process has been seen as the transformation of the complex problematics of biodiversity into messages that are both simpler and clearer in order to establish discussion between knowledge holders and decision makers the purpose of which is to guide the decision process and improve the implementation of policies that affect biodiversity.

### **Users – Suppliers**

The users of an IMoSEB—identified mainly by the consultations—are the decision makers at various levels from local to international and in different public, private, community or collective categories, such as governments, international organisations, local communities, indigenous peoples, NGOs, academies, scientists, the media, consumers, enterprises, planners, development stakeholders, chambers of commerce, etc.

All the regional consultations recognised that biodiversity appraisals can draw on several types of knowledge: fundamental research, targeted research with decision making, lay knowledge, local and traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge and the skills of enterprises from the local to the international scale.

The following suggestions have been made several times:

- enhancing interaction between modern and traditional knowledge with emphasis on mutual contributions and the need for mutual validation-use for better biodiversity management;

- setting up synergy between decision makers and holders of knowledge, between traditional and scientific knowledge and between the specialists in the various groups of themes.

Interactions between the users and suppliers of expert skills should be encouraged through partnerships and collaboration through networking. This is particularly important insofar as the users of certain information may be the suppliers of other information. This is the case, in particular, with the involvement of certain local authorities and enterprises in the development of biodiversity knowledge systems related to their activities.

### **Mandate, functions and fields of work**

The proposals for a mandate for an IMoSEB defined at the Leipzig workshop have been taken up in particular by the Asian consultation:

- Synthesize and communicate a knowledge base on biodiversity in support of decision making and implementation;
- Bring together and acknowledge diverse understandings, perspectives, and values regarding biodiversity loss and change;
- Create a mechanism for dialogue and exchange among holders of diverse knowledge and knowledge systems (i.e. all forms of traditional and modern knowledge and science);
- Foster deeper understanding of the ways in which biodiversity loss and change transcend scales (spatial, temporal, etc.) and jurisdictional boundaries;
- Through its activities enhance and improve abilities to collect, exchange and disseminate knowledge and information, and promote actions in favour of better biodiversity management at all levels.

The new mechanism could therefore undertake independent appraisals, draw up a synthesis of available knowledge on biodiversity and translate this information into the 'languages' of the target publics. It should be integrated in networks to draw on different types of specialists and appraisals and could disseminate existing methodologies and specify the type of biodiversity evaluation needed in the long term and on a periodic basis, initiate or provide support for appraisals and also rapid responses to urgent questions and, if necessary, identify, create and support fresh research work.

A parallel has been drawn on many occasions between the experience of IPCC and a possible 'IMoSEB'. The exemplary performance of IPCC in mobilising scientific communities, public opinion, politicians and the media is something of a reference in the determination to include biodiversity in political and decision agendas. However, there has been constant agreement to emphasise the fact that biodiversity governance is very different to that of climate change.

The mechanism should work in close interaction with subsidiary scientific bodies of the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) entrusted with supplying scientific opinions for biodiversity conventions. However, it should also be capable of proactively addressing new problems that emerge in this field. It is necessary to plan a mechanism making it possible to be responsive and/or proactive according to circumstances and themes. It can also be designed to respond to the needs of civil society and/or the obligations of international conventions.

With regard to relations with international conventions, the consultations have in general stressed the potential role of an IMoSEB within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and in particular to strengthen the scientific contribution within the SBSTTA. It has been proposed almost without exception to conceive an IMoSEB with a specific governance system that is independent of the CBD but with special links with the latter and under the auspices of a UN body or possibly to set it up by the General Assembly of the United Nations and have it housed by a UN structure. Links should also be established with the other main conventions (CITES, CMS, Ramsar Convention, WHC) concerning biodiversity, in particular with recognition of the legitimacy and role of the liaison group on biodiversity, and with other conventions or agreements that have impacts on or links with biodiversity (UNFCCC, WTO, etc.).

If it is set up, it should mobilise expertise for ongoing or future appraisals (e.g. GBO3, GEO5, MAII, 'Stern' type report of the Potsdam Initiative).

The mandate should be defined as soon as possible in order to provide the mechanism with all the legitimacy and all the authority required, and it should be implemented very soon and in a long-term perspective so as to set up the resources for monitoring the state and evolution of biodiversity, the options and responses that could abate loss of biodiversity and that would enhance the goods and services provided by ecosystems.

The potential of new information and communication technologies and networking can be central in facilitating the mobilisation of all expertise. This covers the mobilisation of voluntary expertise, a return flow of brains, the reappropriation of knowledge and data in the regions of origin, the use of individual and community expertise and continuing education.

## **Guiding principles**

The consultations have shown the need for such a mechanism to be awarded sufficient legitimacy and authority. These should be accompanied by assurances of independence and free and unrestrained appraisal in liaison with the requirements of decision makers. The consultations have stressed that when science is mentioned it must be seen to be legitimate and authoritative, and also underline the important role of all the sciences—natural sciences, social sciences and economics.

Following the discussions and contributions of the preceding consultations, three guiding principles for an IMoSEB were highlighted by the Asian consultation:

- scientific credibility,
- political legitimacy,
- relevance (meeting users' needs).
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The African consultation requested a light, decentralised, adaptive, flexible, non-bureaucratic structure that is close and accessible to stakeholders and capable of a mutual information approach to decision making.

The Pacific consultation underlined the need for the representation of regions and types of stakeholders to be balanced at the highest level of an IMoSEB. In particular, support should be provided for those that belong to marginalised groups.

## **Points of divergence or failure to agree**

Practically all the consultation participants agreed that present governance of biodiversity does not match the issues and the risks, even if opinions as regards the ways to proceed differed. The points of divergence are fundamental as they highlight above all the differences on 'vision' or 'positioning' of an IMoSEB within the framework of the governance of biodiversity. While there was not often a full consensus on making a particular proposal of options, some consultations clearly took a strategic, tactical position in favour of an option in the name of real potential for power (intergovernmental panel), of possible backing from governments or the presumed effectiveness of an IMoSEB (a meta-network). The setting up of a structure that has received the approval and support of governments will require a certain political consensus which does not yet exist.

Some consider that an IMoSEB could be constructed little by little by broadening its competences and possibly using the creation of a pilot structure at the scale of a region or sub-region as proposed by the African consultation. Others were of the opinion that any mechanism of this type should operate at world level to begin with planning and that structures and procedures operating at other levels could be incorporated at a later date.

## **Regional or local characteristics**

Whatever the final recommendations, existing networks—some of which were identified during regional meetings—should be taken into account.

Access to information and to databases is difficult in some regions in particular for economic or legal reasons (private data), technical reasons (the 'digital divide') or political reasons (information held outside the country). Mention was also made of many difficulties in research systems and for individual scientists in the field of biodiversity and appraisal: shortage of human resources, ageing researchers, lack of facilities and encouragement, brain drain to non-governmental or international bodies, shortages of regional or local expertise in certain fields.

## **Communication**

Communication on biodiversity was very often considered as a primordial feature for an IMoSEB. Several proposals or recommendations were made: face to face discussions between scientists and decision makers, an annual forum on biodiversity on the lines of the Davos Summit, regional journals devoted to the management of biodiversity, a 'Wikipedia' type system devoted to biodiversity<sup>2</sup>, etc. The messages should be proactive, relevant, short and concise and delivered at the appropriate moment. They should be authoritative, take the appropriate scale into account and result from a cooperative, interdisciplinary procedure.

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<sup>2</sup> Considering the potential and limits (control of information, validity and appropriation of information, selection of experts, etc.).