

Role and effectiveness of NGOs in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services



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28 May, 2012

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Executive summary

The main purpose of this report is to give an account of the most appropriate roles and arrangements that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can assume in the newly created, UN-administered, Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

In order to do that, extensive literature was used to establish a thematic framework for the creation of IPBES, to justify its existence, and to stress the importance of civil society to be an intrinsic part of it. Qualitative research methods were employed in the form of semi-structured interviews with representatives from civil society who represent stakeholders to the Platform.

Based on the above, several conclusions were made. The most appropriate activities that NGOs should engage in include advocating and trying to influence the policy-making process, working on the ground under a mandate provided by IPBES, campaigning on neglected and/or emerging issues, capacity-building, and working with local and indigenous communities in order to translate their knowledge into mainstream science. Furthermore, the Ex-officio model of IUCN is the most favoured one. Networks of NGOs are also favoured, however, within limits.

The model for the creation of the IPBES, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is considered a good example but regarding NGO participation, the IPBES needs to evolve and go beyond that concerning transparency and inclusiveness.

Even though many of the above activities have great merits for the multi-stakeholder dialogue, the intergovernmental nature of the Platform and the current state of the inception process reveal that the role of NGOs will be limited to what governments will allow to be civil society's area of activity.

Recommendations include expanding and building on those roles for which non-governmental organizations create added value both for the IPBES findings but also for their own work and goals. Furthermore, NGOs need to accept that IPBES will most likely not revolutionize the way civil society interacts with governments in the UN context, as is the case with the International Labour Organization, and capitalize on the above mentioned merits while being aware of their government-prescribed limitations.

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Glossary

Acronyms

- CBD – Convention on biological diversity
- CoP – Conference of the parties
- FAO – Food and agriculture organization
- ILO – International labour organization
- IPBES – Intergovernmental platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services
- IPCC – Intergovernmental panel on climate change
- IUCN – International union for conservation of nature
- MA – Millennium ecosystem assessment
- MEA – Multilateral environmental agreement
- UNCSD – United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development
- UNDP – United Nations development programme
- UNEP – United Nations environment programme
- UNESCO – United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organization
- UNFCCC – United Nations framework convention on climate change
- WHO – World health organization
- WTO – World trade organization

Definitions of terms:

- **Biological diversity** – the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (Art. 2, Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992).
- **Ecosystem** – a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit (Art. 2, Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992).

- **Ecosystem services** - Ecosystem goods (such as food) and services (such as waste assimilation) represent the benefits human populations derive, directly or indirectly, from ecosystem functions (Ecosystems and their services, MA, 2005).

Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include provisioning, regulating, and cultural services that directly affect people and supporting services needed to maintain the other services.

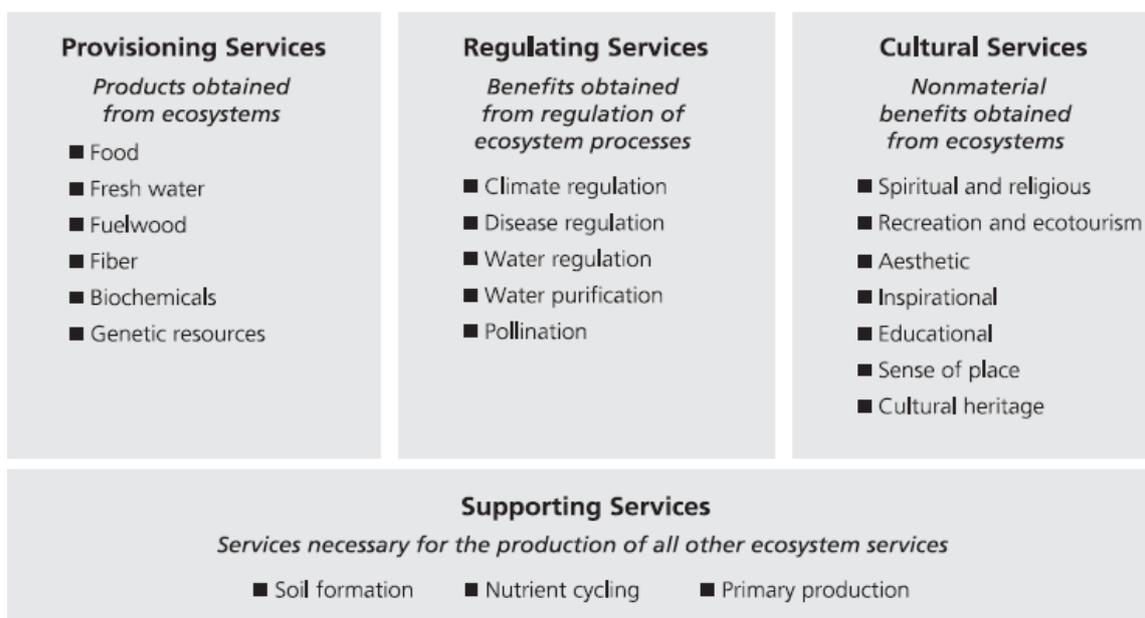


Figure 1. Source: Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

- **The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA)** – The MA assessed the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being. From 2001 to 2005, the MA involved the work of more than 1,360 experts worldwide. Their findings provide a state-of-the-art scientific appraisal of the condition and trends in the world’s ecosystems and the services they provide, as well as the scientific basis for action to conserve and use them sustainably (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).
- **Science-policy interface** – social processes which encompass relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process and which allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making (van den Hove, Chabason, 2009).
- **Observer status** – the right of participation in the work of elective organs or international organizations with advisory functions only; that is, observer status does not confer voting rights (The free dictionary, 2010).

Introduction

Since the 1970s, when the first Earth Summit was held in Rio, Brazil, the world has become painfully aware of the environmental challenge, the biggest in modern-day history. Many conventions, conferences, intergovernmental agreements, scientific studies, and campaigns later, in 2012, many more issues have become pressing and urgent, leading to the assumption that much has been achieved but much more has been missed, overlooked, or ultimately lost.

Global temperature has risen with 0.8 degrees C since the pre-industrial levels (150 years ago) (Human Development Report, 2007/2008). Greenhouse gas emissions which an average citizen of the United Kingdom generates for two months are equal to the same amount which a person from a low Human Development Index country would generate in one year. And in Qatar these two months become 10 days (Human Development Report, 2011). For the past 20 years South-East Asia has lost almost one seventh of its forest area and the loss was estimated at 332,000 square km which roughly equals in size to Vietnam (Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific, 2011). It is estimated that by 2030 four billion people will live in “water-stress” areas if policies remain the same as today (OECD work on the environment, 2012).

Just like issues of climate change, deforestation and water (among others), biodiversity degradation has preoccupied scientists, decision-makers and activists. Though often neglected because of its supposedly purely conservation priorities, biodiversity has only recently been recognized for another value. Two words have been added to the definition – “ecosystem services”. They have supplied new meaning and direction for the biodiversity debate, making it a crucial one in the pursuit of better, more coherent and targeted policies, and, ultimately, of change. Ecosystem services are the services that nature provides for us. Examples include clean water, the provision of fiber, timber and others.

Biodiversity in ecosystems and the services they provide needs to become an integral part of the “green” dialogue because biodiversity is not only about protection of species and habitats, but also about the indispensable resources they provide for human and natural well-being.

This realization came to life for governments as well, as they collectively recognized the need for biodiversity and ecosystem services regulations which are embedded in a science-policy interface – a process which entails interaction between scientists and factors in the policy process, leading to

possibilities for exchange, co-evolution and mutual knowledge generation with the purpose of feeding into decision-making (van den Hove, Chabason, 2009). Thus, the IPBES was created.

This paper will look at the multi-stakeholder involvement in the newly-established Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) by focusing on non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The central focus will be on the possibilities for NGOs to take part in the IPBES process, their most appropriate and suitable roles in the specific context of this Platform, and the fine line between what NGOs would like to do, and what the intergovernmental process will allow them to do.

The importance of this topic, the role of civil society in this particular intergovernmental setup, stems from the fact that biodiversity is in its core a local issue. Problems in one geographical area might be the same as in another one but the causes might be entirely different, and vice versa. Science cannot be produced for its own sake anymore – it needs to be targeted and it needs to provide solutions for policy as well. And NGOs can positively contribute to that process. This paper will try to define, based on theoretical and applied research, the roles for NGOs to assume, as well as possible drawbacks and obstacles to a best-case scenario, from the point of view of civil society.

Within this paper, an overview of global environment policy, the IPBES and its stakeholders, its closest relative – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and an information paper on options for civil society involvement in IPBES will be described. Further, the research method employed is qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with representatives from a number of civil society organizations. The results of these interviews have provided an array of insights regarding the central theme of what the role of NGOs in IPBES is.

This paper will not seek to revolutionize the way NGOs are involved in the UN processes but rather will try to give a perspective to the brand new Platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services and try to trace the implications from this for civil society. The timing also seems prompt as arrangements for IPBES have not yet been finalized and projections on the outcomes are appropriate. While this paper was being written, the IPBES was officially established but not all the rules of procedure of the Platform have yet been finalized. Later, different scenarios might become operational than the ones described in this paper. Further investigation will then be required to see whether the chosen setup is the most appropriate one and if it, in fact, brings the most efficient role for NGOs in IPBES.

Part I

Global environmental politics – a framework

To begin, an introductory framework needs to be established regarding environmental politics in general and biodiversity politics in particular. What has to be stressed is the trans-boundary character of environmental problems and the need for them to be dealt with globally. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part will give a historical overview of global environmental politics by creating a timeline of pivotal moments up to the present moment. The second part will give an overview of the system of international and sub-global biodiversity governance.

Historical overview

Even though countries have been involved in international environmental cooperation in order to manage and sustain resources for more than 100 years, the modern-day chapter of international environmental efforts is said to be the UN Conference on the Human Environment which was held in Stockholm in 1972. This event put the focus on the responsibility of humans to protect the environment on a global level and stressed the fact that this protection was crucial for the social and economic development of people, as well as nature. As a result of the Conference, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created (DeSombre, 2007). Although the Conference addressed certain issues such as poverty and underdevelopment, the results showed very little real commitment in reversing environmental degradation. Nevertheless, the Stockholm Conference was a success in the sense that it brought together 114 governments to discuss environmental issues and created the basis for developing international environmental law. Therefore, it points to political success rather than to environmental success (Elliott, 2004).

In the years to follow what was observed was an increase in scientific knowledge on one side, and expertise and action of environmental NGOs on the other. A number of international conferences and agreements which considerably advanced the environmental debate but brought little action in actually halting environmental degradation took place. In 1982 the World Commission on Environment and Development was founded by the UN. It had the purpose of recommending ways for the international community to save the environment by improving the cooperation between the developing and developed states. The Commission produced the report “Our Common Future”, also known as the Brundtland report, after the Commission Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway at the time. It consisted of a plan of action showing the connections between

“unlimited economic growth, inconsequential use of natural resources, poverty and environmental degradation” (1984 – The World Commission on Environment and Development, 2002). The Report was a landmark in the history of environmental policy as it gave a definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future, 1987).

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, was held in Rio in 1992. 178 countries and over 1400 official-status NGOs were present. Not to mention, the parallel conference organized by NGOs (the Global Forum) which was attended by more than 30,000 people. The UNCED produced and adopted 3 agreements – the Statement of Forest Principles, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and Agenda 21 – all of them non-binding agreements. Furthermore, two separate conventions were created and open for signature – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Elliott, 2004). However, Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the UNCED, concluded that advances towards commitments on transfer of technology, funding and the eradication of poverty have been far from sufficient (as quoted by Elliott, 2004).

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) Special Session in 1997 (also referred to as Rio+5) was supposed to evaluate progress on the action plan Agenda 21, adopted during the Earth Summit. Later, in 1997 the third Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the UNFCCC met in Kyoto, Japan, with the main aim of finalizing a legally binding instrument under which to establish targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions – the Kyoto Protocol (Elliott, 2004).

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (also referred to as Rio+10) in Johannesburg took place in 2002. The objective of this conference was to reach new commitments on sanitation and to stress yet again the pressing need to see sustainable development as an interconnected process. As a result, a number of Environmental Conventions were ratified (About Rio+20, 2011). However, a representation for the outcomes of the Summit could be found in a statement issued by environmental groups “saying the action plan strengthened “an international economic and financial system that is incompatible with the goals of sustainable development” and failed to protect the Earth” (Brown, 2002).

The Rio+20 Summit to be held in June 2012 is expected to be the next big step in international environmental cooperation. It has two main themes: “greening” the economy in terms of

sustainable development and eradication of poverty, and the “Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development” (About Rio+20, 2011). Only time will tell how big the next step in international environmental cooperation will be.

When it comes to biodiversity, many conventions have been signed and ratified since the early 1970s, including the 1971 Ramsar Convention on wetlands, the World Heritage Convention, and the Convention on international trade in endangered species (CITES) adopted in 1973. In 1980 the World Conservation Strategy was produced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The World Bank established a Task Force on Biodiversity in 1985 and this led to a Global Biodiversity Strategy in 1992 (Elliott, 2004).

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adopted in 1992, is the first global agreement providing a legal framework for the conservation of biodiversity. The signatories are obliged to create and maintain national strategies for the conservation, protection and enhancement of biological diversity. On the European continent in 1994 the “Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy” was created in order to coordinate and strengthen the existing initiatives to support the implementation of the CBD. The EC Biodiversity Strategy from 1998 and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 defined the concrete frameworks for action by establishing major themes and objectives to be reached (The Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010).

A major next step in the process of protecting biodiversity in the 21st century has been the progress on establishing an Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (described in detail in chapter 3).

International and sub-global biodiversity governance

In the last twenty years, science, policy and the management of biodiversity have switched from a relatively straightforward frame in focusing mainly on species and habitats, to a complex system which builds on the approach of ecosystem services (Van den Hove, Chabason, 2009).

The global governance system dedicated to biodiversity and ecosystem services is quite diverse. The way it exists today is a result of continuous and systematic creation of institutions which emerged to deal with various problems. The multi-level scale of the issue of biodiversity has been a driving principle for many different governance bodies which have been addressing biodiversity. The main actors of the system, according to Van den Hove and Chabason (2009) are:

At the global level:

- Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) connected with species, habitats and ecosystems. Among these are the CBD, the CITES convention, the Ramsar Convention and the World Heritage Convention.
- Other MEAs somehow related to biodiversity and ecosystem services include the UNFCCC and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- Topic-specific treaties are the ones which relate to specific topics on biodiversity. These include, among many others, the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling and the Antarctic Treaty.
- Intergovernmental organizations dedicated to biodiversity and ecosystem services – for example, UNEP, UNDP, the World Bank, WTO, FAO, UNCSD and other organizations which take into account biodiversity when they build their strategies.

At the sub-global level:

- Regional environmental agreements include the Bern Convention, and the Regional Seas Convention.
- Intergovernmental organizations, for example the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RRMOs) are based on a sub-global level.
- Regional development agencies;
- Regional economic integration organizations also fall in this group. Examples include the European Community and the North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The need for this multitude of different processes is, indeed, needed, as there is no science-policy interface which fits to all problems related to biodiversity and ecosystem services (Van den Hove, Chabason, 2009). These problems are too complex, broad and far-reaching to be dealt with only by one or two international agreements, as is the case for climate change, for example.

Background of the establishment of IPBES

This chapter will examine the process leading up to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services from the birth of the idea to the present moment and beyond, in order to describe the context which non-governmental organizations will strive to be part of. Furthermore, this section will deal with the different stakeholders of the Platform by looking at the UN agencies involved, the Platform Members (governments) and the Non-members (other stakeholders, including the academic community, the private sector and the non-governmental sector).

The need for IPBES

Loss of biodiversity is the result of a combination of different drivers – “lifestyles, production and consumption patterns, population growth, economic growth (...) land- and sea-use change, climate change (...) pollution, invasive species and soil erosion” (Van den Hove, Chabason, 2009). This implies that the knowledge required to understand this loss and to produce counter-action as a result of it, requires an integrated and interdisciplinary approach, which includes indigenous, regional, socio-political and institutional knowledge systems. Therefore, a science-policy interface is required to take on this role.

Among the functions of such an institutional arrangement is contribution to the quality of the scientific process by critically assessing outputs and allowing for peer review; facilitation of timely scientific research and translating it into policy advice; notifying decision-makers about new and emerging areas of concern; raising public awareness, and others (van den Hove, Chabason, 2009).

Timeline

The concept of the IPBES within the above-described profile was created when it was decided that the follow-up to the International Mechanism of Scientific Expertise on Biodiversity (IMoSEB) process and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) follow-up process should merge. Intergovernmental meetings with the participation of various stakeholders took place in Malaysia (2008), Kenya (2009) and Republic of Korea (2010) in order to establish ways to strengthen the science-policy interface.

During the meeting in Busan, Korea, in June 2010, the governments decided that an intergovernmental platform needs to be established, they identified the scope and focus of the platform's work and reached consensus on many of its operational principles, described in the Busan Outcome. During CoP 10 to the CBD in Nagoya (November 2010) and during the UN General Assembly's 65th session the Outcome was very much welcomed. The General Assembly gave the authority to UNEP to hold a plenary meeting in order to put IPBES into a fully operational state. Agencies involved in the setting up of the Platform are UNESCO, FAO and UNDP, among others (About IPBES, n.d.).

The First Plenary Session took place at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, from 3 to 7 October 2011. 112 countries were represented by 366 delegates; 33 non-governmental organizations and 10 UN specialized agencies or UN bodies were also present. Among issues discussed were the functions of IPBES, the operationalization of the Platform, the work programme and the criteria for choosing the host institution and location of the IPBES Secretariat (Chiarolla et al., 2011).

The Second Session's aim is to decide on the institutional arrangements for the Platform and to reach final agreement on the work programme and the physical location. The Session is to take place between 16 and 21 April 2012 in Panama City and is hosted by UNEP (Second session of plenary, n.d.) (at the time of writing the Plenary has not yet taken place).

4 main functions of IPBES

An agreement has been reached among governments during the First Plenary on the four main functions of the Platform. Following is the exact wording of these functions:

- To identify and prioritize key scientific information needed for policymakers and to catalyze efforts to generate new knowledge;
- To perform regular and timely assessments of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services and their interlinkages;
- To support policy formulation and implementation by identifying policy-relevant tools and methodologies;
- To prioritize key capacity-building needs to improve the science-policy interface, and to provide and call for financial and other support for the highest-priority needs related directly to its activities (Frequently Asked Questions on IPBES, n.d.).

Stakeholders

In this section the various stakeholders will be presented. These include UN agencies (UNEP, UNDP and FAO), Members (governments) and Non-members (the scientific/academic community, the private sector and non-governmental organizations).

- UN agencies

The main convening UN body for the IPBES is the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). As a result of a number of meetings sponsored by UNEP in 2010, in December of the same year the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling on UNEP to set up IPBES. UNEP is currently acting as interim Secretariat of the Platform and is the main organizer of the Plenary meetings (UN authorizes new body to stem loss of ecosystems vital to life, 2010).

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNESCO are also among the partners in hosting the Secretariat until a physical location for the Secretariat is designated. UNESCO, for example, also administers the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) and the World Heritage Convention, covering numerous sites rich in biodiversity. Furthermore, it has sponsored the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The organization's specific contribution is said to be in the area of multi-disciplinary capacity building within the Platform's work programme (Salvatore, Hoareau, 2010). However, as the Platform currently does not officially exist or is operational, the roles of the separate UN agencies are not officially set or clarified.

- Members

The official Members of the IPBES are going to be governments of the participating countries. It is important to point out that it will be only Governments who will make the official decisions in the Plenary of the Platform. The intergovernmental nature of the Platform presupposes that it will respond to government needs for relevant scientific assessments. Among such needs will be those defined by governments in the context of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), including the CBD, the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The two latter conventions have included the Platform objectives in their scientific subsidiary bodies, which, in turn, are expected to be the main link between IPBES and MEAs. This would entail, on one hand, "communicating the scientific needs of MEAs to IPBES" and, on the other hand, "being the channel by which the outputs of IPBES might be taken up by MEAs" (Frequently Asked Questions on IPBES, n.d.).

- Non-Members
 - Scientific community

Scientists engaged within the Platform are expected to generate the main body of scientific output for the needs of governments in IPBES. They should be called in to provide a selection of topics of high importance for consideration and they should make sure that this selection is revised regularly (Vohland et al., 2011).

At the moment, scientists can become engaged by participating in organizations which represent the scientific community, for example the International Council for Science (ICSU), or by being involved on a national level with their respective national delegations' work for IPBES (Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services to meet in Panama, n.d). An important third fraction of scientists is grouped in non-governmental organizations which are in fact scientific organizations. Therefore, a distinction needs to be made between academia, grouped in universities and research centers as part of national delegations, and scientific NGOs. Another distinction needs to be underlined between so-called knowledge providers, and organizations more involved in advocacy and field work – frequently referred to as knowledge users. Apart from scientists in the national delegations of member countries, all the civil society formations grouped as users and providers of knowledge will be put in the same group as NGOs in this paper.

Scientists need to ensure that the scientific issues, which arise, are the product of a dialogue between science and society, and the latter is actively involved in defining the research questions within that dialogue (Vohland et al., 2011).

- Private sector

According to IUCN and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) the role of the private sector is two-fold. On one hand, the business community can use the tools and methods produced by IPBES in order to support their decisions when creating their business environmental strategies. Furthermore, IPBES can create incentives for various market mechanisms to be put in use within business in order to improve environmental standards, innovation and competitiveness (WBCSD and IUCN 's views on IPBES and business, 2011). At the same time, building legitimacy for IPBES can be strengthened with the involvement of business as they provide good practices from their work regarding the sustainable use of resources

and that, in turn, can be used for the Platform's assessments (WBCSD and IUCN 's views on IPBES and business, 2011).

In addition to that, a landmark report was produced and finalized in 2010, which targets the business community. It has been widely acknowledged as a stepping-stone for businesses on their road to sustainability. The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) study provides guidance on ecosystem and biodiversity related topics for: a wide range of enterprises with an impact on biodiversity, for example, mining, infrastructure, oil and gas; those dependent on ecosystems for production purposes, like agriculture and fisheries; financial sectors, like banks; and sellers of products related to biodiversity and ecosystem services, for example eco-tourism (TEEB for Business, 2010). The study has succeeded in drawing attention to the economic benefits of biodiversity and in stressing on the increasing costs as a result of loss of biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, n.d.).

Last but not least, the importance of the presence of the private sector among the stakeholders of IPBES is connected to a more practical reason as well – the private sector is in possession of the means to fund various activities of the Platform, and therefore, IPBES needs to acknowledge the importance of their role for the success of the Platform.

The overview presented does not in any case exhaust the roles of the scientific community and the private sector in the work of IPBES. However, their various characteristics and functions can become separate research topics and, therefore, will not be the focus of this paper.

- Non-governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations have their special role to play. They can assume various roles in various situations. For example, NGOs can be sources of information on biodiversity and ecosystem services which can contribute to the inputs of IPBES. Outputs, on the other hand, can be used by NGOs to boost education and communication, efforts for outreach and mobilization of citizens. NGOs can be extremely valuable in another sense – by being close to on-the-ground work and by having the general characteristic of being “local”, they can provide the right questions regarding the needs for scientific assessments (IUCN's views on IPBES and NGOs, 2011).

A further in-depth analysis of the roles of NGOs in the Platform setup will be the focus of research in subsequent chapters.

NGO involvement with the United Nations

Before going deeper into the specificities of NGO involvement in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, it is important to look into the relations between non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations and its intergovernmental processes. This will be done by taking a brief look into the past, the evolution of this relationship, and the issues which arise regarding NGOs, here classified as “good” and “bad” NGOs.

NGOs at the United Nations

Currently, NGOs are presented with various ways to interact with the UN. This section is based on Kerstin Martens’ book “NGOs and the United Nations” (2005).

Until the 1980s NGOs seemed to not consider representation at the United Nations a particularly important task. Over the years, however, NGOs began to recognize the need to be represented at UN meetings and dedicated time and resources in order to become present. This gave them more recognition and by the 1990s they became extremely valued for their advice, expert opinions and contributions at the UN level (Martens, 2005, p. 96-97). When the consultative status came into force as far as the 1940s, 40 NGOs became accredited. By mid-2005 the official number of accredited NGOs to the UN was 2614 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs as cited by Martens, 2005, p. 129).

UN Resolution 1996/31 defines the rules for acquiring consultative status. In order to be accredited with consultative status with the UN, the process goes through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Three different categories of accreditation are available for NGOs – general consultative status, special consultative status, and roster status. Conditions for approval include revealing any presence of government funding, presenting examples of publications, description of the aims and activities of the organization, and a statement regarding the contribution by the NGO to the ECOSOC. The Committee on NGOs reviews and approves the applications and after that the NGO becomes recommended for consultative status. During the next meeting of ECOSOC, the Council reads the recommendations and the Committee’s report and takes the final decision (UN NGO accreditation: the conditions, n.d.). Consultative status does not grant direct access to meetings but is dependent on invitation by the UN bodies themselves, or by member States in order to voice a position. With this status NGOs are not entitled to speak on their own initiative in any of the UN bodies (Koenig, 1991).

Unlike the consultative status, the more formal observer status grants its holder with the opportunity to regularly attend conferences and meetings of the UN bodies. Such unlimited access gives opportunities for greater influence in the processes of decision-making, regardless of the fact that observers cannot vote (Koenig, 1991). Different UN bodies have varying degrees of openness regarding who can be granted observer status. The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s General Assembly, for example, decided in 1996 that "it would not be possible for NGOs to be directly involved in the work of the WTO or its meetings" (as quoted by Membership and Observer Status, n.d.). Other setups, such as the The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which is administered by UNEP, has a more open procedure to admitting observer status NGOs – they need to be qualified in biodiversity protection and conservation, to provide materials proving their affiliation and compliance with requirements and copies of the NGO's charter and bylaws (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2003).

Martens (2005) claims that both the UN and NGOs have good reasons to have an official relationship. NGOs, on one hand, with their access to the UN, have the chance to meet with delegates, obtain information, distribute information and take part in meetings. On the other hand, the UN obtains additional information, important support and advice from NGOs. Furthermore, regarding legitimacy, again it works very well for both parties – civil society organizations benefit from being recognized as actors by an official international institution, while the UN's activities gain a democratic element as CSOs are involved in the official process (Martens, 2005, p. 125). In general, representation by civil society has turned from voluntary to strictly professional and organizations themselves have recognized the importance of allocation of resources for their international presence (Martens, 2005, p. 98-99).

NGOs can be involved in initiating policies, processes of policy development, and policy implementation practices. Regarding the first set of activities, the strength of non-governmental organizations has been provision of information. This, consequently, leads to initiating political processes of which NGOs themselves become part. Official UN channels for providing such information are "annual sessions, committees, meetings, or special officers" (Martens, 2005, p. 46). Another channel for influence has also been lobbying in informal settings. Whatever the means, results show that the supplied information is often used in official UN reports or in the statements of government representatives (Martens, 2005, p. 46).

Furthermore, regarding policy development, policy advice and even policy formulations have been strong assets for NGOs in their dealings with UN agencies. Representatives from the civil society

sector are sometimes invited by UN officials to give advice on a specific issue. On the other hand, representatives from governments often ask NGOs to form part of an official delegation. This could be the case, for example, when documents are being drafted (Martens, 2005, p. 49).

Last but not least, when it comes to policy implementation, the UN system more often than not relies on NGOs. Grassroots organizations carry many advantages which “lie in the proximity to their members or clients, their flexibility and the high degree of people’s involvement and participation in their activities, which leads to strong commitments, appropriateness of solutions and high acceptance of decisions implemented” (UN Doc. A/53/170 III 33 as cited by Martens, 2005, p. 53).

When it comes to environmental NGOs, the bureaus and secretariats of Intergovernmental Environmental Governance (IEG) processes have become eager to attract civil society organizations to their major events, for example, Conferences of the Parties to environmental treaties, the gatherings of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Governing Council of UNEP. The presence of NGO participation becomes an indicator for the media and various stakeholders for the importance of the event. Civil society organizations can play a very important role in establishing public expectations for such events and trying to measure their progress by praising or condemning a process and its eventual success or failure (Foti, Werksman, 2011).

“Good” and “bad” NGOs

Considering the fact that over the past couple of decades the number of NGOs has risen exponentially, it becomes no easy task to evaluate which NGOs are performing and doing well, and which are not. Questions of credibility, capacity, motives and interests arise whenever donors or agencies want to cooperate with organizations operating on the ground. While this paper argues the indispensable role of non-governmental organizations in IPBES, it is essential to point out that not all NGOs are good and reliable. And evaluating their activities and trying to measure their success remains difficult and obscure.

In a draft paper prepared for the Beyond Virtue workshop hosted by the Munk Centre at the University of Toronto on September 2, 2009, the author argues that among the characteristics of “good” NGOs are “tangible attributes such as the number of employees, financial resources, technical and organizational capacity, issue area, location, and formal status. More difficult to identify, but arguably just as important are less tangible qualities like commitment to an ideal,

integrity, access to quality “local knowledge,” and the ability to wisely spend money” (Boulding, 2009).

According to the same paper “the worst-case scenario is an NGO that is dishonest and only seeking aid dollars for private gain, with no intention of carrying out the projects proposed, or no actual capacity to do so”. “How much the tangible and intangible attributes of goodness should be weighted relative to one another? Is it better to give money to a well-intentioned organization with little capacity, or a proven organization with questionable motives?” (Boulding, 2009).

In a paper by Collingwood and Rogister from the Tilburg University in The Netherlands which investigates the perceptions of legitimacy from NGOs and their stakeholders (May, 2005), nine generalizations were made. Regarding the source of legitimacy, “transparency, accountability, and independence of action /principled behaviour” were identified as the primary indicators (Collingwood, Logister, 2005). Support from the public and demonstrating credibility and effectiveness were also among characteristics of legitimate NGOs. Added to these were: catering for established international norms, “acting within established legal, ethical, or political institutions”, being representative, taking part in partnerships, promoting progressive change, and having connections with the grassroots (Collingwood, Logister, 2005). It is another matter, of course, whether NGOs do, in fact, follow these guidelines but it can be inferred that any deviations from the above-described profile would potentially lead to failed and non-reliable organizations.

In the context of IPBES, a strictly intergovernmental process in its nature, it will be a yet another test for civil society to prove that it is reliable, and for governments to show that they have developed ears for a variety of opinions which do not come from states.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

This chapter will examine the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is the setup that IPBES is expected to resemble most closely. It will look at its characteristics and organization. Furthermore, this section will examine the drawbacks of the IPCC and how that relates to IPBES, also in the context of civil society involvement.

The IPCC was created in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). It constituted an effort by the UN to ensure that governments are in possession of an accurate scientific view of the state of the world's climate (Organization history, n.d.). The Panel's first assessment report became the basis for the negotiations leading to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). From that moment on, the IPCC has become a very valuable source of scientific and technical information for the Convention. The Convention-Panel relationship is said to have turned into a model of interaction between decision-makers and scientific knowledge (IPCC history, n.d.). It is no surprise then that the IPBES has been largely set to copy the institutional arrangements of the IPCC.

The current policies and processes of the IPCC to admit observer organizations have been set up since 2006 and amended once in 2009. Those organizations with observer status with any of the UN agencies involved in the IPCC – the WMO, UNEP and UNFCCC, are automatically considered to be observer organizations of the IPCC, subject to the approval of the Panel. Organizations applying for the status need to go through a process in which they have to prove their independence from governments, their non-profit and tax-exempt status and their involvement in the topic of climate change. The latter is reinforced by compulsory submission of information on “the affiliation with other non-governmental organizations or institutions involved in climate change activities as appropriate” (IPCC policy and process for admitting observer organizations, 2009). The process goes through screening by the Secretariat, review by the Bureau and acceptance through consensus by the Panel. Observer organizations are not allowed to Sessions of the IPCC Bureau and the Task Force Bureau. They have access to the Sessions of the Panel and its Working Groups, which, however, does not necessarily grant admission or invitation to workshops, expert meetings or any other closed events. Individual experts from civil society can be invited to contribute to the work progress of the Working Groups (IPCC policy and process for admitting observer organizations, 2009).

The IPCC has been subject to a lot of criticism over the past few years. In 2009, two weeks before the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change, information was leaked allegedly showing how scientists manipulate data to “talk up the threat of global warming” and try to suppress critical views directed at them. Scientists were criticized for being disorganized and lacking transparency. Even though no evidence of fraud was found, the legitimacy of the IPCC was severely damaged (Wright, 2011). The leaked emails between climate scientists were used by climate change sceptics as proof that there is no human-induced global warming (United Nations panel to examine evidence in leaked climate email case, 2009). Even though the allegations turned out to be unfounded, it took the Panel and the UN a lot of time, resources and publicity efforts to try and regain public trust in the IPCC.

Another blow on the legitimacy of the IPCC came in June 2011 when it issued a report on renewable energy. The report claimed that within forty years 77% of the energy that the world needs will come from renewable sources, wind and solar power, in particular. Later it turned out that this ambitious claim came from a very biased source. The basis for the report was built on a paper from the previous year co-authored by a person working at Greenpeace International, and by a renewable-energy organization lobbying the EU on behalf of renewable energy industries working in wind and solar energy. This meant that the main message of the IPCC report came from an environmental activist and a lobby group representing the interests and benefits of those industries (Booker, 2011).

More recently, in November 2011, Ross R. McKittrick, a Professor of Economics at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, published a report called “What is wrong with the IPCC? Proposals for radical reform” in which he put the IPCC’s procedures under scrutiny and highlighted some weaknesses. For example, he criticized the procedures for selecting Lead Authors and the significant flaws in the peer review process (New report: reform or abandon the IPCC, 2011). In his 11 recommendations McKittrick urges for immediate reforms in the IPCC process. Among these are transparency in selecting Lead and Contributing Authors, identifying sections with potentially controversial implications, full disclosure of all the methods and data used for the production of figures and tables, publication of reports before the production of summaries, etc. (McKittrick, 2011).

It seems that these recommendations will be also valid in the IPBES processes. While in its inception period, it is of vital importance for the IPBES to provide regulations like these which would ensure the smooth and unbiased production of reports.

It remains to be seen whether the IPBES will be a replication of the IPCC and to what extent civil society will be involved in determining this outcome. References to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will be made again further in this paper.

Possibilities for NGO participation in IPBES

This section will present the IUCN information paper “Civil society organizations involvement in the IPBES” (October, 2011) prepared for the First Plenary Session to determine the modalities and institutional arrangements for IPBES in Nairobi, Kenya in October 2011. The paper has since been updated and presented at the Second plenary as well. It explains in detail the various options for CSO participation in IPBES.

In the information paper produced by IUCN, three models for civil society organizations involvement are presented – the Minimalist, Policy Development and Ex-Officio models. The key criteria for making these divisions are credibility, salience, legitimacy, ownership, policy impact and transparency. For the sake of this paper’s focus, when referring to NGOs, the term CSOs will also be used, as a synonym.

The Minimalist model is relevant for international institutions which have restricted the most the level of engagement of civil society. In such setups the only option for such engagement is through the submission of research and very limited presence during Plenary deliberation. Furthermore, the experts involved in the process do not engage in direct interaction with policy-makers. The status of such NGOs is of silent observers. The IPCC is one example of this model being put into practice.

The Policy Development model, according to the IUCN information paper, is a setup in which civil society organizations are actively involved. They participate in agenda-setting and policy development. Experts in such setups do in fact work for decision-makers. Engagement is much stronger compared to the Minimalist model. However, the level of participation does not include involvement in governance bodies and NGOs are again limited to silent observers. Therefore, involvement is still quite limited. Examples of such institutions are the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the International Criminal Court, and the OECD Development Assistance Committee.

The Ex-officio model of participation provides ground for extensive and permanent participation of CSOs and regular interaction with governments. In such a setup, NGOs are recognized as participants in the various aspects of the deliberations. Furthermore, they are directly participating in the governing bodies, even though they are still non-voting members. Public debates regarding specific issues are common. A collaborative process is taking place which includes elaborating on

specific products and assessments which do not take into consideration whether participants are members or non-members. In other words, experts work directly with decision-makers. Examples of such institutions are UNAIDS and UNEP Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) (IUCN information paper, 2011).

Part II

Methodology

This section describes the methods used in this dissertation and the reasoning behind them. To clarify, in this paper the use of the term civil society organizations (CSOs) is used as a synonym of the term non-governmental organizations (NGOs), even though the former includes more than just the latter, but also academia and the private sector, among others. I have taken the liberty to adjust the term for efficiency reasons but, nevertheless, acknowledge the fact that the term CSOs is not used exhaustively here.

The research method employed in this paper is qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with representatives from a number of civil society organizations. The chosen method seems the most appropriate, as it gives the opportunity for respondents to shape their own views and observations without being given a straightforward frame in which to do that. The results of these interviews have provided an array of insights regarding the central theme of what the role of NGOs in IPBES is. The open nature of the questions gives space for the respondents to speculate and provide various points of view, which have collectively contributed to answering the central research question.

The interviewees are:

- **Jeffrey McNeely:** Senior Science Advisor at IUCN and liaison person between IUCN and various organizations, such as UNESCO, FAO and the World Bank. Author or editor of more than forty books on environmental subjects and member of the boards of fourteen international journals. Co-founder of the Global Biodiversity Forum. Participant in drafting the Convention on Biological Diversity. Currently Chair of the Policy Committee and on the Board of the scientific organization Society for Conservation Biology. According to UNEP “one of the world’s leading experts on biodiversity, conservation and the economic incentives needed to foster both” (Members and partners: Jeffrey McNeely, n.d.).
- **Bengt (Bege) Gunnar Jonsson:** Professor of Plant Ecology at the Mid Sweden University. Active participant in numerous national conservation projects under the auspices of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency and the Forest Agency of Sweden. Scientific advisor for the Convention on Biological Diversity. Currently a Board member for the European section of the Society for Conservation Biology.
- **Dr. Leon Bennun:** Director of Science, Policy and Information at BirdLife International.

- **Pierre Commenville:** Policy Officer on IPBES at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

The thoughts and opinions of the interviewees are presented. Following, I conducted an analysis as to how the interviewees perceive NGOs in IPBES and their suggestions for possible roles civil society organizations could assume.

Finally, by taking everything into account, in this paper I will try to conclude by summarizing the information and presenting a best-case scenario for non-governmental organizations and their involvement in IPBES.

Interview results¹

In this section the results from the qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews will be presented. Seven main topics can be distinguished from among the questions asked and answers received. The results from the interviews will be presented grouped in seven thematic parts.

Governments and the intergovernmental process

Regarding the intergovernmental nature of the IPBES and the implications from this for civil society participation, Jeffrey McNeely stated that governments “are going to be a lot more protective than we would like them to be. They will do what they want to do and will be looking out for their own interest and will not be terribly interested in having a lot of NGO opinions.” Furthermore, he claimed that governments will be looking out for their own interests and that they don’t like to be transparent. Bege Jonsson added to this that some governments will be skeptical because they want more control over the outputs of IPBES.

Pierre Commenville stressed on the importance of the budget discussions. He claimed that if there is only funding for national and regional assessments, IPBES will not be very inclusive. On the other hand if “it’s about thematic assessments, they will be obliged to draw from knowledge from elsewhere [...], they will need somebody else to identify the good knowledge”. Leon Bennun added on the topic that “it is important that NGO input does not undermine (in reality or in perception) the intergovernmental nature of IPBES” and that “NGOs must, thus, be careful not to over-extend their role within IPBES, which is largely one of technical support”.

Local and indigenous knowledge

On the topic of NGOs as representing local and indigenous knowledge systems responses were similar. All four interviewees recognized this as a positive contribution by NGOs. Bege Jonsson mentioned that in the CBD process it is very common that NGOs represent local communities and indigenous peoples and that this is quite important. According to Jeffrey McNeely, it is a very appropriate role and Leon Bennun added that “this has already been in evidence during the IPBES negotiation process, with substantial involvement and input from a number of NGOs representing

¹ The interview quotes are an accurate account of interviewees’ responses and contain grammatical flaws.

indigenous peoples”. He also stressed that it is important that “IPBES chooses to build in consideration of local and indigenous views and knowledge across all its structures and processes”.

There were also opinions of a different nature. Bege Jonsson mentioned that while umbrella organizations, such as IUCN would play a good role as representing indigenous knowledge, it is good to have a mix of representation of both small and big civil society organizations at intergovernmental meetings. Jeffrey McNeely stated that “a lot of the indigenous local communities would also rather have a more direct input, so not having a gatekeeper”. Furthermore, Pierre Commenville added that IUCN is active with indigenous peoples only in South and Central America and “could be a good broker to try to represent them and coordinate these inputs” if they come from that region.

Pierre Commenville also talked about the “International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIBF) which is a coordination network of indigenous groups and peoples acting in the CBD processes” and is the first instance of such a network.

Advocating for nature

Regarding influencing governments and advocating, the views were overlapping to some extent. Bege Jonsson said that it is important “to try to understand what the governments are up to and use our national and regional contacts to influence and comment on the governments and how they are going to act and deal with the issues in the meeting”. He added that it is quite easier on the European level as “the European states talk with the EU voice” and “if you have contacts within the EU process, you can actually influence what ends up as the EU’s opinions or positions in different topics”.

Jeffrey McNeely added that it is more effective for civil society to influence “before the intergovernmental meetings when helping to prepare the papers. But when decisions are taken, they are taken at the meeting. And if you are not in the room talking with people, arguing your position, then the chances of your position being heard are greatly reduced. So it is important to be there. Not that you need to speak up at the Plenary but to be talking with the governments over coffee or during a side event or all the other things that are going on. But being able to actually argue your perspective is something that’s very important.” Furthermore “while governments are themselves trying to decide what position to hold, that’s the time you can have the most influence. If you talk to them while the cards are still being played, and the discussions are still being held,

then you are more likely to have your voice heard. So timing is a very important part when you try to influence a government and very often the most important decisions are taken before the meeting, not at the meeting.”

Leon Bennun, expressed his view that NGOs could “have a role in picking up IPBES findings and using these to help push governments in the right direction”.

After being to the Second Plenary which officially established IPBES, Pierre Commenville shared that it is very likely that NGOs will be given a capacity building role within the IPBES process. “In this sense advocating and influencing will be a side effect if I can say so, of the mandate because IPBES would provide a mandate to produce some knowledge or to perform some activities but then depending who the mandate will be given to, it would probably help this organization ultimately to be more efficient to advocate or to influence in one way or another.” He stressed on the importance of research centres in Europe, the USA, Africa and Asia which are currently not very visible but could play a role by engaging in “policy relevant knowledge production”.

Differences and similarities with the IPCC

Regarding the IPBES resemblance to IPCC, Bege Jonsson pointed out that the variables that IPCC is dealing with are fewer compared to those for biodiversity. He added that perhaps “one of the reasons that this idea of IPBES has emerged is because the IPCC has been so successful and has been at least contributing, or maybe the main reason why the climate change issue is so high up on the political agenda. So the hope is that IPBES can bring biodiversity issues higher up on the political agenda.” Furthermore, he added that with climate change there are big economical interests and the question will be if it will be similar in the biodiversity area if, or when, it becomes “politically hot”.

Jeffrey McNeely stated that it would probably be the same kind of setup as for the IPCC and that the advantage of this is that governments are already used to it. Pierre Commenville shared the same thoughts that probably the procedures would follow the IPCC template very much “because of the credibility of the assessments and the peer review and the scoping mechanisms to perform what you produce as assessments need to be really robust and transparent“. But he also added that IPBES is expected to deliver more on the side of capacity building “and on this side civil society organizations are really welcome”.

Leon Bennun envisaged that “NGOs should be better integrated to the structures and processes of IPBES, and a much more significant part of its operations, than with IPCC. Recognition of the important role of civil society organisations appears to be significantly greater now than when IPCC began. As an issue, biodiversity is also very different to climate change. With biodiversity and ecosystem services, unlike with climate change, NGOs are key knowledge holders. The local focus of many NGOs also matches with the local nature of biodiversity.”

NGO typologies for inclusion in the IPBES

Bege Jonsson talked about the types of NGOs that might find their way to join the IPBES processes. He said that one issue that needs to be different from the IPCC format is to have a very open attitude and include stakeholders that are not representing governments. He added that it is a good thing if NGOs would take part in the work of IPBES as observers but there needs to be some sort of a system “because you could also get NGOs which are not “friends” of biodiversity wanting to join in – sort-of big industrial interests or economic interests which have another type of agenda, might be destructive for the work. So, filtering who can join is perhaps also relevant to IPBES.”

Pierre Commenville shared IUCN’s role in the Platform processes and said that IUCN, along with a few other organizations, presented information about the benefits for IPBES to build on existing networks, initiatives and programmes. He added that IPBES “will innovate in producing things not only on its own but relying on others”. He also mentioned big NGOs like BirdLife International and Conservation International which also provide knowledge on biodiversity conservation. Mr. Commenville also added that civil society organizations with expertise on capacity building will be really welcome. What is meant by capacity building in his opinion is trying to target “researchers from research centers, research institutes, and academic institutions” which are delegated in developing or countries. in his view, “the idea is that IPBES could implement activities to help those researchers to be present in the big assessments and to be more active in the national or sub-national level by getting involved in, say, scientific advisory boards of protected areas in providing small-scale assessments, in engaging in dialogue with policy makers”, and adds that those are normally NGOs “because that’s the way the collaboration is shaped usually”.

Jeffrey McNeely stated that in his opinion “it’s part of the grand strategy to split interest groups into multiple groups so that they don’t get together. I don’t think governments want to see a united voice that is not government. I think they would rather have multiple voices and then they can choose from what these groups say and even play them off against each other”.

Leon Bennun's opinion on NGO networks was that there are many different kinds and they can be effective by sharing information and speaking with a common voice "that is much louder and clearer than an individual NGO's would be. The BirdLife Partnership is a case in point. IUCN (which is Governmental as well as non-Governmental) is another network that can be effective at collating information, setting standards, and providing co-ordination and leadership. On the other hand, there is a risk that networks become dysfunctional and are effectively taken over by a small clique of organisations claiming to represent a much larger set, in which case their input can become a distorting factor."

Options for NGO involvement in IPBES

Regarding options for NGO involvement in IPBES, Leon Bennun from BirdLife expressed his organization's affiliation with the "Ex-officio model" presented in the IUCN information paper as it gives "greater legitimacy, transparency and credibility for IPBES, but also greater effectiveness in carrying out the platform's functions, across all elements of the work programme". He added that the role of NGOs is to support the intergovernmental process.

Pierre Commenville introduced the discussed option for civil society organizations to work on a mandate provided by IPBES. In his view: "to implement some activities it makes a big difference to have a mandate provided by an intergovernmental platform rather than being legitimized only by your good rationale and your good reputation". He said that before the Second Plenary meeting, there had been hope for the establishment of a mechanism – "something that makes a difference because it legally means that it should be perennial, it should be funded, it should be run by the executive body or by the Secretariat of IPBES, it should be included within the governance of IPBES" and would have a regional structure. However, "governments agreed on endorsing not a mechanism but a function of the Plenary which is to ensure the effective and active participation of civil society" which still leaves the door open to "organize in some way inputs to the Plenary" but is "not a proactive mechanism".

Furthermore, Mr. Commenville stated that governments have expressed concerns over possible chaos in scientific and technical activities if there would be "a broad consultation of civil society organizations about who could be nominated to attend". In the same line of thought he added that if there would be funding only on regional assessments, there could emerge an "impetus for several countries to perform national assessments and in providing a conceptual framework asking for consultation or asking for transparency and also recognizing that there could be divergent views on

an assessment”. He continued that “by essence, by necessity and need, several activities could not be done without civil society organizations. Broadly, everything related to building capacity falls in this case.”

Bege Jonsson’s thoughts on the subject concerned the importance of the IPBES products and that the success of the statements and recommendations is determined on the national level – “if there are active and good NGOs and there is good, firm basis on what is known and what is science, and what is knowledge, then they should be stronger in their own work”. Furthermore, in his opinion the observer status for NGOs would have a two-fold function – it “would contribute to the IPBES process” and it would help “many of these groups to know what’s going on – it is important for their own activities to be aware and know what the IPBES is actually doing”. Expanding on this, he mentioned that a good option to be included in the process is by using personal contacts, as the example of his work within the CBD: “I see all the draft documents from the EU and also have the possibilities to have comments on the EU position papers during the intersessional periods”.

On indigenous knowledge, Mr. Jonsson stressed on the importance of a function to ensure “a peer review system also on traditional knowledge” in order for this type of knowledge to be interpreted. “Because there is lots of important information among indigenous groups that is highly relevant for biodiversity conservation, but there are a lot of non-scientific, mythological or religious beliefs that don’t really represent knowledge, but rather beliefs. No disrespect to people’s religions, but you understand that there is real knowledge that belongs to indigenous peoples that is not known to science but there are also other things that are not truly knowledge. So there has to be some sort of review system.”

One of the suggestions by Jeffrey McNeely was to build IPBES after the example of the International Labour Organization: “I think the best, which I think is impossible, but still, is an ILO kind of body which would have three parts – governments, scientists and civil society. To me that would be the ideal but the chances of that happening are very very small.”

What could go wrong?

Regarding concerns for possible failures of IPBES and its accompanying civil society process, Bege Jonsson said that “the peer review process has to be done in a proper way”. He said that there mustn’t be a political filter and there must be some kind of trust that that “is how science works at presence”. He added that “if the system is such, that there is a sense that there is a sort-of political

pressure of what you can and cannot write, then I don't think that IPBES has any credibility or reason to exist." He also expressed concern over the ability of IPBES to "deliver something that is important for policy" and to "package the information that makes policy sense". If there would be a sort-of political filtering as to who will be on the working groups, "in the end you will not get the right scientists working on the products and assessments". "Then we can forget about the IPBES, it is only going to cost money for products no one is really interested or believe in."

Jeffrey McNeely shared a similar concern as Mr. Jonsson regarding the ability of the Platform and the willingness of governments to appreciate policy options: "maybe not policy directions, but at least policy options, things that they could consider doing".

Pierre Commenville worried that "if there is too little funding or if there is a too weak political will, I fear that IPBES will only perform assessments because we have the resources and means to perform assessments. As I mentioned earlier, it's not the activities in which IPBES could be most inclusive, especially if it's a question of a regional or global assessment."

Leon Bennun said that lots of things could go wrong. However, the main concern would be if IPBES "fails to forge a better link between science and policy, and an effective science-policy dialogue, and continues to produce assessments and other information that are largely ignored by decision makers. Even if these assessments are scientifically excellent, if they are answering question posed only by scientists that would represent a failure. IPBES could also become bogged down in its own bureaucracy, or in political in-fighting amongst Governments, or amongst the UN agencies collectively involved in running it. There is also a considerable risk that IPBES fails to focus sufficiently on capacity building, so that the less developed parts of the world feel disempowered and unable or unwilling to engage. With luck, however, IPBES will be able to avoid these traps, to thrive and to make a real positive difference to our collective futures."

Analysis of interview results

The interviews which were conducted provide a lot of insights on the different aspects of NGO involvement in IPBES. These will be analyzed in this section.

Governments and the intergovernmental process

Regarding the intergovernmental nature of the Platform, **all** interviewees acknowledged that this is a fact that cannot be overlooked. On one hand, governments will restrict NGO inclusion to the Platform's decision-making process because they want to keep that strictly between Governments. This is limiting the activities of civil society organizations. This is true also in a purely practical matter – by restricting the budget. That very practical side might become crucial not only for the execution of the assessments and activities themselves but also would be a sign for the willingness and openness of Governments to a more inclusive Platform, which takes into account the multi-stakeholder nature of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and their conservation.

On the other hand, results point out to another aspect of the CSO-Government relationship – NGOs themselves should be aware of their role in the process and should come to terms with the fact that their support will be complementary, and in any case, only supporting. This fact should not be overlooked as, at the end of the day, it is Governments who make the decisions and it is their decisions that have the most overarching impacts – if they decide to act on them, that is. So, it is evident that the restrictions on CSOs are tangible and it is of great importance that any organization, which wants to be part of the process, acknowledges them and acts within their limits.

Local and indigenous knowledge

On local and indigenous knowledge, all interviewees recognized this as a positive and indispensable contribution by NGOs. It becomes evident that this notion has already been picked up by international processes, like the CBD, as well as from the start of the process of forming the IPBES. But it still requires an effort, and it is expected that the Platform, effectively Governments, will decide, or not, to build in consideration of the existence of this knowledge. This points once again to the decision-making power of Governments which need to take into account indigenous knowledge and integrate it in the science-policy process. This seems especially true for countries, which do have indigenous peoples within their boundaries, and, consequently, civil society

organizations, to push for more recognition of the importance of these knowledge systems for the effectiveness of the Platform. The hope is that all governments will recognize this need and act in consideration of it. If that will not be the case, the Platform will already start at a disadvantage and will fail to ask the most appropriate and timely questions.

Another part of the responses points to a rather different situation in which local and indigenous peoples represent themselves and do not need an “umbrella” NGO to represent them. This is a good opportunity for these actors to enter the process and have a say in it. It could be expected, however, that such groupings will be regarded as another interest group and will, effectively, be considered as part of civil society. Therefore, such groups would most probably have to face the same restrictions as other organizations, unless there is a mechanism established which specifically puts local and indigenous knowledge in a separate category. So far, no such arrangements have been made.

Advocating for nature

The advocacy role of NGOs has been recognized by all interviewees in different aspects. It can be inferred that the most successful advocacy work is expected to take place before intergovernmental meetings. The role of NGOs as providers of knowledge has been recognized, as well as the fact that Governments very often lean on civil society to provide the information necessary to make a decision because NGOs’ biggest asset is information itself.

The ultimate goal of NGOs, to bring forth their knowledge and their expertise in order to push for an agenda which caters for their ideals and visions, is best utilized in the context of preparations for the Plenary meetings. Evidence also shows that organizations can be more successful if they utilize their personal contacts with government officials. This points to a preceding long process of establishment of such relations and stresses the importance of building credibility and trust among the main parties an organization has to deal with – a process of becoming a “good” NGO.

After successful completion of that process, although it should be a never-ending process, an organization might be given a mandate to perform certain work – support assessments, or capacity-building, among others. This would be a big boost to the credibility and image of the organization, which then can more easily enter the policy process and advocate for what it believes in. Even though there is no written rule that this is the case, it seems like a natural path for growth, which also will hold true in the IPBES context.

Lobbying can also take place during intergovernmental meetings. However, obstacles related to budget restrict civil society organizations to attend. That is why it is so important to be able to work on the national level before big decisions are made. Finally, lobbying can also comprise of picking up the IPBES findings in order to push governments by using the already widely approved and accepted knowledge. An interesting observation is that this role should not be underestimated as it can bring diplomatic consequences for governments. Sometimes rejecting what has internationally been accepted as the best way in one policy area, can have wider negative implications on other policy areas, economic implications notwithstanding.

Differences and similarities with the IPCC

As far as thoughts on differences and similarities with the IPCC were shared, a few generalizations can be inferred. Biodiversity issues, unlike climate change, have a more local and diversified nature and, therefore, the role of NGOs is much better recognized now at the inception of IPBES as compared to the beginnings of the IPCC.

Among the respondents it could be noticed that they regard the Panel as a reliable establishment which has brought the climate change issue higher on the political agenda. In general, they acknowledged the successes of the climate change Panel and pointed it as one of the reasons the idea of IPBES was picked up in the first place. Therefore, the processes are expected to more or less follow that template. However, the shortfalls of the IPCC in terms of transparency should not in any case be overlooked in the building of the IPBES. Despite the positive feelings expressed by the interviewees about the IPCC being a role model for IPBES, and even though some acknowledged its failures, the general positive attitude needs to be contained as the Climate Change Panel has gone through a lot of criticism. It is because of this that it is even more important to kick-start IPBES properly and as transparently as possible, in order to ensure that the same mistakes will not happen again.

The need for a more transparent Platform, which takes into consideration the multi-stakeholder process, was also expressed. This raises thoughts as to the extent to which this is wishful thinking, or it will be in fact picked up; whether governments have become more open to interest group influencing; to which interest groups are they more open compared to others, and so on.

NGO typologies and options for inclusion in the IPBES

Regarding typologies of NGOs that are envisaged by the interviewees to participate in the IPBES process, different aspects of the NGO profile can be detected. The capacity building role appears to carry especially significant importance for research organizations whose scientists expect to be included in the assessments carried out by IPBES. This purely scientific role points to a distinction between scientific NGOs and advocacy NGOs. While the former are anticipated to participate in the production of assessments and products by the Platform in a purely scientific role, the latter are expected to be strongest before and after decisions on actions are taken. However, neither role is isolated, so they can complement and reinforce each other if utilized transparently and openly. Another aspect which is connected to the above divisions is the need for the Platform to make a system for filtering and selecting those civil society organizations which have passed a “clearance” test and are proven to be reliable. As the Platform is intergovernmental in nature, this “clearance” will be given by Governments. Therefore, this notion can be referred to what has previously been said on the process of creating reliance and trust in the constituencies of NGOs. Following the IPCC shortfalls, and as interview results show, this becomes of paramount importance for the newly created Platform.

On representation of civil society, organizations like IUCN and BirdLife International seem to be the best-practice cases as they can more successfully represent those civil society actors which do not have the means to physically be at the Plenary meetings. However, a lot of doubt was also expressed. Firstly, this is connected to the obstacles for creating strong actors which are not Governments – a concern by Governments themselves and something to keep in mind and beware of. Secondly, there is also the concern that such big network organizations might turn into “bad” NGOs by representing only a specific fraction of their constituencies, ultimately becoming useless for local and smaller organizations. These two factors, each in its particular way, become real obstacles to fair and equal representation and can have very damaging impacts on the multi-stakeholder process that is hoped to be at the heart of the IPBES.

Regarding options for NGO involvement in IPBES, the “Ex-officio” model and the ensuing features of civil society participation seemed to be the most favoured. Working under a mandate provided by the Platform was seen as a very good opportunity for NGOs to build up their image, area of work and reliability, ultimately positively contributing to the IPBES process. Being granted a mandate can be a good sign as to which civil society actors are most suitable to execute

the Platform's activities on the ground. This can become an incentive and an end goal for those actors to strive to create such a profile for themselves.

The acknowledgement of governments' concerns regarding possible chaos as to which non-state actors can enter the IPBES consultation process is yet another case in point when it comes to guarding the intergovernmental nature of the Platform. This is once again evidence that governments will be inclined to limit the involvement of CSOs in an array of different ways.

Nevertheless, certain roles will, in fact, be assumed by NGOs and expectations are that these roles will be indispensable for the work of the Platform. It needs to be pointed out that this is the case because of the nature of the work content – biodiversity and ecosystem services are essentially local issues. Therefore, the importance of being granted observer status is quite high as it is useful both for the IPBES process but also for the work of NGOs themselves – acquiring knowledge and information not only in the scientific field but also in the political and advocacy fields is an indispensable part of the profile of NGOs.

The interview results show that campaigning in a style similar to that of Greenpeace for example, will not have a place in the IPBES. Reasons include the high scientific nature of the platform. As was mentioned earlier, it is important that NGOs do not overstep their roles and that governments have complete trust in the products that IPBES will deliver so that they are more inclined to use them. This can also be added to shortfalls of the IPCC which need to be avoided if the Platform is to be successful in delivering science for policy-making.

However, from another point of view, it could be expected that exactly because of the IPCC experience, and exactly because there have been shortfalls, it might become important that campaigning NGOs are part of the process. While the channels through which this relationship should take place need to be more clear-cut, campaigning could “do the trick” of actually bringing up those questions and those needs for IPBES which are most pending – what NGOs would be best suited to detect and promote. While kept within limits, widespread campaigning can add value and reliability to the IPBES processes and make it more universally acknowledged and accepted.

The notion to establish a peer review process for indigenous knowledge as well seems appropriate as the indigenous knowledge systems tend to be different from mainstream science and there is a need of bringing the two closer together. However, such a setup would require a lot of resources and this is going to be a part of the big question on the inclusion and recognition of indigenous and

local knowledge in the build-up of the IPBES. This type of knowledge is especially important in the context of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and, unlike other similar intergovernmental setups, indigenous knowledge must be included and must become part of the picture, even if that would mean pooling more resources in order to translate that knowledge into mainstream science and policy.

Last, but not least, a suggestion was made for organizing the Platform in the same way as the International Labour Organization (ILO) – a type of setup which has a three-fold decision-making structure with equal voting power for governments, employers and workers. This adds even more to the vision of the importance of including civil society in the decision-making process of this Platform. However, as the respondent himself ascertains, such a way of organizing is not at all likely to take place. This requires capacity which will most likely not be within the grasp of the IPBES and will not be supported by governments. Further investigation of this model is not going to be the focus here as the probability of it taking place is minimal.

The above two sections are summarized in Figure 2 below. The top row deals with what the most appropriate NGO roles would be in the Platform setup, and the bottom row presents the options for institutional arrangements regarding the work of non-governmental organizations.

Figure 2.



What could go wrong?

What seemed to be the biggest concern of the interviewees regarding the possible scenarios for failure of the IPBES was the prospect of the inability of the Platform to produce knowledge which is relevant for policy. What appears to be the most important is for governments to be willing to listen to policy options and to be able to make informed choices regarding their own policies.

As for the role of NGOs in this process, there is the fear that they will fail to pose the right questions. From this it can be inferred that one of the roles of civil society organizations is to influence the questions being asked by stressing on those which are still pending and which deal with the knowledge that still needs to be developed. This is an extremely important role because of the fact that biodiversity and ecosystem services are such diverse topics that encompass so much information. Consequently, it becomes of paramount importance that all pending questions, not only from governments but also from non-state actors, are acknowledged by the Platform.

Fear of political filtering and lack of transparency in the peer review process was also raised. Special attention needs to be paid in order to avoid that. Unfortunately, NGOs' role in this regard is limited only to try to participate in the selection of scientists by offering lists of names. In the end, it turns out that one of the most important arrangements to ensure the transparency, accuracy and usefulness of the Platform, the selection of scientists who will carry out the assessments, might be decided non-transparently and non-inclusively, i.e. among Governments only. This could be the first crack in the credibility of the IPBES and could prove that what the IPCC has failed to do, providing science for policy, the IPBES will not be able to accomplish either.

Therefore, an interesting and highly anticipated moment will be the establishment of rules and regulations regarding the decisions on who is going to be part of which assessment, who will be granted observer status, who will be given authority to participate in the peer review process or in the capacity building activities, among others. These questions will be crucial for the future success or failure of the Platform and non-governmental organizations need to take the initiative and try to influence these rules and regulations by using different channels, including the ones presented above.

Last but not least, the question of funding is also a sensitive issue and it can be inferred from the interviews that the establishment of rules and procedures for this is also going to be crucial for the future of IPBES and its nature – inclusive or not. Regarding funding there is not much civil society

organizations can do to influence those decisions, as they themselves will have to rely on this budget for implementing any sort of activity within IPBES. This is another crucial decision that will determine the fate of NGO involvement in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Conclusion and recommendations

Non-governmental organizations have their special role to play in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The research which was conducted revealed different aspects of this issue and based on this, a collective image of NGOs at IPBES can be constructed.

The most successful NGOs will:

- Try to influence the policy process before decisions are being taken at the Plenary sessions by building up personal relationships with their constituencies, especially Governments, based on trust, reliability, transparency and possession of valuable information;
- Recognize the importance of being at the Plenary sessions and, either formally through the UN observer status, or informally through side events and informal discussions with policy makers, will try to “sell” their most valuable assets;
- Recognize among these assets the importance of representing local and indigenous knowledge, the ability to ask the right questions to the right people and processes, the significance of picking up the IPBES findings and being instrumental for their endorsement by governments;
- Acknowledge the power of reputation and strive to build one for themselves. They will embrace the opportunity that a mandate by the IPBES can give them both in terms of the nature of work, most likely connected to capacity building, but also because of the opportunity to progress with their own programme, vision and goals;
- Regard the IPCC arrangements as a good reference point but will strive for better and more inclusive recognition because of the nature of the work itself – they will try to match the local needs of biodiversity and ecosystem services with a corresponding arrangement.

The activities of these NGOs may, however, be limited and incomplete. The intergovernmental nature of the Platform will allow only so much freedom for civil society, and organizations will have to acknowledge this and progress in that context. Even so, this will most probably be a positive notion, as long as certain rules are observed by governments themselves – the rules and regulations for appointing knowledge providers, regardless whether national or civil society representatives, need to be as clear-cut as possible. Once this becomes reality, the supporting role of non-governmental organizations will assume a suitable, although still limited, nature.

In recognizing the limitations of this paper, it needs to be acknowledged that further investigation would provide the opportunity to expand and go deeper into many of the above findings by trying

to understand the underlying causes for them. This paper provides the basis for further research, including when the IPBES establishes its institutional arrangements. Then, other questions will become pending. Issues, such as how, under what conditions and with what instruments NGOs take part in the IPBES processes, will become the focus of research.

Finally, even though the content of the Platform is rather specific and unique for that type of intergovernmental setup, it appears that the role for civil society will not be that much different as compared to other such setups. There will again be actors who will completely disregard civil society's standpoints, and actors who will heavily rely on them. There will again be questions of reliability and truthfulness, and reluctance to accept unfitting notions. There will again be those who will shout and point fingers, and those who will use the power of information and diplomacy to reach their goals. There will be those with questionable goals and hidden agendas, but there will also be those who honestly believe that there is actually a point in this exercise and that biodiversity and ecosystem services degradation need a global response. This holds true for governments and NGOs alike.

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Appendix I: Interviews**1. Bengt Gunnar Jonsson, interview via Skype, 5 April 2012**

Enitsa Gabrovska: E

Bengt Gunnar Jonsson: B

E: Thank you very much for having this call with me. I really appreciate it. So, I don't know if you had the chance to look at my questions?

B: Yes, I looked through them and we can have a discussion on this. Just to make this clear, you are working on a PhD product related to this issue?

E: No, it's a bachelor dissertation, in fact.

B: Oh ok.

E: It's not on a PhD level for sure because I am also limited with time.

B: It seems quite timely because these issues are ongoing right now so it sounds like a good product.

E: That's what I thought as well and there are many unanswered questions and I thought it is better to discuss them beforehand. Because if it is already decided, there is not so much...

B: And you have a chance to some time follow up also what actually came out in the end.

E: That would be nice, maybe for the Master's thesis.

B: You have done half of the work already.

E: Actually, another question I have, what is role of the Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) that you are part of?

B: We are organizing conservation scientists, broadly speaking, so we are a professional or learned society, as is the professional term. As an organization we organize individual persons, which is a bit different from some other places like the IUCN or Diversitas or ICSU that are umbrella organizations for organizations. So from that perspective we are slightly different from the other scientific organizations involved in IPBES. Uhm.. We have, I don't know what the correct number is right now, but somewhere between 5 and 10 thousand members worldwide.

E: It's quite a lot.

B: Yeah, it's been going down because it seems to be a global trend that societies ask for membership fees and active involvement has not been very popular so we have been declining a bit but still we are among the larger ones in this field so.. And we are organized in regional sections, so, 7 sections distributed over the world and obviously I am mostly part of the Europe section.

E: Alright, let's move on to the core of our talk. So basically I started looking into this more or less with the paper produced by IUCN on the options for the involvement of civil society in IPBES and, well, pretty straightforward, which one do you think is most appropriate although you kind of gave an answer to that question on the forum but maybe it would be better to...

B: Yeah. Well mine and our starting point on these perspectives of course would be, IPBES should be a science-policy dialogue thing and it's a little bit strange if science and scientific organizations are not sort-of integrated into the governance structure. As a general stakeholder, it would be a little bit strange. So of course the more trust is given to scientists in the organization of IPBES that is something that we would be very happy for. So I mean the Ex-officio model is the one which provides the most access to, maybe not to the decisions, but at least to the discussions the decisions that will be made on.

E: How do you see NGOs in particular being part of this process? Because you said, with scientists it's a bit natural that they are part involved.

B: I don't want to indicate any sort of disrespect toward environmental NGOs whatsoever, I belong to several myself. They have of course an important role to play here, but I would have been more happy if there had been a distinction between what you could call knowledge providers and knowledge users among the stakeholders. Of course, in one sense every organization can be a user of the knowledge that is derived out of the IPBES process but not everyone is going to be a knowledge provider. We have scientific organizations and we also have organizations that work with the traditional knowledge and so on, which will hopefully be a component in IPBES. I think it would have been very good if there had been a distinction made between these two main groups of stakeholders or civil society organizations.

E: That leads me to the other question, what should NGOs do then in this setup?

B: Well, from the scientific NGO point of view I think we should, what end to start with, I mean, there are few things that is going to be debated and is not obvious. I would think that scientific NGOs should be allowed to nominate experts for the working groups or the executive bureau, or whatever, or the science panel, whatever it is going to be called. And I would also think it would be very good if there would be a process for such organizations to suggest themes and topics for review or assessment. To what extent other NGOs, other stakeholders, more the knowledge users, should be allowed to sort of suggest topics for review, I don't have a very strong opinion on that. I see that from their perspective of course that would be very valuable. But you could also imagine a situation where IPBES would have to deal with hundreds, maybe thousands, of requests for reviews or in-depth analysis and so on. So I guess it is a question of the capacity of IPBES and how much they can manage.

E: Okay. And then, moving a little bit down on the process, what about when there are finally products brought out, because it's a science-policy interface in the end, so all the science is supposed to feed into the policy in some way or another...

B: Yeah, I mean, environmental NGOs, and NGOs in general, they are of course part of the policy process to formulate what we should do or not do more on the national and regional level and of course the hope from everyone is that the IPBES can provide a solid knowledge base for that process. I think I can say that I can also see that, I am a little bit involved in the Convention on Biological Diversity, and if that has any consequences in reality, if it actually means something, it depends if we on the national level actually use the statements and the conclusions and the recommendations that come out of that process. I think it's gonna be the same with the IPBES, that if there are active and good NGOs and there is good, firm basis on what is known and what is science, and what is knowledge, then they should be stronger in their own work.

E: Is that connected to governments endorsing what comes out as recommendations, and then governments working with NGOs, or NGOs by themselves working on the ground?

B: I would assume that would look very different in different countries depending on how the political situation is. But in the end I should say, if something has been taken through the whole IPBES process and in one sense been accepted as the truth, for a government it would be much more difficult on the national level to say "we don't care about this, it's irrelevant" or "we don't believe in this". Of course, it's not only giving better knowledge but it's also giving an accepted knowledge which means that it has more political strength. Which I guess is one of the reasons that some countries are hesitant, or skeptical, and want to control the output of the IPBES process to a larger extent.

E: In what sense?

B: I mean it is very much both the nomination, who is going to do the work, who is going to decide who is going to be on the working groups. And if governments are in control of that, they can make sure that they get the kind of persons they like on those working groups. And in the end, when the report is ready, a question is how it should be accepted or adopted by the government Plenary. Is it only sort-of the summaries, or could they actually say no to an underlying larger report just because they don't like the results that are there? So what kind of political filtering could be expected, or feared, in the process?

E: That's one of your fears as representing scientists or?

B: It's one of the things you have to keep an eye on. What we have been stressing is that if there isn't an independent scientific peer review process that goes through the documents and sort-of guarantee that this is good science and if there would be sort-of political filtering in the end you will not get the right scientists working on the products and assessments. It's not going to be

interesting for a scientist to take part in that work. Then we can forget about the IPBES, it is only going to cost money for products no one is really interested or believe in.

E: Do you think NGOs on the national level have the capacity to actually, well enforce would the wrong word because they cannot, but to pressure in one way or another the public on one side to be more active and government on the other side, for the same thing I guess?

B: Are you relating to the results, the knowledge that comes out, or how governments act within the IPBES?

E: No, once the results are out and once this knowledge “truth” you are referring to is.

B: Whatever truth is, you can always debate but the best available knowledge at present. Yeah, I mean, I would hope and think that it would be actually a powerful tool, that it would be a sharper tool to use at the national level also for NGOs because if that information has come out from a global scientific process and the results have been basically accepted by governments globally, it is going to be very difficult for national governments to say “we don’t believe in this, this is just another opinion” and so on.

E: Because through the process of researching these topics, I found that these are topics which are not so widely known, especially regarding biodiversity, people don’t know, they are not informed. So I thought, maybe, in this sense, NGOs could have a role because, climate change for example was made huge, but that was also a lot easier to understand while biodiversity is so diverse and country specific that it is just...

B: It is of course more problematic. The comparison with the Climate change panel is interesting and no-one should say that their work is easy but at least the variables they are dealing with are not that many compared to biodiversity. On the other hand, I guess one of the reasons that this idea of IPBES has emerged is because the IPCC has been so successful and has been at least contributing, or maybe the main reason why the climate change issue is so high up on the political agenda. So the hope is that IPBES can bring biodiversity issues higher up on the political agenda.

E: Okay, but regarding the success of IPCC, naturally it is, but I came across many pieces and many articles and news regarding the, how do you say that, credibility of the science that comes out of it. And I was a bit shocked, actually, about the Greenpeace scandal, let’s say. I am thinking, how do you prevent that from happening? Maybe it’s a lesson to be learned?

B: It’s a lesson to be learned. I mean, that might be the easiest way to say it. I don’t have an answer myself how you can avoid these things but of course just knowing that it can happen is very important. Now, what is true and not true about the failure of the IPCC to deliver correct data, or information, that’s also a matter of discussion. I think there is big economical interest in the energy sector that likes to discredit the IPCC as a process. We have the US, where a large part of the political establishment doesn’t even think there is climate change, I mean, they are fighting a very

special fight. The question is if it is similar in the biodiversity area. Yes, maybe it is, but it has not been that politically hot and we haven't seen that sort of challenge yet. But it is something that we have discussed within the SCB also, is that if the IPBES becomes a strong player, if it so that science gets closer to policy and decision-making, we can also expect we will be scrutinized much more, our statements and opinions. The question would immediately come, well what is the evidence for what you are saying, can you show us the research studies that can actually prove you are right? And so far, I think, in the conservation and related ecology, it has been pretty easy to have opinions. And opinions sometimes have not been well founded on actual evidence and scientific study. So I think there could be an interesting challenge for conservation science in the future, that we have to be much more stringent and base our statements on what we really know and what really has been proven.

E: But in the end this is a good thing?

B: In the end it is a good thing. The only thing is that one has to also bring along the precautionary principle on the same trip. Because if you always look for the scientific evidence that a certain activity is bad for biodiversity, then you sort-of turn around the burden of proof. And by tradition it has been the exploiting activity to show that there is no problem of the activity.

E: But the mere fact, I think, as you said, that climate change was a hot political issue, that is by itself a big step because it makes people hear it and know about it.

B: Absolutely. I don't think science should be feared of being scrutinized or questioned, this is basically a good thing. Scientists are used to being questioned from the peer review system. It's always there that you get questions and you have to stand up for your research. So we should be prepared to be scrutinized by external interests. Hopefully the system would be similar to the peer review process and it is managed independently from those working groups who did the assessment. An independent review system finds reviewers which are not affiliated or connected to the people who actually did the assessment. So the basic principle is going to be the same but sort-of how it's going to be organized in details, that's another question and something which is going to be discussed in Panama but I am not sure if they will settle on the details. I mean the IPCC has a double review system. First, the draft of the report goes to a scientific review, and then the authors revise their manuscript and then it goes out to a second review which goes to both science and policy experts. Maybe there's going to be something similar. I think this two-step procedure seems to work so that you get the science right first but then you get a second round where people who know how policy, politics, decision-making go through the text to make sure that it becomes relevant in a policy perspective and then suggest changes that make it more relevant. And hopefully then it would be easier for those texts to also pass through all these acceptance, approval and adoption systems that the IPCC uses.

E: What I wanted to say just now, back to my topic a little bit, the engagement of NGOs. In the IPCC, for example, NGOs were quite limited in their presence there. So the process was being accused of not being entirely transparent. What do you think about that?

B: That's probably true. There have been a lot of voices saying we cannot just copy the IPCC format and use that for IPBES. One of those issues has been how to include those NGO stakeholders that are not representing governments. I would hope that it would be a very open attitude. I don't see any major problem for the process if there would be NGOs as observers and taking part in the work of IPBES – I think that's only positive. And as long as there are not two-thirds of governments who oppose the observer status of a particular NGO, then they are welcome as observers. Some sort of streaming might be necessary because you could also get NGOs which are not friends of biodiversity (☺) wanting to join in – sort-of big industrial interests or economic interests which have another type of agenda, might be destructive for the work. So, filtering who can join is perhaps also relevant to IPBES. But as the suggestions are right now, it could be quite open for various NGOs to join in.

E: And in your personal opinion, apart from scientific NGOs, what would be their input? Okay, they could be observers and they suggest topics perhaps, but other than that, or limited to that?

B: Well, being present there as an observer would fill two purposes. First, you would contribute to the IPBES process but of course it is also important for many of these groups to know what's going on – it is important for their own activities to be aware and know what the IPBES is actually doing. Therefore, it is a two-sided thing that would make it important for NGOs to join in. I would hope that their specific perspectives are important. What is quite common in the CBD and the previous IPBES meeting is that there are a lot of NGOs representing local communities, indigenous people groups. I think that perspective is very important to have because a lot of the science and the knowledge we are producing and think is important, doesn't necessarily have to be relevant from a local community perspective or the perspective of indigenous people. So I think their presence there and their voice is important.

E: As far as indigenous knowledge is concerned, how is that going to be intertwined with mainstream science?

B: That's a very big question and I don't have a straightforward answer. The only answer I have is that there has to be a peer review system also on traditional knowledge. Someone who can actually interpret this knowledge. Because there is lots of important information among indigenous groups that is highly relevant for biodiversity conservation, but there are a lot of non-scientific, mythological or religious beliefs that don't really represent knowledge, but rather beliefs. No disrespect to people's religions, but you understand that there is real knowledge that belongs to indigenous peoples that is not known to science but there are also other things that are not truly

knowledge. So there has to be some sort of review system. That's something that is being discussed and is recognized as something that needs to be solved.

E: Regarding representation of local communities, you said that there has been good representation but in fact...

B: Yeah, good or good, there are also umbrella organizations for these groups and they seem to have the resources to be present but that's an issue for NGOs, including the SCB, that going to Panama for 10 days, that's a big cost. I would assume that many NGOs would have a problem of actually finding resources to attend on a regular basis.

E: Regarding the umbrella organizations, that's a way to be present?

B: Yeah, I mean, on the scientific view we have IUCN which is really big when it comes to organizing sort-of not just independent NGOs but also state, national organizations and I think those will have an important role to play.

E: In the end, organizations like IUCN, maybe that's a better solution than individual observers?

B: I think there should be a mix because by having a big umbrella organization might mean that the people that might go might not have direct contact with specific expertise that is needed. When we are selling, or discussing why SCB should be present at this meeting is that we have a direct link with the researchers that might get involved in the actual work. While umbrella organizations are one step beyond that link because they work towards organizations that work towards individuals.

E: But ideally one NGO represents one point of view or one group working on the same thing so it's more or less, well it's not individual representation but it's interest representation.

B: Yeah. I think it should be a mix of both. Ideally, everyone should be able to be there but in practice that will not happen for economical reasons. So those organizations that have the economic possibilities to send representatives, of course they should be allowed to be present if they want to be observers but for some interest groups that might not be feasible. So they need to sort-of join in and be represented jointly by several organizations.

E: But do you think that the only way these interest groups can influence what's going on is only by being there, because that is a bit discouraging if you are an NGO and think, okay, if the only way to influence things is by being there, well of course, when you cannot...

B: Then we go back to the Minimalistic model of IUCN. If we would end up in a situation where they could only be silent observers, I think that would be sad, actually. And it would probably limit the interest of many NGOs to participate at all and that would be bad I think. So some sort of speaking rights is a minimum that should be allowed.

E: What about the time between these meetings? Maybe that would be a window of opportunity. I mean, decisions are being discussed and decided also in the periods between two meetings in this

example. I mean, for me it's a bit strange that the only way that you can influence the outcome of something is by physically being there.

B: I guess NGOs have to consider what the best strategies to work are. We at SCB, we are going to be there, but of course we have not just been sitting and waiting for the next meeting. We have tried to understand what the governments are up to and use our national and regional contacts to influence and comment on the governments and how they are going to act and deal with the issues in the meeting. So I mean there are always possibilities to act. I guess what the former roles of NGOs in the intersessional periods would be, I don't think that has been really addressed besides the question on who can actually put requests for assessments and studies to the IPBES.

E: What about what you just mentioned, that organizations like yours are communicating with governments by feeding knowledge. You can sort of pressure them to take specific standpoints in Panama?

B: On a European level it's convenient that all the European states talk with the EU voice. At least so far and if you have contacts within the EU process, you can actually influence what ends up as the EU's opinions or positions in different topics. I know that our US colleagues also have had a number of contacts within the US delegation and have been pushing for some things they think it is more important. Whether that will influence the outcome is difficult to say, but it is an alternative way to act and try to give some sort of input to the process.

E: And do you think that you do finally have input in the position. For example, there is a EU delegation going to Rio+20 and they have designed their own opinion as to what they will represent. But for example IUCN will make a briefing session to the delegation, basically to present what IUCN will say there, hoping that they will influence the standpoint of the EP.

B: That's a formal and official way to try and be influential and organizations like the IUCN are probably big and strong enough to get attention from an EU delegation. For smaller organizations it can be of course much more difficult to formally get their hands on the EU delegation. What we have done is that we are using personal contacts. For example for me, I see all the draft documents from the EU and also have the possibilities to have comments on the EU position papers during the intersessional periods. So there are other ways to utilize the context that you might have.

E: But that's really nice that you have that. And it's also a little bit easier as you say in Europe, compared to developing countries.

B: These international negotiations are very interesting processes because it doesn't matter if you are an island state in the Pacific, if you still disagree, you can block the process. You do have power even if you are small, and your voice is heard. So even an NGO in a smaller developing country perhaps if they can actually influence what their person going to this meeting, what he/she will say, it can actually matter. Those unofficial contacts can actually be good.

E: One more question: what do you think could be drawbacks for IPBES's work and what do you think could go wrong?

B: I think to work, the peer review process has to be done in a proper way. There cannot be a strong political filter in the end. There has to be trust, or acceptance that this is how science works at present. There needs to be some sort of adoption, approval process for these main summaries that go to the Plenary for approval but the underlying basic reports, the compilation of the available information, that cannot be a political filter. If the system is such, that there is a sense that there is a sort-of political pressure of what you can and cannot write, then I don't think that IPBES has any credibility or reason to exist. So, that's from the scientific point of view. Then, you can also ask, is IPBES going to deliver something that is important for policy? Is it able to package the information that makes policy sense? And that is a difficult thing, I think. As a researcher I am not very good at that so the question is how do we make the findings in the form that they actually influence decision-making.

E: And who do you think is responsible for that?

B: To some extent, it's going to be the working groups which provide these outputs, reports, and summaries of their work. That's a part of that.

E: I think we've exhausted my questions so I think that would be it. Thank you very much for your time.

B: I hope it comes out well and you have a chance to write a good thesis.

E: I hope so, too.

2. Jeffrey McNeely, interview via telephone, 13 April 2012

Enitsa Gabrovska: E

Jeffrey McNeely: J

E: What is your opinion on the information paper produced by IUCN on the options for civil society involvement in IPBES? Do you think it will become reality or not?

J: I think that governments will decide what they want to do and I think that they are going to be a lot more protective than we would like them to be. They will do what they want to do and will be looking out for their own interest and will not be terribly interested in having a lot of NGO opinions. That's what I worry about.

E: Why do you think that is?

J: Because that's the way governments behave at these meetings. Not all governments, I should quickly clarify that, but all it takes is a few. If it's just two or three governments that are against

something, they can prevent it from happening. So governments like China, USA, sometimes Brazil, Malaysia, sometimes India. There is a handful of governments who really want to keep this an intergovernmental process rather than a more open multi-input kind of process. That's just my opinion. I'm not going. I attended the previous ones and I've done the best I could. We have people who are going and I am also the chair of the policy committee of the Society for conservation biology (SCB). We have also prepared a paper which is rather similar to that of IUCN. And we will have people there representing SCB and we'll see what happens. I think that ICSU will also be pushing very hard to be the spokesperson for the scientific community and they might be a little bit protective of what they see as their leadership. So rather than being part of a team, they would like to be the leader.

E: Where does that put IUCN then?

J: Well, we'll see. I don't know.

E: What would be the best case scenario?

J: I think the best, which I think is impossible, but still, is an ILO kind of body which would have three parts – governments, scientists and civil society. To me that would be the ideal but the chances of that happening are very very small.

E: Going back to the roles of NGOs, I don't know if you had the chance to look at my questions, but I will go back to them because I think that's important. What do you think about the role of NGOs as sort of gateways, or the link, to local and indigenous knowledge. Do you think that this could be a special role for NGOs?

J: I think that would be a very appropriate role for NGOs. Some are much better than others at this. Still, I think NGOs can do that better than most governments and indeed it would be an appropriate role. But I think that a lot of the indigenous local communities would also rather have a more direct input, so not having a gatekeeper. But how that would work, nobody has really come up with a very clear way to make that happen because as you know very well these communities are tremendously diverse groups. They speak a lot of different languages; they have lots of different levels of educational background, lots of different interests. They are far from being a coherent group. Of course, governments aren't either. But still, there is a lot of diversity within indigenous peoples which is what makes them so valuable. I think that it's important that their voices be heard and NGOs can play an important role helping to promote that.

E: But you are saying that because they are so diverse, it's very difficult to represent different groups. I had a conversation last week with one of your colleagues from Sweden, Mr. Bege Jonsson, and he mentioned the fact, which actually surprised me, basically he said if you are not able to physically be at the Plenary sessions, it's very difficult to have your voice heard. Do you agree with that?

J: I think here are two ways of influencing things. The more effective one is before the intergovernmental meetings when helping to prepare the papers. But when decisions are taken, they are taken at the meeting. And if you are not in the room talking with people, arguing your position, then the chances of your position being heard are greatly reduced. So it is important to be there. Not that you need to speak up at the Plenary but to be talking with the governments over coffee or during a side event or all the other things that are going on. But being able to actually argue your perspective is something that's very important.

E: In that sense then, these networks of NGOs, for example the case with IUCN which is sort-of representing, convening factor, and through IUCN smaller NGOs, we are not talking just about local knowledge or indigenous knowledge but in general, by IUCN being there it is, I don't know...

J: Well IUCN has a special status because it is not really just an NGO because we have about 80 governments that are members of IUCN. And we have an observer status at the UN which we are the only ones who have that, and so we have a way of talking directly to governments that other groups might not have. But ICSU would probably claim that they do too and I think with some justice.

E: But ICSU, aren't they simply a scientifically oriented?

J: Yes, they are exactly that. And IUCN is much more looking at the link between science, policy and action on the ground.

E: Okay. Another question that I have and think is appropriate in this case is the comparison with the IPCC. Do you think there will be a different role for NGOs in IPBES compared to IPCC?

J: I hope so. The IPCC has evolved and I think that NGOs can play many different roles. A lot of people who are outside governments are often working with governments and on the government input on the IPCC documents. So, that's good. And maybe that's what we can expect out of IPBES. When papers start to get written, the governments that would typically have to do the work by themselves, will draw on their national universities, scientists and NGOs to help them draft the papers. We can hope for that. But still, the government will end up approving the papers. All NGOs can do is provide input to them, which is a lot better than nothing.

E: Is that different then or do you think it is going to be the same setup basically

J: It sounds to me that it is the same sort of setup. The advantage of the same kind of setup is that governments are already used to it.

E: Regarding IPCC again, I was reading on this topic and I came across a lot of critical articles and critical standpoints regarding the transparency of IPCC and that was accused of not being very open to the multistakeholder groups involved in the IPCC. Because for me I think it's the most important to be transparent. Really what comes out and is supposed to be true science is as much

true science as possible. So, the way you reach that outcome is supposed to be transparent. Do you think that was the case?

J: I think that governments don't like to be transparent. That's the reason that they insist on having the final word. We all think democracy is great but it isn't really democracy in the sense that governments will do what special interest groups want them to do. Because there are a lot of different special interest groups. And we tend to think that NGOs and environmental groups and scientist are somehow special but governments, many governments anyway, see scientists as just another special interest group. And there is also the private sector who is a special interest group but they have money. And their money goes to supporting politicians and supporting political parties and so they have a different way of influencing governments. So, I think that it's going to be an interesting negotiation but governments are still going to want to keep the final word on anything that comes out and maybe what we, we being the scientific community, need to do is to do everything we can to make sure that the papers IPBES produces are of the highest quality and then feel free to criticize them when they come out and play a supporting role and, say, a friendly opposition. Or a friendly critic of the products that come out.

E: And how do you ensure that quality of the work that comes out?

J: You know, a lot of it is going to be, you know people will say it's science but really what we are interested in, we being SCB because I can't really speak for IUCN, what we are trying to do is provide science that can support some policy making and we really see the link between science and policy being very important. Governments would rather just have the science and leave the policy up to them. And you've seen that with the IPCC. So the IPCC does not give policy advice. And I think most of us would like to give policy advice. We think that's what governments need.

E: So that would be the ultimate goal for the new Platform for scientists?

J: I think that different scientists will have different perspectives on this which is good. There is no reason why science should have one perspective on this, but I know that for the SCB we definitely want to provide science that is going to be useful for policy.

E: But isn't that the idea of this Platform? That is my impression at least.

J: Well let's see if governments will accept that as the idea. I think it still remains to be seen.

E: Yeah but then it's just, I mean, why would you create something new and put so much money in something that is not gonna do what it was initially not decided but what was the initial idea, or at least what I got out of it, that science will be produced but true science which would then feed into policy.

J: That's definitely the idea.

E: But you are saying that it's not sure that that's gonna happen.

J: I think there's nothing certain until it happens. So, it's something I worry about. I remain hopeful that the policy element would be frequently mentioned and accepted by governments who would appreciate policy options. Maybe not policy directions, but at least policy options, things that they could consider doing. And then each government would decide for itself what it's going to do. It's the same with IPCC. Governments will decide for themselves what they are going to do.

E: Yes, in the end, all efforts depend on that. And what do you think about NGOs which are working on the ground and scientists – how they come together? I mean, also for example, on the website of the IPBES there is the stakeholder section and scientists and NGOs are in different groups. Where do you think they come together?

J: I think it's difficult for them to come together. I think that it's part of the grand strategy to split interest groups into multiple groups so that they don't get together. I don't think governments want to see a united voice that is not government. I think they would rather have multiple voices and then they can choose from what these groups say and even play them off against each other.

E: Why?

J: Because that's what governments do. Look at the major governments, and what they are doing is making decisions. And they don't want to have special interest group telling them what to do. They want to decide for themselves what to do. They think that's why they were elected. So, the strategy is to listen, to have all these different special interest groups out there in different categories and let them speak and listen to them. And then, based on what they hear from these different special interest groups, make a decision that they want to make.

E: And do you think that's a satisfactory setup?

J: I think it's clever on the part of governments. I am not sure if it leads to the best decision. But I don't know what the best decisions are either. I would hate to be responsible for the world. Would you like to be in charge of the world? 😊

E: Uhm, no. I don't want to think about that. No.

J: Yeah, it's difficult. I think we should give credit to the governments for doing the best they can while also being disappointed that they can't do better.

E: That's for any factor in politics, I guess.

J: Yes.

E: Okay. I think we've exhausted my questions. I have just one more question, you mentioned that it's more useful for civil society to work with governments before intergovernmental meetings for preparing their standpoints but I think that you are actually referring to scientists, right?

J: Well, for anybody. For NGOs too. But this is for anybody who wants to influence a government position, it is much more likely to be successful before the meeting and before the government has made its decision. So while governments are themselves trying to decide what position to hold,

that's the time you can have the most influence. Because governments themselves do not have a single universal view. The different ministries within a government, they hold quite different views. So, the ministry of agriculture and a ministry of science and a ministry of foreign trade might have totally different views on, for example, GMOs. So what is the government going to decide? Well, they will decide something, but if you want to have influence on them, the time to do it is before they've made their decision. If you wait until they've made a decision, you're just causing trouble because they have already made their decision. If you talk to them while the cards are still being played, and the discussions are still being held, then you are more likely to have your voice heard. So timing is a very important part when you try to influence a government and very often the most important decisions are taken before the meeting, not at the meeting.

E: okay. I think that's it. So, I'd like to say that I am really thankful that you took the time and if you would like, I think that's anyway good, I will share it with you and you could say if you agree on how I quoted you or how I used the information you gave me. If you would want, if not, I am also fine.

J: I'd be happy to look at your paper and give you comments.

E: That's great. Thank you very much!

J: Good luck!

3. Leon Bennun, interview via email, 26 April 2012

Enitsa Gabrovska: E

Leon Bennun : L

1. In what role (considering the three models for engagement presented by IUCN: Options paper for the involvement of civil society organizations in an intergovernmental platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services - UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/INF/6) do you think NGOs could be most effective?

We favour the 'ex officio' model, for the reasons outlined in the IUCN paper – greater legitimacy, transparency and credibility for IPBES, but also greater effectiveness in carrying out the platform's functions, across all elements of the work programme. Overall, the role of NGOs is to support what is, and needs to be, an intergovernmental process – through providing information, generating new

knowledge, developing and disseminating policy tools and building capacity. These are all roles that many NGOs are already fulfilling, which now need to be linked into the IPBES framework.

2. NGOs can be extremely effective when it comes to campaigning and awareness-raising. How will that role be utilized in relation to IPBES? What should NGOs campaign about?

While NGOs can contribute in many ways to IPBES, it is important that NGO input does not undermine (in reality or in perception) the intergovernmental nature of IPBES. The main problem that IPBES was set up to solve is the lack of penetration into policy of information and assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services. If this is to improve, Governments must have complete comfort and confidence in the structures, processes and products of IPBES. NGOs must thus be careful not to over-extend their role within IPBES, which is largely one of technical support. It is not clear that there is any appropriate NGO role related to campaigning. However, NGOs may be helpful in promoting linkages at national level, with local and indigenous communities, academia, businesses, other NGOs and potentially even among different departments of Government (including focal points for different MEAs) – sometimes it is easier for NGOs to convene a multi-department forum than for Government to make it happen internally. Internationally they could also help disseminate IPBES products and information, raise awareness of policy tools and promote best practice approaches.

3. NGOs have very strong local presence. Do you think NGOs can be a factor in voicing the local needs as well as local knowledge (including indigenous knowledge) on the international level? If yes, why? If not, why not? How do you think this voice can be made stronger?

Yes, certainly and this has already been in evidence during the IPBES negotiation process, with substantial involvement and input from a number of NGOs representing indigenous peoples. Other NGOs too that are working at local level can bring local perspectives and knowledge to bear in IPBES discussions. This voice can be made stronger if IPBES chooses to build in consideration of local and indigenous views and knowledge across all its structures and processes. The importance of these views and knowledge is already recognised in IPBES decisions and documentation, but this has yet to be translated into practical reality.

4. How effective can NGOs be in terms of pressuring governments to adopt specific laws or positions on biodiversity before and after big intergovernmental negotiations?

The answer can only be – that depends! Some governments are more receptive, and some NGOs more effective, than others. Not sure why this question is being asked in the context of IPBES? Certainly NGOs have a role in picking up IPBES findings and using these to help push

governments in the right direction. Within the IPBES process, however, NGOs must be very cautious about appearing to act primarily as advocates (see above).

5. Do you envisage a different type of engagement for NGOs compared to the IPCC format? What has changed regarding NGO involvement between now and the time when IPCC was started?

Yes. NGOs should be better integrated to the structures and processes of IPBES, and a much more significant part of its operations, than with IPCC. Recognition of the important role of civil society organisations appears to be significantly greater now than when IPCC began. As an issue, biodiversity is also very different to climate change. With biodiversity and ecosystem services, unlike with climate change, NGOs are key knowledge holders. The local focus of many NGOs also matches with the local nature of biodiversity.

6. What is your opinion about networks of NGOs and what do you think is their contribution to the multi-stakeholder process when compared to individual NGOs?

A hard question to answer, as there are so many different kinds of NGO networks. They can be very useful and effective, providing a way to share information and speak with a common voice that is much louder and clearer than an individual NGO's would be. The BirdLife Partnership is a case in point. IUCN (which is Governmental as well as non-Governmental) is another network that can be effective at collating information, setting standards, and providing co-ordination and leadership. On the other hand, there is a risk that networks become dysfunctional and are effectively taken over by a small clique of organisations claiming to represent a much larger set, in which case their input can become a distorting factor.

7. What are possible drawbacks of the IPBES that you envisage? What could go wrong?

Lots of things could go wrong, but the main concern must be that IPBES fails to forge a better link between science and policy, and an effective science-policy dialogue, and continues to produce assessments and other information that are largely ignored by decision makers. Even if these assessments are scientifically excellent, if they are answering question posed only by scientists that would represent a failure. IPBES could also become bogged down in its own bureaucracy, or in political in-fighting amongst Governments, or amongst the UN agencies collectively involved in running it. There is also a considerable risk that IPBES fails to focus sufficiently on capacity building, so that the less developed parts of the world feel disempowered and unable or unwilling

to engage. With luck, however, IPBES will be able to avoid these traps, to thrive and to make a real positive difference to our collective futures.

4. Pierre Commenville, interview via Skype, 2 May 2012

Enitsa Gabrovska: E

Pierre Commenville: P

E: Thank you very much for finding the time to talk to me. I know you are very busy now.

P: Actually I was very busy during the Plenary meeting. After such an experience you don't feel busy anymore, if you see what I mean. So, are you okay to spend half an hour with me, it's not too short?

E: No, I have specific questions so if we focus on that then I won't keep you for longer.

P: That's great.

E: Well, the most interesting thing for me right now is what your impressions from the Plenary are and how it all went.

P: Well, we are feeling very much enthusiastic about the results of the Plenary because it was not really on the agenda to establish officially IPBES during this meeting. It was what we can call a back thought, something that was on the back of the heads of several delegates but unless it is re-written on the official agenda, it could have remained a thought for all the meeting. Actually, the discussions were very heavily loaded with an agenda which was enormous, really, in establishing this new body without the link to the UN by now, without, almost from scratch and being able to draft so many procedures and principles to make it work was really challenging. For this we are feeling very enthusiastic. For sure the procedures and the operational basis of IPBES was agreed really to the minimum, what has been said by the IISD coverage, you might have read that. It's really my thought that only what really was compulsory and statutory to decide upon to establish IPBES was decided upon. And yet there are some very critical issues that have been kept for decision for the next Plenary. But, well, this is not hindering our enthusiasm that the Platform is finally created so we feel also that several delegates are really willing to begin the operations seriously and I mean substantially. It's reflected by the intersessional work programme which is kind of broad and consistent. There are several activities on the procedural matters but there are also many activities on very substantial matters that are important for us, such as defining the conceptual framework, or basis, for all the work that would be undertaken, or mandated, or legitimized by the Platform. This is very great news that somehow there will be provision of a draft conceptual framework to be endorsed or maybe only accepted by the next Plenary. We got this

feeling that several delegates are now bored of speaking about procedures and really want to begin operations and provide already some products that could be valuable for IPBES. So this is good hope for us and that's finally, you may have been aware that several existing organizations already providing knowledge to inform policy making for conservation or for research purposes were present to this meeting. Along with few others IUCN presented information and documentation about the benefits that IPBES could get by building on these existing networks or initiatives or programmes. We had a nice welcome of this documentation and information and we still have the feeling that IPBES will probably innovate, if you just look at its closest relative, IPCC, it will innovate in producing things not only on its own but relying on others. This is a thing which we felt very sensible.

E: And by others you mean civil society?

P: Well that could be organizations from civil society or that could be intergovernmental organizations or hybrid things just like IUCN. IUCN partnered with two organizations. One is purely intergovernmental – the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). The headquarters are based in Copenhagen and they strive to connect taxonomic data from all around the globe. And the other organization is the UNEP WCNC which is a strange thing. It's apparently an NGO but much supported by UNEP so it's an NGO but mostly funded by public funds channeled through UNEP. And IUCN is the hybrid one. But we know that for instance our colleagues from BirdLife International and Conservation International, two big organizations providing lots of knowledge and data mainly on conservation but on biodiversity patterns in general, were also at the same feeling that they could work on a mandate provided by IPBES. Well, it's great to have this feeling, especially on forming capacity building activities. For sure it's when IPBES will provide the assessments; probably these procedures will follow the IPCC template very much because the credibility of the assessments and the peer review and the scoping mechanisms to perform what you produce as assessments need to be really robust and transparent. But we know IPBES will be much more, and we know that that more will probably have something to do with capacity building and on this side civil society organizations are really welcome.

E: And how would they complement this role? How would you see that happen? Capacity building meaning what?

P: It's still a pending question. We at IUCN we don't feel comfortable only speaking about capacity building, we felt this little bit too vague. But if you look close at the work programme, it's document 2/2, you find some thoughts about this, especially that capacity building should try to target researchers from research centers, research institutes, academic institutions, so that's the first target. Those institutions are mostly delegated in developing or emerging countries and the idea is that IPBES could implement activities to help those researchers to be present in the big

assessments and to be more active in the national or sub-national level by getting involved in, say, scientific advisory boards of protected areas in providing small-scale assessments, in engaging in dialogue with policy makers, that kind of thing.

E: Are you also referring to local and indigenous knowledge here?

P: Well, yes, it's part of the thing, but I want to say is that by deciding upon this target of capacity building activities, researchers from developing countries, it's really opening the door of partnering with professional unions of researchers, of organizations, of academies and institutions, such as ICSU which is the top of the iceberg because it's the international network of national academies but there are many others, especially, trust organizations between some laboratories and research centres to perform some subjects and activities together. We do know that very much on the natural history side there are a lot of good partnerships between either public or private scientific bodies or scientific research centres, and those are NGOs because that's the way the collaboration is shaped usually. So those organizations would be welcomed by IPBES to perform some activities. How it is going to work, could be IPBES could provide them a mandate or second them some staff or IPBES, and when I say IPBES I mean the Plenary and the Secretariat, what would be the Platform, or could provide only a mandate for fundraising. To implement some activities it makes a big difference to have a mandate provided by an intergovernmental platform rather than being legitimized only by your good rationale and your good reputation.

E: To follow up on that, do you think the fact that an NGO is given a mandate by IPBES to perform certain work, that maybe what this NGOs work is it can reflect on governments on the national level, for example for pressuring or advocating? Does it help?

P: I really think so. In this sense advocating and influencing will be a side effect if I can say so, of the mandate because IPBES would provide a mandate to produce some knowledge or to perform some activities but then depending who the mandate will be given to, it would probably help this organization ultimately to be more efficient to advocate or to influence in one way or another. So I am very sure that especially with these capacity building activities IPBES will make a difference for civil society organizations and maybe not, we should probably try to look beyond the conservation world. That's why I took the example of research centers or research collaboration trust or organizations because I really think that in this sector much is still to be done. There are several cooperation activities lead by research centres in Europe, or in the US, in Africa or in Asia, but they are not really visible for the moment. They are not very well known and they are not linked with this policy relevant knowledge production. Being given a mandate that will enable them to go beyond what is the case for now I mean, researchers have conducted a research in developing countries. They had some students there. Those students become the head of research centres, they keep in touch and then there is a cooperation that builds on this. But it's a thing built

on interpersonal trust which is not very resilient and which could really lack impact if you want to use this knowledge for policy impact. Do you see what I mean?

E: Yes. Alright. I guess it remains to be seen.

P: Yes, that's for sure.

E: I wanted to ask what about when it has actually been decided what sort of assessments and what should be the priorities, do you think NGOs can have an influence during this period, like, before Plenary sessions and before work programmes are established.

P: What was discussed during this Plenary is exactly how civil society organizations will be authorized to give input in the Plenary discussions. So we had the hope for a while that the Plenary could establish a mechanism to perform this. That was the provision left in brackets after the first Plenary meeting. But a mechanism is something that makes a difference because it legally means that it should be perennial, it should be funded, it should be run by the executive body or by the Secretariat of IPBES. It should be included within the governance of IPBES. And after setting those principles you could imagine that this mechanism could have a regional reach or a regional structure. But after discussions, governments agreed on endorsing not a mechanism but a function of the Plenary which is to ensure the effective and active participation of civil society. By recognizing this it is not going very far but it could have been purely simply deleted so by recognizing this we really think that the door is kept open to organize in some way inputs to the Plenary.

E: So basically it is limited but not impossible.

P: Basically, there is no proactive mechanism to ensure that but it's mandatory and statutory for the Plenary to ensure, to provide something to ensure the effective and active participation of civil society. So it's for instance a good basis to organize a kind of regional fora before the Plenary, or to organize some consultations on the subject matters discussed during the Plenary by civil society organizations. So that's probably, once again, if you look at the procedures, it's positive. But now as you recall earlier, we need to see what is going to happen pragmatically. But for now what is written in the procedures is really this will to get some input. Some concerns have been expressed during the meeting about not having chaotic processes, for instance nominating members for the multi-disciplinary expert panel, the so called MEP, you read about the creation of this body for IPBES. So to form MEP to perform scientific and technical activities on behalf of the Plenary. We proposed as an example of good implication for civil society that could be a broad consultation of civil society organizations about who could be nominated to attend or to be member of this panel and several governments expressed concern that it could be chaotic and too many people involved. There are still those concerns expressed and for sure when the first request or questions will be decided upon by the Plenary, on which priorities and which kind of assessments the platform will

do, there will be some stakeholders directly interested that would try to input because by now we are just discussing about creating the things, procedures and so on. But when a question will come on the table, take for example the question of pollination services, are we really sure that the chemical industry, that farmers, that other relevant interested stakeholders will try to be vocal at that stage. So better try not to coordinate but to listen carefully and to document their opinions and views before the Plenary than keeping the door locked and saying it is only a scientific matter. So for now, reading the procedures, it's still open.

E: So for now it's not at all completely decided or still has to be finalized.

P: To have a good impression on how it is going to work, the good indicator would be the budget discussions. If the platform agrees to have a good budget to fund this effective and active participation, so then we would have the hope that something will happen. Otherwise, there would still be this lack of balance between civil society organizations, only the ones that are able, that have the means and capacities to participate will participate. You will then have the gap between the big industries being able to send representatives and to draft some nice advocating materials or information, and the others that do not have the capacity and that won't be present.

E: In that sense, do you think that bigger civil society organizations are a means for indigenous knowledge and indigenous research to be brought up a little bit higher on the political agenda?

P: We try to do so because just before Panama there was a workshop about let's say inclusion of local, indigenous and traditional knowledge in the operations of IPBES. We helped documenting this thing and try to show to the delegates all the benefits of this. I think that several are now very convinced about these questions, including the EU, the US, Norway, and several parties, which are weighing a lot in the discussions. So why not, I mean it would probably depend on the regional structure if a regional structure programme is to be decided. It will depend on these regional structures to play a role or not because if you refer to IUCN, we do have some indigenous groups or local community groupings within our constituents but it's mostly the case in South and Central America. So if it is at that level, IUCN could be a good broker to try to represent them and coordinate these inputs. If it's going to be in other regions, for instance in Africa where we do not have so much activities on traditional and local knowledge and also we do not have any indigenous groups as constituents, we may not be the good actor. At the global level, I don't know if IUCN will be recognized for this because we really focusing on conservation and probably there will be a need to designate an expert or several experts on really local and indigenous knowledge management. I got to know during the workshop I was mentioning several people who are really really knowledgeable on how to really deal with local knowledge in natural resources management projects. So really much broader than only conservation and I don't think that IUCN is better placed to designate experts in this regard.

E: But is it something that, because you said you met certain people but you don't mean that they are possibilities for cooperation, you are just mentioning them as they are?

P: Yes, they should be recognized and there is for the first time there is this indigenous forum on biodiversity which is called IIFB, probably standing for International Indigenous Forum for Biodiversity, which is a coordination network of indigenous groups and peoples acting in the CBD processes. They were present to this meeting and they were rather vocal so they might among themselves try to identify those experts that could play at the global level. And they know they can rely on IUCN depending on which region they act.

E: I understand. Okay, since we are already out of time, I would like to ask you, what do you think could go wrong in the whole IPBES setup, what are possible drawbacks?

P: Well, it will be funded; there will be a secretariat, that's for sure. What could go wrong is that if there is too little funding or if there is a too weak political will, I fear that IPBES will only perform assessments because we have the resources and means to perform assessments. As I mentioned earlier, it's not the activities in which IPBES could be most inclusive, especially if it's a question of a regional or global assessment. If it's about thematic assessments, they will be obliged to draw from knowledge from elsewhere than only they can access to – peer review literature, they will need somebody else to identify the good knowledge but that's my main concern. This will take time...

E: So basically what you say is about being inclusive, that the assessments would be carried out strictly by government selected experts?

P: Yes.

E: So you think that they might not be a channel through which civil society can contribute?

P: If the funding are too short for IPBES to do something else than global or regional assessments, that's my fear, yes. But once again, we have the impression that IPBES will give the impetus for several countries to perform national assessments and in providing a conceptual framework asking for consultation or asking for transparency and also recognizing that there could be divergent views on an assessment. Or maybe by providing a kind of a petitioning process making possible for civil society organizations to express concerns and to express their disagreement transparently and publicly on the results of the assessments. Well, that could be something even if the funds are very short, we will still be able to evaluate if it's going to be very inclusive or very poorly inclusive. I know that by essence, by necessity and need, several activities could not be done without civil society organizations. Broadly, everything related to building capacity falls in this case.

E: I see. As I know that you are busy and I don't want to keep you any longer, to wrap up. But thank you very much.

P: You are welcome. If you have some more precise questions, do not hesitate to write me an email and I will try to be responsive.

E: Okay, that's great. Thank you, I'll keep it in mind. Thanks a lot and we keep in touch. I will see you at the event in the Parliament.

P: Oh yes, that's great. Bye bye, Enitsa.

Appendix II: Interview questions

Projections on stakeholder involvement in the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and
Ecosystem Services
Role and effectiveness of NGOs in IPBES

Questions

1. In what role (considering the three models for engagement presented by IUCN: **Options paper for the involvement of civil society organizations in an intergovernmental platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services - UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/INF/6**) do you think NGOs could be most effective?
2. NGOs can be extremely effective when it comes to campaigning and awareness-raising. How will that role be utilized in relation to IPBES? What should NGOs campaign about?
3. NGOs have very strong local presence. Do you think NGOs can be a factor in voicing the local needs as well as local knowledge (including indigenous knowledge) on the international level? If yes, why? If not, why not? How do you think this voice can be made stronger?
4. How effective can NGOs be in terms of pressuring governments to adopt specific laws or positions on biodiversity before and after big intergovernmental negotiations?
5. Do you envisage a different type of engagement for NGOs compared to the IPCC format? What has changed regarding NGO involvement between now and the time when IPCC was started?
6. What is your opinion about networks of NGOs and what do you think is their contribution to the multi-stakeholder process when compared to individual NGOs?
7. What are possible drawbacks of the IPBES that you envisage? What could go wrong?