

POLICY BRIEF NO. 1

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Strategic Priorities for Enhancing Engagement in Global Biodiversity Governance Framework: insights from IPBES-9

Executive summary

This policy brief offers key insights from the Ninth Plenary Session of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES-9), held in Bonn, Germany (July 3–9, 2022). It draws upon the outcomes of the session and the perspectives gathered from African National Focal Points (NFPs) and delegates. The core objective is to propose strategic pathways for maximising the continent's contributions to IPBES processes and ensuring that global assessments effectively support Africa's sustainable development goals.

African stakeholders demonstrated significant engagement with the key assessments adopted at IPBES-9, particularly the thematic assessment on the **Sustainable use of wild species** and the methodological assessment of **multiple values of nature**. Delegates underscored the critical need for immediate access to and effective integration of these findings into national policy frameworks. Future strategy must focus on targeted capacity development, enhanced representation, simplifying communication and policy inclusivity.

Key messages

The overarching strategy derived from the IPBES-9 discussions and regional insights revolves around three core messages:

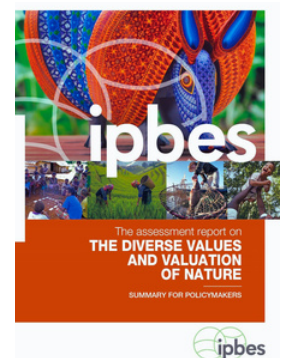
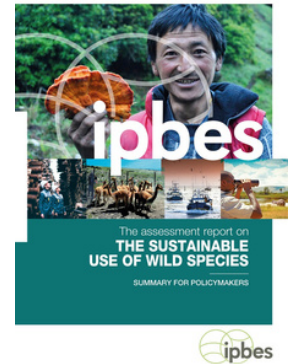
1. Strengthen Capacity and representation in IPBES work and processes.
2. Improve communication and accessibility to IPBES assessments and products.
3. Leverage IPBES assessments to secure Africa's biodiversity and catalyse the achievement of socio-economic development goals.



Context

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was established in 2012 to strengthen the connection between science and policy for biodiversity conservation. IPBES provides assessments, tools, and recommendations that inform evidence-based decision-making to reverse and halt biodiversity loss and promote sustainable development. At the IPBES-9, two landmark assessments were adopted. The assessments offer pathways for reconciling conservation with socio-economic progress, promoting just and sustainable futures. The African delegates welcome the summary for policy makers (SPMs) for both assessments.

- **Sustainable use of wild species:** highlights the need for effective resource management through inclusive policies that involve local communities. This is critical because resource management regimes have often excluded local people. The assessment advocates for recognising customary sustainable use and conservation mechanisms. It stresses that the world must recognise customary rights that allow communities to practice and freely express their dedication to protecting biodiversity. However, delegates noted that a key driver of unsustainable use, the illegal wildlife trade, was not adequately captured in the report, necessitating further attention to issues like the drivers of poaching in future work.
- **Values Assessment:** provides a practical framework for integrating multiple perspectives into decision-making. The assessment provides guidance on navigating pathways for reconciling a good quality of life with that of life on Earth. Africa's diverse natural systems provide essential services, including water and food provision, climate regulation, and cultural heritage—yet these values are often underrepresented in policy frameworks, undermining sustainable development efforts.



The Plenary also approved the scoping report for the assessment on the impact and dependence of business on biodiversity. This is considered a very important topic for the continent, particularly for countries reliant on natural capital.

The IPBES Sustainable use of wild species and Values assessment - *What is in it for Africa?*

These assessments provide critical, evidence-based guidance directly relevant to Africa, where biodiversity underpins over 60% of livelihoods and supports food security for over 50 million people in sub-Saharan Africa. The **Sustainable use assessment** was deemed a very important topic for Africa and highly relatable to the regional context. Wild species are fundamental to human existence, forming major parts of food, medicine, and spirituality. Economic activities like smallholder logging and fuelwood harvesting are significant across the continent. The assessment provides guidance on practices, policies, and governance systems to enhance the sustainability of wild species use. This is crucial because unsustainable use, compounded by weak governance structures, is placing ecosystems and livelihoods at risk.

The **Values Assessment** offers a practical framework for embedding the multiple values of nature into policy, ensuring that conservation efforts align with the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders. The language of the SPM must be clarified to facilitate its adoption by decision-makers who may be inexperienced with nature valuation.

As Africa faces pressing issues, including a growing population dependent on biodiversity, there was, however, a call for further attention to the interconnectedness of human well-being, animal welfare, and the reduction of zoonotic diseases in future research and policy discussions.

Key messages

Strategic priorities for enhanced engagement

While the African Group affirmed its intent to adopt these assessments, successful integration requires addressing persistent constraints related to limited financial capacity, representation deficits, and crucial knowledge gaps.

A1. Financial limitations and representation in IPBES processes:

The participation of African delegations at the IPBES Plenary remains constrained by systemic financial and logistical barriers. Low financial support severely restricts delegation sizes. Many countries sent limited numbers of delegates (often two, or even one representative), which made it impossible for them to simultaneously attend critical working groups (WG 1, WG 2) and budget meetings. This limited staffing hinders full engagement and diminishes the scope of African contributions to the decision-making process. Therefore, Governments and collaborating partners are encouraged to increase financial support to allow for greater expert attendance, ideally ensuring at least two delegates per country, thereby enabling simultaneous participation across parallel negotiation tracks.

A2. Awareness-raising and capacity strengthening needs

The need was highlighted to raise more awareness of the need for such participation (for the government to understand the value of participation). Furthermore, The need for enhanced capacity-building programs for National Focal Points (NFPs) and national experts was consistently highlighted, to effectively contribute to the decision making. For instance, some delegates stated that they had no prior knowledge of how things are done in the plenary (first time participating in person). Regional initiatives, such as the acknowledged CABES initiative, are seen as crucial for empowering experts to contribute more effectively to assessments and decision-making.

There were also concerns that African nominated experts are not considered like those from the other regions). Capacity development must focus on preparing NFPs and national experts, including youth, to better contribute to scoping reports and review processes.

A3. Logistical challenges

Practical hurdles, including difficulties related to poor internet connection and power supply, particularly during online engagement periods, pose technological challenges for some participants. Furthermore, some participants noted challenges related to their non-member or observer status, which prevents direct individual contribution to the plenary process.

B1. Enhancing policy accessibility and knowledge integration:

For the assessments to drive genuine transformative change in Africa, the outcomes must be readily accessible and actionable by diverse stakeholders. Delegates stressed that the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) reports must be communicated in simple, clear language. This is essential for policymakers operating across multiple official languages, including English, French, and Portuguese, to effectively mainstream outcomes into national policies. This is vital for Africa's policymakers, who operate across official languages including English, French, and Portuguese, alongside numerous local languages.

B2. Addressing data and knowledge gaps

Efforts should be intensified to address data and knowledge gaps from Africa in future assessments, as acknowledged during IPBES-9. This includes ensuring better representation of African case studies. Specific areas identified for greater attention included capturing inadequate case studies and addressing the illegal wildlife trade, a key driver of unsustainable use.

B3. Integrating diverse values

Given that wild species are fundamental to livelihoods, food, medicine, and spiritual wellbeing, there is a strong call to document and recognize existing traditional research and knowledge.

This includes acknowledging customary rights. Future IPBES efforts must tailor and simplify findings and ensure adequate representation of the region's diverse biodiversity and socio-economic realities. Mechanisms are needed to systematically document and integrate Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) into policy planning.

C1. Leveraging assessments for national development

The adopted assessments provide evidence-based guidance that can catalyse socio-economic development and achieving prosperity across the continent. The sustainable use assessment, in particular, is directly relatable to African challenges, such as managing resources and addressing the need for inclusive policies that involve local people in the management of resources. However, realising the full potential of these outcomes is contingent upon adequately addressing the systemic and financial barriers highlighted in subsections A and B.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of the thematic assessment at IPBES-9 represents a critical moment for the continent. These assessments offer evidence-based guidance that is highly relevant, particularly as biodiversity forms the foundation of livelihoods and supports food security for millions. The core objective now shifts from assessment to robust policy uptake, providing guidance on pathways to balance conservation with socio-economic development priorities. The effective realisation of Africa's prosperity depends on transforming the knowledge generated by IPBES into decisive action.

Turning this knowledge into tangible impact demands urgent, coordinated actions by governments to fully embed biodiversity goals into national development planning and policies using a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

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