

POLICY BRIEF NO. 3

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Strengthening collaboration: integrating science, policy, and social equity for biodiversity & sustainable development in Africa

Executive summary and context

The first CABES workshop, held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from October 25 to 27, 2022, convened 135 experts from 43 countries, including IPBES National Focal Points, researchers, and private sector representatives. This event provided a crucial platform for discussing co-developing strategies to utilise the products of the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Given that Africa is a continent exceptionally rich in biodiversity and highly dependent on natural resources, enhancing governance models is critical. The CABES project (2022–2030) aims to develop capacities and support the implementation of political decisions regarding the management and sustainable use of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services/Nature's Contributions to People (BES/NCP) leveraging on IPBES assessments. Thus, highlighting the need for the establishment of a network of Science-Policy-Practice Interfaces (SPPIs) at different scales.

This brief, informed by rounds of consultation, highlights the identified benefits and barriers to effective uptake of IPBES assessments into national biodiversity policies, as well as the challenges and the opportunities that come with establishing and engaging a wide range of stakeholders in national SPPIs. Challenges includes lack of formalised science, policy and practice interfaces (weak integration), communication barriers, social exclusion and long-term sustainability.



Cross-section of participants during the CABES workshop. © CABES

CABES regional workshop objectives

The CABES workshop recognised the strong need for bringing together diverse stakeholders (researchers, decision makers, practitioners, NGOs, and the private sector) to address African sustainable development challenges. The workshop goals included:

- To increase awareness of the IPBES work programme and products.
- Co-design domestic pathways and strategies for the national ownership of IPBES assessment products.
- Foster connections among African BES experts at national and sub-regional levels



What is IPBES?

The **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)** is an independent intergovernmental body with currently 150 member states, established to strengthen the **science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services** for the **conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being, and sustainable development**. In addition to its member states, a large number of NGOs, organisations, civil society, representatives of research institutions, local communities and the private sector also participate in the formal IPBES process as observers.

IPBES outputs include **assessments** on specific themes (e.g. "Pollinators, Pollination and Food Production"); methodological issues (e.g. "Scenarios and Modelling"); and at both the regional and global levels (e.g. "*Global Assessment of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*" and the "*Regional Assessment for Africa*"). More info available on <https://www.ipbes.net/assessing-knowledge>

There are various possibilities to engage with IPBES, including: contributing as a nominated expert to ongoing assessments, supporting capacity and knowledge-building work by contributing expertise, data or other resources, and participating in the IPBES Young Fellows programme. However, the first step is to **register as an IPBES Stakeholder**. To register, visit www.ipbes.net/stakeholders.

Key messages

A1. Identified benefits of the uptake and implementation of IPBES assessments

Stakeholders highlighted that the adoption and engagement with IPBES assessments offer significant advantages, contributing directly to sustainable development and conservation efforts. Identified key benefits include:

- **Access to information and knowledge:** provides access to up-to-date information and facilitates knowledge transfer.

Furthermore, engagement mobilises experts and facilitates information on other biodiversity conservation programs and platforms.

- **Capacity and skill enhancement:** involvement leads to the enhancement of skills and knowledge-sharing,
- Promotes sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity: the adoption of IPBES findings contributes directly to the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity,

- **Networking and collaboration:** helps in the establishment of strong professional relationships and provides opportunities for partnerships. For national platforms, this means fostering new in-country and cross-border collaborations between experts for biodiversity conservation.
- **Resource mobilisation and livelihoods:** provides opportunities for resource mobilisation and the search for funding. It can also contribute to improving livelihoods and provides employment opportunities, thereby improving the standard of living for individuals engaged in IPBES activities.

A2. Challenges hindering the uptake of IPBES assessments

The effective uptake and implementation of IPBES assessments are recognised as foundational to achieving transformative change and enhancing national decision-making processes across Africa. However, there are structural and communication challenges that impede their translation into effective policy and practice. These include:

- **Inadequate science-policy linkage and data gaps:** models of biodiversity governance currently face serious challenges, because of inadequate science-based policies for conservation. This situation is compounded by gaps in scientific knowledge on the status of biological diversity, and in some regions, the absence of scientific data makes inter-sectoral collaboration challenging. Additionally, the interface between science and policy is hindered by a lack of funds to enable the integration of activities necessary for knowledge exchange, such as conferences and seminars.
- **Communication barriers and accessibility:** A prominent constraint noted is that as with scientists, technical language of the assessments makes it challenging for decisionmakers to understand. The strong need for a simpler language to facilitate communication was explicitly noted.

Furthermore, earlier versions of the assessments, that is, during the review process, are only available in English language, making it difficult for non-English speakers to review and include country case studies. This need for comprehensive multilingual inclusion is further highlighted by the significant diversity in the region. For instance, in the workshop's survey, 54% of the responses were in French, compared to 43% in English, and 1.5% in Portuguese and Spanish. This underscores the necessity of moving beyond single-language dissemination to ensure equity and full engagement.

- **Exclusion of Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK):** the sustainability of environmental strategies is compromised by a lack of mainstreaming of the existing knowledge, in particular, ILK, in the design of biodiversity and ecosystem service (BES) management strategies

A3. Co-designed roadmaps to ensure uptake and national ownership of IPBES assessments

These co-designed pathways represent the roadmaps for uptake, centered on institutional reforms, effective communication, and capacity strengthening, including:

- **Governmental commitment:** Successful uptake and implementation requires the continuous engagement of all actors and political will,
- **Policy focus:** recommendations from IPBES assessments should be translated to national context, and where applicable conduct supplementary national assessments, valuable for informed government decision-making.
- **Financial security:** policymakers should participate in fundraising and ensure that the national platform structures include economic evaluation and regular fundraising to guarantee sustainability.

- **Strengthen communication and accessibility of IPBES products at the national level:** A crucial component of the roadmap is bridging the gap between scientific language and policy implementation to facilitate the use of IPBES products. To serve the diverse national biodiversity stakeholders, platforms must provide multilingual resources.
- **Ensuring comprehensive social inclusion:** The long-term success of national uptake depends on integrating all relevant stakeholders, correcting the historical lack of mainstreaming of certain knowledge systems. The roadmap must address the lack of mainstreaming of indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) in the design of biodiversity management strategies, and should be designed to involve all social strata, explicitly

including women, youth, people with disabilities, and the elderly, in experience-sharing workshops.

- **Effective stakeholder dialogue:** There is a necessity to promote effective dialogue to enhance cooperation and streamline the interests of numerous stakeholders in policy development.

The overall strategy emphasises creating SPPIs for connection and information sharing across different sectors, promoting the importance of biodiversity to all sectors, and highlighting the benefits each party could derive from its involvement in IPBES. Recommendations to enhance engagement in IPBES span key stakeholder sectors (Table 1).

Table 1: Interactive synergies for biodiversity and ecosystem services (BES) governance

Stakeholder group	Required input/action (synergy output)	Interacting partners	Required outcomes for BES integration
Policymakers /Government	Provide legal and institutional mandate: enforce laws and policies and provide adequate funding for networking activities. Streamline the interests of numerous stakeholders for policy development	Academics, private sectors	Achieve coordination between the different sectors and align national policy with international conventions
Academics/ scientists	Enhance Communication and Relevance: Must popularize scientific results using accessible channels (social media, radio, TV). Must focus on generating solutions to mitigate identified issues to provide valuable information for informed decision-making	Policy makers and private sector	Ensure scientific research aligns with a country's development aspirations and translate findings into a clear manner.
Private sector	Ensure Full Participation and Investment: Must be formally included in policy dialogues. Must be convinced that investment in BES conservation will yield dividends.	Policymakers, academics	Reconcile the focus on profit maximization with sustainable management strategies, often supported through public-private partnership initiatives.
NGOs and ILK holders	Ensure Social and Local Relevance: Must be formally included in platforms. Must provide knowledge; requiring documents to be translated into local languages.	All sectors	Guarantee that the existing knowledge, in particular, indigenous and local knowledge (ILK), is mainstreamed in BES management strategies.

B. Challenges and support needed in establishing a national science-policy-practice interface (SPPI)

SPPIs were highlighted as critical driving force for the uptake and national ownership of IPBES findings. However, SPPIs must be robust, legitimate structures, institutionalisation at the national level and must be secured by establishing a binding legal document and legal regulation. Constraints and support included:

- **Networking and governance:** stakeholders perceive a lack of coordination among government, academia and private sector, leading to imbalances in participation and hindering integration. Therefore, networks should be created between stakeholders to facilitate information sharing.
- **Collaboration and policy participation:** successful establishment requires clear, coherent legal and regulatory frameworks, and participation of policymakers. Multi-sectoral collaboration and a shared vision for the SPPI should be promoted, participation of youths, CSOs, and other stakeholder groups should be strengthened, balance decision-making power among stakeholders, and encourage partnerships with larger organisations and international initiatives.

- **Capacity strengthening and awareness-raising:** there is a need to raise awareness of the platforms and strengthen the capacities of local stakeholders and institutions to engage actively,
- **Financing and incentives:** mobilise sustainable funding, provide targeted incentives to support stakeholder engagement and ensure predictable financial support for platform activities.

CONCLUSION

The first CABES regional workshop achieved a clear and urgent consensus on the strategic imperatives for sustainability in Africa. There is the strong need to bring together the different sectors—science, policy, and the private sector, to address the challenges of biodiversity conservation. This necessitates the implementation and institutionalisation of national and (sub-)regional platforms (SPPIs) to support IPBES work and facilitate the mainstreaming of IPBES assessments into relevant national policies.

It is recommended that governments fully commit to ensuring the integration of nature and its contributions to people into national planning, and decision-making. Realising that achieving sustainable development relies on securing SPPIs with a sustainability plan backed by adequate funding and all-round support.

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