



Scientists recommend realignment of biodiversity research

Current research results show the main cause behind the ongoing loss of biological diversity to be uncertain knowledge or a complete lack of knowledge about the complex links between nature and society. Scientists therefore recommend that a stronger transdisciplinary approach now be taken towards biodiversity research.

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) will meet from 7 to 10 March 2017 in Bonn, Germany. One of the key issues for the IPBES plenary session is the better incorporation of indigenous and local knowledge into the implementation of the Work Plan. With this topic, IPBES is addressing a pivotal challenge facing biodiversity policy today: despite the existence of manifold national and international initiatives and programmes such as the ratification of national biodiversity strategies, the drafting of action plans, or the implementation of protected areas, it seems that such efforts are not enough to guarantee an improvement in biological diversity by the year 2020.

“If we are to halt the loss of biodiversity, we must look very closely at the complex relations between nature and society” says Marion Mehring, Head of Biodiversity Research at the Frankfurt institute ISOE – Institute for Social-Ecological Research (Germany). Important questions targeted by biodiversity research are: What beneficial or harmful effects does society experience from biodiversity? Are these effects spread evenly amongst the social groups? Which ecosystem services do we wish to retain? Which ecosystem disservices must be avoided at all cost? How can a change within society be translated into sustainable use of biodiversity? Answers to these and other questions can be found by taking the ecosystem services as a starting point.

Connecting scientific with non-scientific knowledge

Ecosystem services embrace all economic, ecological, cultural and social services, each of which has a direct link to human well-being. “If we are to preserve biodiversity, it is vital that organisations such as IPBES recognise the need for transdisciplinarity in biodiversity research” says Marion Mehring. This also includes the demand for new alliances between the disciplines (of the natural and the social sciences), the incorporation of local knowledge about biodiversity, and the integration of stakeholders into the research process. Only by applying a transdisciplinary mode of research, it is possible to focus on the dynamics of utilising biodiversity, such as the conflicts that arise when various stakeholder groups make different claims on ecosystem services.

Background information on IPBES

IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) is a scientific, inter-governmental body that provides policy makers with objective and reliable information on the state and development of biological diversity and its ecosystem services. The members (126 countries) meet in plenary sessions, with the founding session taking place in 2011. The secretariat of the IPBES is in Bonn and is administered by the United Nations Environment Programme. The Fifth Plenary Session will be held here from 7 to 10 March. The goal of IPBES is to promote and improve the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020. A Work Programme (2014–2019) that exists for this purpose takes account of requests and suggestions submitted to the IPBES Secretariat by governments, inter-governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders. The overarching

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objective is to strengthen the science-policy interface in the field of biodiversity and ecosystem services, with a view to protecting biodiversity and ensuring sustainability of use.

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