

# Guidance Document for the Inclusion of Indigenous and Local Knowledge in National Ecosystem Assessments



Prepared by: Carlos Hernández and Érika Peñuela, Public Policy and Cooperation Office, Alexander von Humboldt Institute.

This report has been produced by Alexander von Humboldt Institute, with technical support from the National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA) Initiative at UNEP-WCMC. Financial support was provided by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE IN NATIONAL  
ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENTS**

CONTENT

List of Acronyms.....2

Introduction.....3

How to include ILK in a national ecosystem assessment?.....3

Call for authors.....5

Information management.....7

Ethical considerations.....8

Bibliography.....9

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ILK: Indigenous and Local Knowledge

IPBES: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

IPLC: Indigenous People and Local Communities

TSU: Technical Support Unit

## Introduction

As a starting point, it is important to highlight that the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services-IPBES recognizes in its conceptual framework the importance of Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) and encourages its inclusion in biodiversity and ecosystem services assessments.

However, to date, the global or thematic IPBES assessments have not included a specific chapter that compiles knowledge, practices and the links that Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) have with their natural environment, and those that include them in a cross-cutting manner show that this is an element that can be substantially improved, i.e., the importance of the presence of this knowledge in the assessment should be clearer.

The importance of the inclusion of IPLCs and the ILK lies in the fact that this provides access to a worldview that is not normally contemplated in the traditional/Western academy (NEA Initiative, 2023). This allows the contributions of people who have a constant connection with nature and who have a spiritual dimension to be recognized.

This constant connection between the cultural and the natural has laid the foundations for a coexistence between human groups and their environment for a long time (in some cases up to millennia)<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of environmental protection that IPLCs can offer also has a deep conviction in the ethical and cultural responsibility for the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Therefore, it is also important to include them, as it makes visible the dangers and threats to which the preservation of the ILK is subjected. All of the above adds up and can lead to better decision making and policy development that also includes Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the formulation, implementation and even assessment stages.

Therefore, a series of steps to be taken into account for the inclusion of the ILK and the participation of IPLC in national assessment development processes are proposed below.

## How to include ILK in a national ecosystem assessment?

The Scoping Document precedes the assessment and the definition of its chapters. As its name indicates, this document defines the scope of the assessment, i.e., what will and will not be covered by the evaluation. It is a definition and conceptual exercise that will be the starting point for the assessment and its individual chapters.

ILK can be included in two ways. One way is cross-cutting (throughout the assessment) and/or through a specific section of the assessment (it can be a chapter)<sup>2</sup>.

In the first case, there is a methodological document produced by IPBES that sets out how co-chairs, authors and technical support units (TSUs) working on IPBES assessments can include the ILK and, in turn, serves as a resource for IPLCs wishing to know how they can participate in IPBES assessment processes.

<sup>1</sup> Please see <https://www.ecosystemassessments.net/content/uploads/2022/03/ES-Why-Engage-IPLCs-NEA-Initiative.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> La existencia del apartado específico debe ir acompañada también de una inclusión transversal del ILK-CLI en la evaluación. No debe ser excluyente.

In turn, it is also possible to include a specific ILK chapter in the assessment, as was done in the case of the National Assessment of Colombia, in which [Chapter 4](#), entitled Biocultural Diversity: Knowledge and Practices for the Care of Life in Indigenous Peoples' Territories and Local Communities, was developed.

In this sense, the presence of experts or knowers recognized by the communities should be part of the experts participating in the elaboration of the scoping document. This inclusion may avoid future discussions during other stages of the assessment due to lack of consensus on whether the ILK approach is really being adequately included.

The inclusion of a specific ILK chapter should be considered from the beginning, taking into account that it may be a longer process compared to the other chapters. It is very likely that this will be the chapter that will take the longest time to develop. In the case of Colombia, the time to agree on the conceptual framework and content with the Indigenous Peoples and local communities was extended several times due to the difficulty of convening the authors. The consultation meetings were postponed several times, and this posed some challenges in terms of timing.

Consideration should be given to the difficulties that may be encountered in effectively integrating Indigenous Peoples and local communities into the assessment. Variables such as the need to have consensus on the concepts of the chapter, its objectives and that the communities agree with the way in which their knowledge is presented must be weighed.

This exercise of joint construction of the chapter will ensure that the assessment really includes a vision from the communities and approved by them. This process is vital to create expectations in the subsequent call for authors and to maintain their interest and involvement in the process of elaborating the chapter.

The Trialogue methodology is recommended for the ILK inclusion exercise, as it allows for the participation and representation of the actors necessary to ensure the success of the activity. The [Trialogue methodology](#) is based on the recognition of the need for cooperation to address complex problems. Thus, the Trialogues promote the articulation between science-policy-practice for the sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services, including the participation of members of NGOs, community organizations, the private sector, and representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities.

In order to achieve the inclusion of the communities, it is important to propose a targeted communications strategy (the same in the call for the scope document). This strategy must consider two equally important obstacles to overcome: a) the geographical complexities and difficulties in accessing some communities b) the language must be interesting and generate an incentive for the representatives of these communities, as there is a risk that the message will reach people, but will not be heeded and will be ignored.

In the definition of the chapter, the following questions should be addressed with the communities and ensure their active participation in the answers:

- What will be the content of the chapter?
- What methodology will be used to construct the sections (must be agreed upon and accepted by all parties)?
- What tools are needed? This question is important, because in some Indigenous Peoples and local communities their knowledge bearers or knowers do not have the tools that are taken for granted for researchers, such as access to the internet, computers, cell phones and the use of virtual platforms.

- How to overcome the asymmetries between researchers from conventional academia and researchers from Indigenous Peoples and local communities? This question should be openly discussed and resolved by listening to the representatives of the communities, as different conditions may limit the participation of indigenous experts as authors or coordinators of the chapter. These asymmetries and difficulties should be reviewed, such as the geographical remoteness of their communities for meetings, the opportunity cost of devoting time to the assessment without financial remuneration, and the time they can devote to the chapter without neglecting their activities in the community.

## Call for authors

The call for authors must have a focused strategy and be designed to overcome geographical and cultural obstacles. The traditional calls for authors that are made through virtual campaigns or even the use of e-mail may be insufficient.

For this type of assessments, there are generally two types of calls:

- Call and selection of experts for the scope document: the selection of experts is done through an open call, with minimum requirements that guarantee the quality and experience of the candidates and aimed at the general public, but where there is a large participation of universities, research centers, institutes, government entities, among others. The resumes are selected using criteria such as academic level, expertise, area of knowledge, diversity of knowledge systems and a very important aspect for IPBES, which is to ensure that there is a geographical and gender balance among the authors.
- Call and selection of experts for the development of the assessment: a new call must be made to recruit the experts who will prepare the chapters and the summary for decision makers that make up this type of assessment. This call and selection of experts follows the same steps and parameters as the call for experts for the scoping document. In this call for experts the experts that will fulfill the following roles are selected:

*- Chapter coordinators: the main function of the chapter coordinators is to assume the responsibility of technically coordinating the development of an assessment chapter. They coordinate and direct the lead authors; contributing authors and volunteers if applicable, ensuring the highest quality standards and overseeing that the IPBES guidelines are followed in the development of the sections, both conceptually and methodologically and in terms of format and style. Likewise, they must ensure that the chapters are delivered on the established dates, and they are a channel of communication between the lead authors and the co-chairs for the resolution of doubts and concerns. They are also responsible for ensuring that there is coherence between the sections that comprise the chapter, and that there are no duplications, overlaps or contradictions between chapters. A key function of the chapter coordinators is to lead the preparation of the executive summary of their respective chapter and, based on this, the formulation of the key messages that are the basis for the preparation of the summary for decision-makers.*



*- Lead authors: their main function is to write sections or parts of their chapter, as agreed at the first authors' meeting. They must ensure that the sections or parts of the chapter in their charge are developed with the highest scientific quality and rigor and using the best scientific, technical and socio-economic information, as well as complying with the deadlines established for the delivery of their contributions.*

*- Editors-reviewers: their function is to advise the group of authors in addressing the comments received by the chapter during the external review phases, ensuring that all external comments are appropriately considered. They also advise the group of authors in resolving technical controversies if they arise and that these are reflected in the text of the respective chapter. The editors-reviewers also advise on the appropriate use of the terms of confidence in the executive summaries of the chapters.*

- Other roles that constitute this type of assessments but whose experts are not selected by call for proposals are:

*- Assessment co-chairs: are ultimately responsible for the preparation of the assessment, both the technical report and the summary for decision-makers. The co-chairs must ensure that the assessment is conducted to the highest technical and scientific standards and that it answers the questions posed in the scoping document. The co-chairs supervise, coordinate and collaborate with the chapter coordinators for the development of the chapters. They must ensure that the chapters maintain a common thread, that there are no overlaps or contradictions between them, that the guiding questions are resolved throughout the assessment and that the general, conceptual and methodological principles of IPBES are observed.*

*- Contributing authors: their role is to prepare technical information such as parts of a section, case studies, graphs, tables or data for a particular section or chapter. Any contributions should come from peer-reviewed sources or literature sources such as international bodies, etc.*

For the call of Indigenous and local community experts, it should be ensured that the message reaches the people in a more direct way, contemplating the communication channels they use to guarantee the effectiveness of the communication.

It is important that the time set aside for receiving author nominations for the ILK chapter remains open longer compared to other chapters, as response times may be different and the call may take longer to be effective for indigenous flavors and experts and local communities. If the general call for papers does not work, it is recommended that direct invitations be made on the recommendation of the communities to experts.

It is recommended that workshops be held to synchronize and integrate different visions of the different Indigenous Peoples and local communities. These spaces for discussion and concertation are necessary to maintain the interest and participation of ILK experts and to ensure that there is consensus on what is being included in the chapter.

As in the definition of the chapter, its elaboration should take into account the asymmetries in terms of access and use of tools between researchers from the conventional academy and those from Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Coordinators should take this into account and look for alternatives to avoid frustrations and prevent desertion in the middle of the process.



The elaboration should have a subtle articulation with the other chapters, i.e., it should be seen as an integral part of the assessment and not as an isolated section. For the same reason, the contributions of the ILK must be visible in all the other chapters in order to achieve transversality.

In addition, the sections of the chapter should address the following:

- Consensus on a definition of ILK for the national context, which should be included in the chapter.
- It should be made clear who are the actors that own ILK within the national context.
- The following questions should be asked as a starting point:
  - In what ways has Indigenous and local knowledge contributed to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services?
  - In the national context, in which decision-making instruments is ILK mobilized and put into dialogue with other forms of knowledge?
  - How is the ILK's contribution recognized in official decision-making instruments on biodiversity, ecosystem services and people's well-being?
  - What institutions, organizations and research groups work with ILK associated with biodiversity in the regions of the country? what thematic and geographic gaps are there?
  - What are the threats to ILK and what are the resistance and knowledge preservation movements?

## Information Management

The management and collection of information needs special attention, as it implies broadening horizons beyond western approaches to take advantage of ILK. This type of knowledge evokes spiritual and traditional dimensions with an intrinsic link to the territory, and is often excluded from the construction of knowledge in traditional academia. Therefore, the best way to take advantage of it is to consult with its bearers on how it should be interpreted and used, here listening and learning are key for those who participate in the assessment, including the co-chairs.

Those coordinating the chapter, and the assessment in general, should be open to collecting information and input from indigenous and local community experts in different ways.

Often a virtual platform is not a method with which these experts feel comfortable or are tools to which they do not have access. Methods such as oral transmission should be considered from the outset, and should be consulted from the beginning in the dialogue and consultation spaces.

It is recommended to include within the chapter or as a parallel text an approach to the diverse knowledge systems of indigenous and local livelihood systems. This text, which contemplates the information from local narratives, allows the communities to present their knowledge without being pigeonholed in the concepts and structure proposed by the assessment methodology. Giving space to present the information in this way allows the different visions to be recognized, which is precisely the objective of the chapter<sup>3</sup>.

## Ethical considerations

The following are some ethical considerations that should be taken into account when incorporating ILK into national assessments. These considerations are based on IPBES recommendations<sup>4</sup>:

- It must be understood and every effort must be made to mitigate the mistrust that exists in ILK holders. For this, the assessment processes must be clear and those coordinating must ensure that at all times it is understood what is being done with the information and how it is being used to avoid any misappropriation of knowledge.
- The traditional ethnocentric view in scientists and decision makers that considers Western science superior should not be present in the assessment. Should cases arise in which Indigenous and local knowledge is underestimated, measures should be taken to avoid delegitimizing or underestimating other forms of knowledge.
- The ILK has been marginalized and underestimated, so it is important to give it equal relevance from the start. The importance and need for its specific knowledge, systems, values and priorities in the assessment should be highlighted.

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<sup>3</sup> A concrete example of this may be section 4.3 of Chapter 4 of the National Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Assessment of Colombia entitled "OTHER WAYS OF KNOWING, OTHER WORLDS" - <http://proyectos.humboldt.org.co/evaluacion-nacional/prensa.html> (Ecosistémicos, 2021)

<sup>4</sup> For more information see the document "Initial elements for an approach towards principles and procedures for working with indigenous and local knowledge systems proposed for use by the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services". Disponible en el repositorio de la IPBES. <https://www.ipbes.net/resource-file> (United Nations Environment Programme, 2013)

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