

# Towards the Dissemination of the Expert Assessment Process and its Findings



## Case study based on the Colombian experience

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# Introduction

The process of preparing the National Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Assessment of Colombia (hereafter the national assessment) was completed in 2021, resulting in, among other things, a robust document that seeks to be a consultation tool for informed decision making.

With the development and publication of the national assessment come new challenges, including ensuring that the findings and key messages are incorporated into decision-making processes at national, regional, and local levels; and achieving true appropriation of the calls to action by decision-makers, academia, and communities of practice.

Thus, a communications strategy was proposed for the national assessment, ranging from a campaign to raise expectations to ensure the participation of experts and arouse the interest of key stakeholders, to the implementation of a process to disseminate the findings of the national assessment with the support of the Global Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net). The purpose of this campaign was to address the communication challenges inherent to an exercise such as the national assessment.

These challenges implied, in one hand, generating interest and expectation in an exercise whose information is confidential during most of the process and, on the other hand, creating an own identity for the information and dissemination of the findings of the national evaluation.

The strategies for dissemination, impact and capacity building that have been implemented to achieve this are presented below.

## Strategies for dissemination and impact of the findings of the national assessment

The national assessment is a large and robust document, so the first challenge in the process of identifying the best dissemination strategies focused on how to condense the findings and key messages in a way that would facilitate their understanding and use by the different stakeholders (policy makers, academia, and communities of practice). The dissemination strategy included five actions aimed at achieving the correct dissemination of the national evaluation and its findings among the different stakeholders. These actions were as follows:

- 1) Creation of a web portal and digital tools.
- 2) Design of infographics for the dissemination of content
- 3) Strategic outreach with key government stakeholders.
- 4) Awareness-raising and use of biodiversity and environmental thematic networks. #
- 5) Launching of the results of the national evaluation.

## 1) Web portal and digital tools

The creation of a web portal<sup>1</sup> and digital tools was part of the national evaluation dissemination strategy from the beginning. This action was aimed at generating the necessary expectation and

keeping the interest of the different stakeholders alive, even though the process of defining the chapters and the content were confidential until the end of the process.

The website has 6 informative microsites that store the different digital tools to give the national assessment its own identity and encourage interest in it by the different actors that must and should be related to the process. The microsites are divided into:

a) General information with details about what it is, why it is important, where the information is taken from, how it will be carried out, its timing and location, and how the results will be made known. Finally, it presents a brief description of the chapters.

b) Microsite with podcasts that narrate the profiles of the researchers behind the national assessment, creating a sense of closeness between those who wanted to know more about the national assessment and those who made it possible.

c) Series of clips with interviews with researchers participating in the national evaluation, where they share their motivations to dedicate themselves to the scientific world.

d) Microsite with opinion articles from different researchers involved in the process in which they discuss different topics such as the importance of the national evaluation, their expectations, and next steps.

e) Microsite with the profiles of the experts of the national evaluation, but with a striking narrative in which their life and academic trajectories are known in a friendly and narrative way.

f) One press area that remained active during the national evaluation, publishing news of interest and the activities carried out for the different chapters, with a newsletter that was updated every two months. This press area also published the Summary for Decision Makers and the Technical Document of the national evaluation.

This portal was vital for the expectations campaign and for raising awareness of the national assessment and its importance for the country. However, it also played an important role in the dissemination phase of two of the documents that resulted from the national assessment (the technical document and the summary for decision-makers) and which can still be consulted and downloaded from this website.

## 2) Infographics for Dissemination

Through an analysis of both the contents of the national assessment and the summary for decision-makers, 6 infographics were designed (one per chapter), which show the main findings and calls for action (see figure 1). The infographics have become an important tool for dissemination and have been used in spaces where a large number of stakeholders have gathered (workshops, celebration of International Biodiversity Day). They have also been shared with decision makers, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, including different ethnic groups.

These visual pieces have two sections of relevant information to communicate the national evaluation findings and provide guidance for their implementation. On the one hand, the

infographics present the most important findings per chapter, stating a sentence that summarizes the most important and data that support the idea presented in the chapter.

The second section contains the "messages for action", which suggest courses of action that decision-makers could follow if they wish to do so. This is very important because the way of communicating the actions was modeled on the language used by IPBES when addressing decision-makers.

The infographics manage to condense the most important elements of the national assessment and serve as a support to the Summary of Decision Makers to simplify the messages to the non-scientific target audience. This is very important, as the information included in the national assessment can reach highly complex technical levels that require an important effort to communicate them in an effective and clear way, without falling into oversimplification of the information. As a recommendation, from Colombia's experience, investing in this type of visual tools strengthens the dissemination process and they become consultation and support tools that do not lose validity at the end of the evaluation process, so they will always be a good alternative for any dissemination strategy.

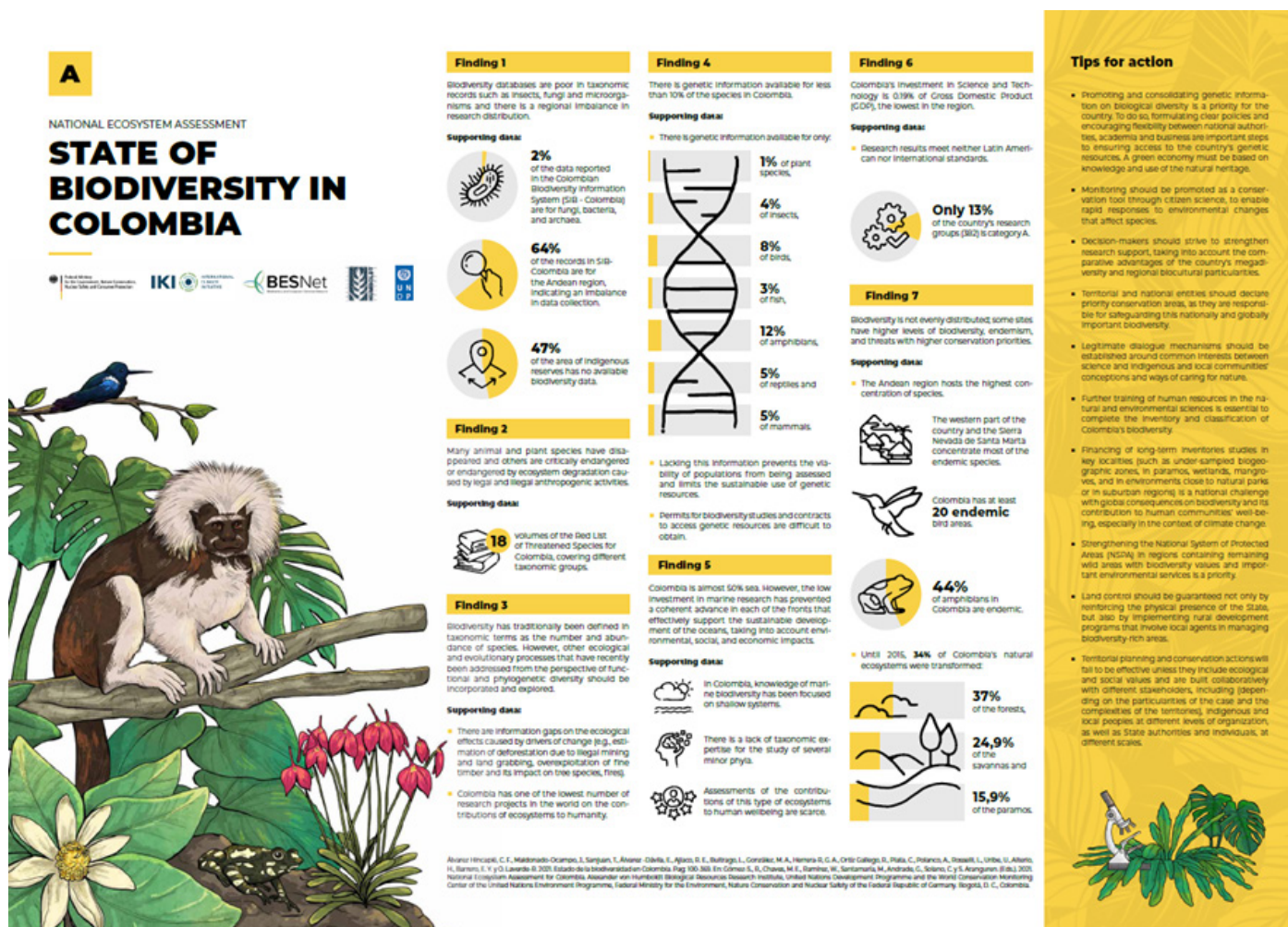


Figure 1. Infographic of chapter 2 - State of biodiversity

### **3) Strategic outreach with key government stakeholders**

The second element that has been addressed is that of political incidence and citizen participation, the latter understood as those efforts and activities of organized citizens to influence the formulation and implementation of public policies, programs and projects through persuasion and pressure on state authorities and other institutions of power.

To this end, the main findings of the national assessment were shared with government officials at the environmental sector roundtables, where the country's priorities were addressed.

As a result, and taking advantage of the change of government in Colombia, the National Development Plan "Colombia: Potencia Mundial de la Vida" (2022-2026) incorporated elements that address the national assessment, such as the strengthening of the bioeconomy, the need to halt deforestation, and the structuring of conservation and restoration programs to reverse the biodiversity loss curve.

Meetings were also held to socialize the results of the national evaluation at the regional level with government entities at the local level. Two face-to-face meetings were held, one in Barranquilla for the Atlantic Coast and the other in Medellín for the Central Region of the country, which includes Antioquia, Eje Cafetero, Santander and Norte de Santander. These meetings were attended by governors, mayors and Regional Autonomous Corporations from each region.

Finally, a virtual meeting was held with the governments, mayors' offices and Regional Autonomous Corporations of the Pacific, Amazon, and Orinoco regions and with representatives of the national government, such as the National Planning Department, the High Councils of the Presidency of the Republic, ministries related to the national evaluation process and private sector associations.

On this point, it is worth noting that the Colombian experience presented an enormous challenge in the implementation of these strategic socialization meetings. Initially, 5 regional face-to-face meetings and 5 high-level meetings with national government entities and private sector representatives were planned. However, the contingency due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other security conditions associated with the National Strike of 2021, it was not possible to carry out all of the planned meetings, achieving only those mentioned above.

### **4) Awareness raising and use of biodiversity and environmental thematic networks**

The fourth action was the joint work with different thematic networks of biodiversity, environment, conservation, etc. in order to encourage them to implement actions to reverse the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services, according to the findings of the national assessment. To this end, a call was launched to Indigenous Peoples of two biogeographic regions of great importance for the country: Amazonia and Nariño, to finance through small grants projects aimed at conservation, restoration, food sovereignty, nature-based solutions and transmission of traditional knowledge, promoting the results of the national assessment in this regard.

In just one month, more than 50 proposals were received and 11 initiatives were selected thanks to an evaluation committee with the participation of delegates from the Ministry of the Environment and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations at the national level. It is expected that these projects, which will last for one year, will strengthen conservation processes in the territories where cultural diversity is recognized as one of the greatest riches of our country, as established in chapter four of the national evaluation. This work was supported financially and technically by the BES Solution Fund.

The use of networks is one of the actions that needs further development, but their use is still being contemplated due to their potential for disseminating information to a specialized public interested in the content of documents of the national evaluation type.

## 5) Launching of the assessment results

The launching of the results is a key part of the national evaluation dissemination process, as it concludes the expectations campaign and makes the findings available for public consultation. In the Colombian case, this launch was carried out with a series of public outreach activities.

As a first step, a multi-platform campaign was carried out through YouTube, Facebook and Twitter for different stakeholders to join Hangout and Zoom sessions where experts and those involved in the national assessment would talk about the results. At the same time, the networks of the Alexander von Humboldt Institute for Biological Resources Research, coordinator of the development of the national assessment, and the members of the "Grupo Asesor"<sup>2</sup> (Advisors Group) national evaluation to upload the results information and the launching videos.

Secondly, a launch was held with a space open to the public. This space was attended by the National Government represented by the Ministers of Environment and of Science, Technology and Innovation. Subsequently, a panel was held in which the co-chairs of the national assessment presented the results and findings with some final reflections on the work that was carried out. Finally, a discussion was held between the ministers present, a representative of academia and guests from the Indigenous Peoples and local communities/ethnic groups that participated in the national assessment.

In addition, a private meeting was held at the Ministry of Environment, the Alexander von Humboldt Institute and the co-chairs of the national assessment to discuss the steps to follow for the implementation of the findings. Subsequently, a press conference was held with the participation of the aforementioned entities.

## Lessons learned

- National assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services should adopt and adapt the findings to their local contexts, even if the same methodology is used. It should also be emphasized that the methodology only proposes a framework for action to ensure the effectiveness of national assessments, however, the interpretation of the findings should be flexible and thought through in the national-local context.

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<sup>2</sup> The Advisory Group was composed of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colciencias (now the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation) and the other institutes of the National Environmental System. This group was in charge of accompanying and advising when necessary on different aspects and stages of the evaluation.

- It is important to mention that the Alexander von Humboldt Institute, particularly its communications team, and the Technical Support Unit - TSU of the national evaluation played a decisive role in the monitoring and follow-up of the dissemination strategy. It is vital that this strategy has a person in charge and that there is constant monitoring to avoid that public interest is lost or that the results do not reach the target audience once they are disseminated.
- Communicating key findings and recommendations was a major challenge, as how can you generate expectation and interest in a process that is initially totally confidential? The use of the scoping document and its dissemination was important for this purpose. In the Colombian case, although a structured dissemination strategy was implemented, factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other events already discussed in this document hindered its dissemination. As a recommendation, it is suggested to use the available digital resources to avoid setbacks in case of situations that get out of control in the process of national evaluations. This implies having a good knowledge and response plan with these resources as an alternative plan if face-to-face meetings or activities are not possible.
- In the Colombian case, a major barrier to the national evaluation was the complexity of the national territory. To carry the information of the national evaluation and, subsequently, its results has not been an easy task. Reaching, for example, the Indigenous Peoples and local communities farthest from the country's urban centers has been quite challenging and this generates a lesson learned from the Colombian case: it is important to think about the accessibility of those who will be involved in the national evaluations and the public to whom the results are to be communicated. A country with a varied geography and demanding in terms of access should include in its evaluation planning a planning component for the dissemination process in order to prevent geography and lack of access from compromising the scope of the information.
- Giving the evaluation an identity and also bringing those who worked on it closer to the public was one of the great successes of the Colombian experience. The web portal managed to make the national assessment an attractive process thanks to the different communication strategies employed, such as podcasts, profiles in story form of the co-chairs and chapter leader authors, opinion articles, among others. In short, it is recommended that countries that are initiating the process invest in a good website and give an important space to digital tools.
- The development and use of infographics was another good practice that was used satisfactorily in the Colombian case. Infographics as visual material were made with the objective of transmitting information in a simpler way and with a scope designed for any audience. In other words, infographics make it possible to convey the key messages of the evaluation in a visually pleasing way that is easy to distribute and understand. The use of this tool made it possible to address a challenge inherent to the scientific evaluation process, which is to translate the results into language that is understandable to non-scientists who must understand the findings in order to make informed decisions. The infographics served to strengthen the communication process to politicians and other key stakeholders.



- Another point to highlight is the need to make it clear that the findings should be implemented and used in decision making. In this sense, the involvement of the National Biodiversity Platforms, in the case of Colombia the so-called "IPBES National Committee", in the follow-up process of dissemination and subsequent implementation is necessary so that the evaluation does not remain a research exercise without any impact on decision-making.

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