The review process of a national ecosystem assessment


#  Why

*Why the review process is important in a national ecosystem assessment?*

The review process helps validate assessment findings, ensures feedback from stakeholders is incorporated and contributes towards the alignment with the assessments key policy questions throughout the process. The development of the technical report involves producing a series of drafts (i.e., zero order draft, first order draft, second order draft and the final report). These drafts are reviewed by editors that are experts in their fields and represent a range of scientific, technical, and socioeconomic views, including indigenous and local knowledge. The first draft report follows the chapter outline and addresses the guidance and questions in the approved Scoping Report. Documents to be reviewed during the national ecosystem assessment process include the *scoping* report (and its drafts); the technical report (and its drafts); the Summary for Policymakers (SPM); and other key documents.

#  WHEN

*When should a review be carried out?*

Reviews are conducted after completing each draft of the technical report and following the synthesis of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM). This provides an opportunity to identify gaps in knowledge, ensure coherence across chapters and avoid duplication of data and information. The review process increases the transparency, credibility, and legitimacy of the assessment process, ensuring more robust and policy-relevant final outputs.

For example, the chapter outline is generally considered in a first author meeting where it is annotated and developed into a zero-order draft for internal review. This is the basis for developing the first-order draft of all chapters, which is then submitted to an independent external review open to all interested and qualified reviewers.

# How

How to carry out the review process?

The following is a suggested method for conducting a review process. However, this process might be adapted to fit the country context, as described in the examples below from Cameroon (Box A) and Ethiopia (Box B).

**Internal review**

The internal review process involves co-chairs, coordinating lead authors, lead authors and the Technical Support Unit. It allows authors to identify areas of duplication and overlap in each technical report's drafts and ensure coherent messaging throughout the assessment.

**External review**

External reviews are often only conducted after the development of the first-order draft, second-order draft and Summary for Policymakers. The step aims to provide the authors with constructive feedback on the content of the assessment, ensuring and preparing an assessment of the highest credibility and legitimacy.

**Open review process**: If an open process is chosen, the Technical Support Unit will develop a call for comments from all stakeholders. This might be communicated through a variety of ways, for example, mailing lists, social media, direct emails, radio, websites etc. See country example in the box below:

EXAMPLE: As part of Cameroon’s national ecosystem assessment, reviewers were identified from the different stakeholder groups. They managed to secure 40-50 external reviewers, which comprised of mixture of experts and various stakeholder groups. See further explanation in box A below.

**Closed review process:** The Technical Support Unit will initiate a call for nominations for reviewers. It can be helpful to provide details of the requirements and disciplines covered by the assessment and ideally, these reviewers will represent a range of backgrounds, regions, disciplines, expertise, and viewpoints. This might include the following stakeholders: government representatives, academic institutions, non-governmental organisations, indigenous peoples and local communities, youth organisations, etc. If there is an established national biodiversity platform, engaging them in this closed review process has been considered by some countries to be useful.

EXAMPLE: Azerbaijan set up its national platform during the scoping stage, including to support the assessment process and to emphasize the value of establishing links with the government for sustainability and impact. Its core motivation was to ensure and facilitate future national engagement on issues related to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Once the review period is over, the Technical Support Unit (TSU) collates the review comments, with support from the co-chairs, and shares them with the coordinating lead authors. They then organize their chapter authors to address the comments appropriately. The review editors can help authors address the comments too. (Refer to the [guidance on selecting authors](https://www.ecosystemassessments.net/resource/selecting-authors-en-es-fr/) for more information).

BOX A In Cameroon’s case, authors worked collaboratively during the drafting phases, meeting several times to discuss chapter cohesion, easing the review process. The review of the assessment drafts was carried out a chapter at a time, starting with a review between authors of different assessment chapters. Once the review among authors was complete and addressed, the drafts were shared more widely among other members of the national ecosystem assessment project, including Co-chairs, TSU members and other stakeholders. Finally, drafts were sent to external reviewers, identified by authors and members of the TSU. Reviewers and stakeholders were invited to meet with the authors of each chapter and discuss their feedback, to work through any conflicting amendments and towards cohesion of the assessment.

BOX B Ethiopia’s approach also considered the assessment chapter by chapter. During the review of the second order draft, the TSU invited the authors and reviewers of each chapter to defend their chapters and the amendments to members of the TSU. The TSU convened five meetings for each chapter, with a final meeting between all chapter authors to work towards cohesion of the final assessment and share feedback across chapters.

In both examples above, the review process has included similar key elements. Both country teams approached the assessment by chapter segments, breaking the review into clear segments before considering the assessment. Each chapter team received reviews from their peers, other authors on the assessment, as well as members of the wider assessment team. Once reviews were carried out on each chapter, authors were brought back together to work towards cohesion across chapters.

**Resources**

IPBES (2018). The IPBES Guide on the Production of Assessments https://bit.ly/2wCfQHB