

HOW TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY PLATFORMS

The Effectiveness and Sustainability of National Biodiversity Platforms (NBPs) Depend on their Perceived Credibility, Relevance and Legitimacy.

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ENSURING NBPs SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LONG TERM FUNDING

1.1 RESOURCE MOBILIZATION PLAN

To reduce the risk of financial resources being a limiting factor to sustained core operations, NBPs should aim to diversify their funding sources. A balanced ratio of unrestricted and committed funds, with a hybrid model involving various actors, is instrumental for maintaining independence (credibility), flexibility, and sustainability. Aim for discretionary funding, allowing more freedom in the designation of its use (e.g., to maintain basic capabilities through staff and facilities) and some flexibility to respond (rapidly) to emerging policy priorities or crisis situations. Being housed within a host institution and having a mandate can facilitate a minimum flow of discretionary funds.



Mexico's NBP has operated for approximately three decades and credits this longevity partly to hybrid funding arrangements with the Mexican Federal Government (for core functions) and partnerships with other organizations (for special projects). It outsources important, but resource-intensive activities to partners (e.g., hosting biological collections), and in turn, provides communication support to those partners to raise the profile of their work (Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad - CONABIO).

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ENSURING NBP's SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH ITS OBJECTIVES, VISION AND NETWORKING ROLE

2.1 OBJECTIVES RELEVANT TO SOCIETY

It is important that the objectives of the NBP are relevant to the society in which it operates. It can do this by pursuing established societal priorities and/or emerging topics that may not yet be broadly recognized by society. NBP's objectives aligned with established agendas offer stability, simplify strategic planning and attract consistent funding.



South Africa's National Biodiversity Hub reprioritized its functions to address urgent national needs for stimulating the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the platform rapidly invested in the bioeconomy topic (South Africa National IPBES Hub).

Investing in emerging topics can strategically position NBPs for long-term sustainability, especially if the topic becomes central to future policy needs. Horizon-scanning and scenario-planning tools can help identify possible futures and prepare flexible strategies that can work with different outcomes (Lieberman & Montgomery 1988; Ramírez & Wilkinson 2016; Reed et al. 2013). Ideas can then be vetted with policy officers, advisors and other stakeholders (e.g., NGOs, think tanks), to explore potential policy directions.



Belgium initially established its communities of practices and policy support activities around emerging issues which have now evolved to become relevant and mainstream. Notably, it began work on invasive alien species in 2006, when the issue was still relatively unknown and not on the policy radar in Belgium. When the European Union Regulation on Invasive Alien Species came into force in 2015, Belgium's response was notably robust, largely due to the groundwork already laid by the NBP. This foresight to create their own space and eventual indispensability secured the NBP a formal cooperation agreement with regional authorities.

2.2 CLEAR, ACCESSIBLE, AND COMPELLING VISION

The NBP needs to clearly define its purpose and scope to help stakeholders understand the value it brings to decision-making. This helps to increase the chances of securing a mandate or other form of official endorsement or recognition (Hove 2007). NBPs can also have evolving visions that adjust to their change of objectives.



South Africa emphasizes the need to develop "value propositions" for the entire "value chain" of stakeholders who could benefit from the NBP's work: emerging scientists, government officials and senior decision-makers (South Africa National IPBES Hub).

2.3 ENGAGE WITH GLOBAL NETWORKS AND PLATFORMS

Engaging with global platforms like IPBES can enhance the sustainability of NBPs by connecting them with organizations and institutions that support existing national and sub-regional platforms and networks. This collaboration strengthens national capacities, improves stakeholder engagement at local, regional and global levels, and provides an online space for information exchange and mutual capacity-building.

These models can range from an informal network of experts to a dedicated project team within a larger organization, or even an independent entity with official political endorsement. Governance structures refer to arrangements such as steering committees, advisory boards, communities of practice, and core operational staff.

3.1 POLITICAL MANDATE

NBPs can achieve sustainability through official endorsements and mandates. These endorsements often come with discretionary funding essential for core operations. Advisory boards that include representatives from multiple political parties can establish legitimacy with different governments (Bertelli & Wenger 2009). Another effective strategy is to focus on long-term, broadly supported policy goals, such as climate change, education, public health, or sustainable development goals, which remain relevant even when short-term political priorities shift (Rafferty & Griffin 2004).



South Africa's NBP was established as a national investment in response to international obligations, particularly related to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). It provides analytical and advisory services to government agencies regarding issues relevant to South Africa's obligations under multilateral environmental agreements (South Africa National IPBES Hub).

3.2 EXISTING INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

Embedding the NBP into existing stable institutions is a good strategy for sustainability. Such structures should ideally have a solid foundation with robust stakeholder networks to access infrastructure and support for the NBP's activities.



Denmark has a mandate from the Ministry of Environment and Food and five Danish universities. Its coordination group consists of representatives from these organizations, so there is an interaction between policy and science. They have the benefit of being able to access any scientist within the five host universities (IPBES Denmark).

3.3 LEVERAGING THE FULL VALUE OF DIVERSITY IN NBPs GOVERNANCE BODIES

Incorporating a diversity of stakeholders across several sectors in the governance bodies of NBPs (e.g., steering committee, advisory board) has a two-fold effect on sustainability. First, it builds legitimacy, which is crucial for acquiring strategic information and gaining access to difficult-to-access forums in different sectors. This, in turn, increases the NBPs influence and impact. (Reed et al. 2018; Van den Hove 2007). Second, this inclusivity expands the NBP's reach into various sectoral opportunities, which can offer resources such as expertise, funding, data, and in-kind goods and services.



France indicates that having a strong network of committed people helps the NBP to fulfill its various objectives and functions. This is particularly leveraged by being hosted within a larger boundary institution (French Foundation for Research on Biodiversity) also working at the science-policy interface, which has a Stakeholder Advisory Board (comprising representatives from more than 200 institutions) (French Committee for IPBES).

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ENSURING NBP'S SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES

Institutional processes form the framework of practices that an NBP employs to implement its strategic plan and achieve its objectives.

4.1 ROBUST STRATEGIC AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Developing, implementing, and regularly revising a mid- and long-term strategic plan is the most proactive approach to sustainability. This includes articulating targeted and timed strategies and their linked activities for achieving clearly defined objectives, the uncertainties and risks that need to be navigated, and the resources for execution. A well-developed plan ensures that all components of the NBP work synergistically.



Nigeria plans its programs and projects approximately four months ahead of the time it needs to start engagement with or secure support from government, in order to work with administrative procedures and policy cycles of government agencies (Nigerian Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services).

4.2 ITERATIVE ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE LIFETIME OF NBPs ACTIVITIES

The NBP should take a co-creation (co-design and co-implementation) approach throughout the lifecycle of its projects. This requires continuous open dialogue with stakeholders who, for example, were consulted in the project design or contributed data and willingness to receive, learn from, and adapt appropriately to feedback. This social learning process builds trust, ensures that the work of the NBP remains relevant to decision-making needs and therefore, more likely to be adopted in policy contexts. To improve the efficiency of iterative engagement, a stakeholder mapping exercise (e.g., categorizing based on influence, interest, and impact on the project) helps to prioritize the designation of resources for engagement efforts.



Switzerland conducted stakeholder mapping exercises to focus its efforts on those with high influence in biodiversity mainstreaming, whose activities have high impact on biodiversity, those who have different worldviews and value systems, and those who have not yet been engaged in SPPI processes (Swiss Biodiversity Forum).

4.3 CO-CREATING TANGIBLE OUTPUTS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

To scope and prioritize ideas for outputs, the NBP can draw on the perspectives of its in-house stakeholder groups (e.g., advisory board, steering committee) to understand what is needed in a particular sector, who could be potential clients, co-design and test first iterations of outputs and practice 'elevator pitches.' For this reason, it is useful to have multi-sectoral stakeholders engaged within the NBP's governance structures (see Institutional Structures). Furthermore, NBPs should consider having a 'legacy and access' plan (embedded within its strategic plan) which supports continuity and progress by ensuring that outputs from past projects are accessible to be cumulatively built upon (Cash et al. 2003). Ongoing and future projects benefit from this solid knowledge base and contextual lessons learned.

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