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It's not (all) about the money — supporting IPBES through challenging times

“An IPCC for biodiversity” – this is what many people were hoping for when the Intergovernmental Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) was founded (Nature, 2010). And indeed, as reported in previous editorials, IPBES has had a very promising start – with a comprehensive conceptual framework and an ambitious work program (Opgenoorth and Faith 2013). Its first published thematic assessment on pollinators, pollination and food production (IPBES 2016a) received wide attention not only within the (ecological or biogeographic) scientific community, but far beyond (Opgenoorth and Hotes 2016). The uptake by decision makers at national and regional levels has been impressive¹, with follow-up activities in a number of countries, including the so-called ‘Coalition of the Willing’. Their aim is to implement measures that should improve conditions for pollinators and for people to enjoy benefits from well-functioning pollination. While the scenario and modelling assessment has also been finished recently (IPBES 2016b), the regional and global assessments are currently underway, as are additional thematic assessments.

However, during its last plenary session in Bonn, Germany, in March 2017, IPBES was confronted with difficult decisions due to insufficient financial pledges to the Platform’s Voluntary Trust Fund. The consequences of the budgetary shortfall are severe: The “cash crunch” (Stokstad 2017) will delay the initiation of the pending assessments under the current work programme, it could potentially lower the quality of the reports and, ultimately, decrease the impact of IPBES. The problem: while more than 100 countries are IPBES members, they are obviously not willing to provide financial means to actually make the platform operable on the highest quality levels as would be necessary to serve as most important, policy-

relevant scientific body on global biodiversity. This is particularly embarrassing as we are talking about an annual budget of less than 10 million US-Dollars: The 2017 budget had to be cut down to \$8.7 million, the budget for 2018 will have to be reduced by almost a third to \$5 million. Just to put the figure of \$10 million into perspective: it is about 0.001% of the annual budget of the American Environmental Protection Agency, around 0.8% of what the European Union has invested into biofuel production facilities per year between 2003 and 2016, or 0.9% of the annual budget for CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research.

Even if we acknowledge the challenges of agreeing on each member’s financial responsibilities in international organizations, there should be room for most member states to increase their financial pledges and strive for more balanced contributions in terms of the fraction of their respective gross domestic products to be dedicated to the work of IPBES (fig. 1a, b). Given the urgency of the global biodiversity crisis, it is paramount that the international community provides the funds necessary for IPBES to fulfill its role in finding solutions for humanity’s biggest challenges.

The IPBES budget challenge may be a symptom of the current trend to assign less importance to scientific facts in political debates and reach decisions based on preconceived ideas rather than on careful consideration of reproducible evidence. However, this should encourage us as biogeographers and biodiversity scientists even more to get engaged in IPBES activities and contribute to its impact on sustainable development (Hof et al. 2015). The contributing authors play a major role to ensure the quality of the assessments, especially if their expertise aligns well with the topic of the respective assessment chapters. Thus, we should

¹ <http://www.ipbes.net/work-programme/pollination>

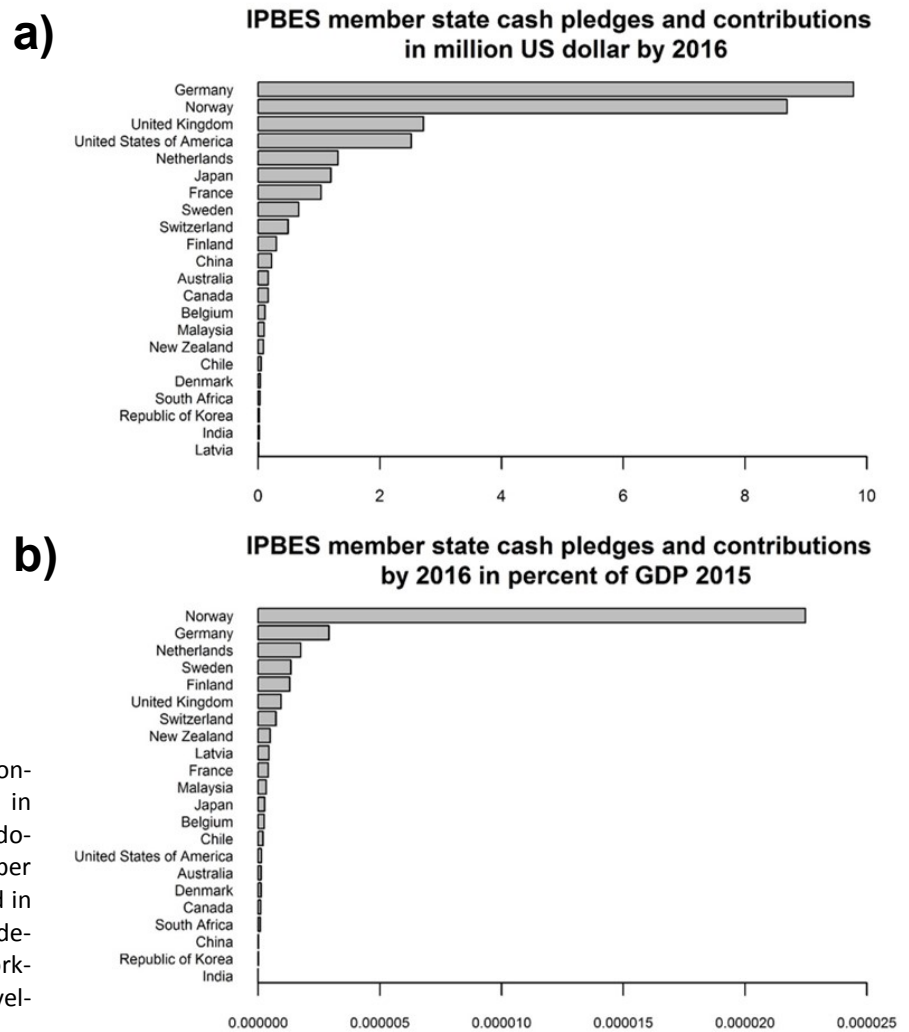


Figure 1. IPBES member state total contributions and pledges by 2016 and in relation to their respective gross domestic products. Of the 126 member states, 22 countries have contributed in cash, though in strongly varying degrees. Data are taken from IPBES working document 5-10 and "World Development Indicators²."

become proactive in offering our expertise and support as contributing authors. Another option is by providing our knowledge and experience to the upcoming external review processes for the following IPBES deliverables:

- Thematic assessment on land degradation and restoration, (May 1st through June 26th, Deliverable 3bi)
- Regional/subregional assessments on biodiversity and ecosystem services (Deliverable 2b)
 - Africa, (May 1st through June 26th)
 - Asia-Pacific(May 1st through June 26th)
 - Europe and Central Asia (May 1st through June 26th)
 - Americas (May 29th through July 24th)

To do so, simply register at the IPBES website³ and apply to become an IPBES external reviewer for individual chapters.

In addition to sharing our insights to ensure that IPBES assessments meet the highest standards, work at all levels of society is necessary to spread the idea that open, equitable debate is a prerequisite for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. IPBES aims to integrate scientific and indigenous and local knowledge in its deliverables, and collaboration across the traditional divides between scientific disciplines as well as between academic and non-academic partners needs to be developed. Stakeholder engagement is absolutely indispensable for this purpose, but establishing a wide network of individuals and institutions from all parts of civil society has not been easy during the early development of IPBES (Hotes and Opgenoorth 2014), and achieving the balanced representation of all relevant groups in IPBES bodies has also been

² Downloaded from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator> on 17th April 2017.

³ <http://www.ipbes.net/user/register?destination=sod-review>

challenging (Opgenoorth et al. 2014). These issues persist, and additional efforts are necessary to overcome them. Unfortunately, instead of facilitating stronger stakeholder engagement, restrictions have been put forward on the use of the name, acronym and logo of IPBES which makes it more difficult for stakeholders to engage the public. Although it is important to prevent the IPBES process from being abused, every person who qualifies as a stakeholder — and this is pretty much everybody based on the definition of what constitutes a stakeholder of IPBES⁴ — must be able to relate to IPBES, and this naturally involves the use of the name, acronym and logo of the Platform.

A lot of work lies ahead if the vision of a world in which information on biodiversity and ecosystem services provides the basis for rational decision-making, including the peaceful resolution of conflicts over access to natural resources, is to become a reality. The recent March for Science has been an encouraging sign that there is indeed widespread support around the world for such an approach. Let's do our bit and give IPBES a chance to flourish — and thereby give biodiversity an opportunity to remain on the global political agenda.

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