



THIRD WABES WEST AFRICAN EXPERT WORKSHOP ON STRENGTHENING THE OPERATIONAL CAPACITY OF THE WABES EXPERTS NETWORK AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SECOND WORK PROGRAM OF IPBES

OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO, MAY 21-23, 2019

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

WABES is an initiative to facilitate networking and capacity-building across West Africa with the aim to support West African contributions to the Work Programmes of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Its overarching goal is to connect Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services experts from West African universities, research institutions, governmental (policy makers) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and existing science-policy interfaces. Workshops conducted annually act as exchange platforms and distribution hubs for IPBES developments, supplemented by discussion groups to connect experts and policy makers across West Africa and beyond.

The third WABES experts' workshop was organized in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) from May 21-23, 2019. In attendance at this workshop were 68 experts from 19 countries, including all 15 West African ECOWAS member countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo), and others (Cameroun, Egypt, Morocco, Germany). Amongst the participants were representatives from IPBES, IPBES national focal points, researchers, NGOs, and as well as from the policy sector.

The participants highly appreciated the progress of the WABES Master programme - SPIBES, which currently has 15 students, and that is established at the University of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Cote d'Ivoire, as a valuable way to develop capacities and foster mutual exchanges at the national level between the participating countries.

The workshop was conducted in a participatory way through several breakout group sections, panels and interactive presentations. The participants highlighted the relevance of IPBES for West Africa, as a region exceptionally rich in biodiversity, and in many ways dependent on nature and its contributions to people.

The workshop addressed the following objectives:

1. THE WABES INITIATIVE AND IPBES & ITS WORK PROGRAMME ARE KNOWN IN THE REGION AND ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN TOWARDS ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The recent adoption by 132 governments and the launch of the IPBES global assessment on the status of global biodiversity, in May this year at the seventh IPBES plenary in Paris, has raised a lot of awareness about IPBES, its products and its key messages to policy makers worldwide. In West Africa, however, there is still the dire need to create more awareness of IPBES beyond the community of

experts. The participants appreciate the role the WABES program and particularly, its experts workshops in raising the awareness of IPBES in the region, as the consideration of nature (biodiversity) and its contributions to people in regard to sustainable development and long-term economic growth is crucial to be assimilated into national policies. The participants acknowledged that their knowledge of IPBES, its objectives, work programmes and relevant outputs (assessments) have been enhanced through this third WABES experts' workshop.

2. CONSOLIDATING THE GOALS ACHIEVED AND LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR: WHAT HAS WABES ACHIEVED AND WHAT ARE THE FUTURE CHALLENGES?

The participants all agree that WABES is on the right track in the implementation of its objectives, and has already made recommendable impacts in the first-half cycle of the project-funding period. The participants opined that the series of annual workshops so far conducted by WABES in the past three years have provided knowledge about IPBES, its processes, and guidelines on how to contribute to its work programme. Additionally, these workshops have served as ideal avenues for interactions, exchanges and strengthening of their social network.

The SPIBES Master's programme still ongoing has made significant contributions towards the education of young pool of multidisciplinary experts on biodiversity in the region. The participants encouraged WABES to improve on its existing online platform as this presents a further opportunity for information exchange and networking. WABES was also encouraged to find mechanisms to reach out to wider audiences (stakeholders from the policy sector, scientific communities, NGOs, indigenous and local knowledge holders, and the civil society).

3. PARTICIPANTS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION ON IPBES-RELEVANT TOPICS AND STRENGTHEN NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

The attendance and commitment of a number of IPBES experts (Co-chair of the Global Assessment, MEP member, IPBES authors & fellow) contributed to a profound understanding of IPBES, its functions, and outputs. The planned activities of IPBES in the course of its second work programme (until 2030) were introduced through several presentations, discussions, and interactive working groups. The workshop facilitated networking activities through various interactive sessions and group discussions; where individual views were expressed, and common ideas developed. The participants were happy for this opportunity and expressed interest in more of such opportunities for exchanges. The WABES online platform was highlighted as an important tool in this regard, and a number of ideas were collected on how this platform should be further developed.

4. PARTICIPANTS GET A BETTER IDEA ON HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO IPBES WORK

The participants stated that the workshop was very helpful to get more insights, and to discuss the various options on how to contribute to the IPBES processes. Presentations on, and accompanying interactive working group sessions, about the new IPBES assessments and its second work programme in general indicated ways on how to engage in ongoing IPBES activities. At the same time, challenges were also highlighted inclusive of difficulties to procure sufficient funding to intensify those activities. To overcome this challenge, the participants expressed the necessity of implementing national platforms to support IPBES national focal points in their countries to help better connect to the IPBES processes and facilitate the mainstreaming of IPBES relevant topics. In this regard, it is relevant to provide policy tools adapted to national peculiarities and policies.

5. EXCHANGE ABOUT THE ROLE AND RELEVANCE OF INDIGENOUS LOCAL KNOWLEDGE (ILK) AND OTHER KNOWLEDGE AVAILABLE IN THE REGION

The presentation of Mr. Yacouba Sawadogo, holder of the alternative Nobel Prize and one of the most renowned indigenous knowledge holder in Burkina Faso was an eye-opener for the audience. His profound knowledge and shared experiences on traditional medicinal practices, sustainable land management practices and restoration of degraded land using local Zai method, indicated the relevance of including indigenous and local knowledge in all aspects of the work of IPBES. The participants encouraged WABES to continuously involve indigenous and local knowledge holders in its activities. The participants appreciated the fact that IPBES recognizes the deep knowledge possessed by the indigenous peoples and local communities on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and that they are often better placed than scientists to provide detailed information on local biodiversity and environmental change.

6. STRATEGIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KEY MESSAGES OF THE IPBES GLOBAL ASSESSMENT IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES ARE DEVELOPED

The participants stressed the need for a proper uptake of the key messages of the IPBES Global assessment and the regional Africa Assessment into national policies, as this is crucial for West Africa. Participants also highlighted the need for joint collaboration between their national focal points and relevant stakeholders (scientists and policy makers) in their countries. Regarding the mainstreaming process, the participants stated that there are still language barriers to overcome. In their developmental stages, most IPBES materials are only available in English language, making it difficult for non-English speakers to effectively participate in these processes. Moreover, the participants stressed that adequate funding and all-round support from their government would improve the capability of the national focal points to contribute to networking activities.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS BY THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants expressed their sincere gratitude to the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU) for its interest in the West African region and the establishment of WABES, and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for supporting this workshop and its objectives. Participants affirmed their interests and commitments to WABES and its implementation, and were grateful to the organisers of this third expert workshop and for providing the necessary facilities and pleasant working atmosphere. The participants expressed their sincere thanks to the Government of Burkina Faso and WASCAL for hosting the workshop.

Ouagadougou, May 23rd 2019

The Participants