

Summary of Key Themes and Observations from the IPBES Meeting (Windhoek, Namibia, December 10–16, 2024)

By EAERE Delegates Ben Groom (Head), Andreas Kontoleon, Ståle Navrud, Sandra Rousseau

1. The Process of Reaching Consensus

- **Detailed Negotiations:** Observers highlighted the painstaking and methodical nature of the text revision process, where every word and phrase in key documents was debated to ensure clarity, shared understanding, and alignment with diverse political and ideological standpoints. Chairs and authors demonstrated significant skill in balancing ideological differences, navigating interventions, and maintaining progress.
 - **Inclusive Representation:** Efforts were made to reflect diverse worldviews, including traditional knowledge (e.g., indigenous and local knowledge systems), while managing sensitivities around neo-colonialism and cultural perspectives.
 - **Challenges in Efficiency:** The live revision of text in plenaries was perceived as slow and, at times, inefficient, but necessary for achieving agreement across stakeholders.
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2. The Role of Economics

- **Economic Instruments:** The discussions addressed the identification and removal of harmful subsidies and perverse incentives as part of the solution to biodiversity loss. Also, policy instruments such as PES, global cooperation on meeting financial needs and providing access to technological innovations as well as a shift in business models were mentioned in the text with little discussion by the participants. However:
 - There was limited engagement with the relative efficacy of policy alternatives, with the debate often defaulting to listing a broad toolkit of potential options without critical analysis.
 - The emphasis on financing biodiversity conservation underscored its importance but lacked a detailed discussion of mechanisms or trade-offs.
- **Systemic Economic Structures:** Economic systems like capitalism, colonial history, and globalization were debated as underlying causes of biodiversity loss.
 - Some countries advocated for explicit mention of capitalism and globalization as drivers of biodiversity loss, while others preferred more generalized terms like "dominant systems" or "relationships of domination."
 - Trade-offs associated with economic growth and technology, including the "rebound effect" (increased consumption offsetting efficiency gains), were raised as significant concerns.
 - Several countries exhibited an aversion to mandatory policies. For instance: mentions of other agreements such as the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework often lead to discussions about terminology and obligations of (non-)signatories. As another example, one country strongly opposed the use of the word 'protected' or 'protection'

because it implied a legal stringency and a lack of flexibility (e.g. limited land use in protected natural areas), while the words ‘conservation and management’ had a more ambiguous definition and allowed more flexibility in land use options.

- **Stakeholders and Civil Society:** The role of stakeholders and supporting institutions in policy making was emphasized as critical for achieving transformative change, alongside greater engagement with civil society.
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3. Key Themes from the Discussions

- **Transformative Change:** Central to the deliberations was the summary for policymakers on the causes of biodiversity loss and the pathways to achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity. Key areas of debate included:
 - **The Role of Scale:** Transformative change was discussed at various levels—individual, institutional, and global—with a focus on both small-scale and macro-level interventions.
 - **Interconnectedness:** The nexus approach emphasized the interconnected nature of biodiversity, food, water, health, and climate, advocating for integrated policy responses.
 - **Language Sensitivity:** Efforts were made to simplify terminology to ensure accessibility for policymakers, avoiding technical jargon and overly theoretical language. “The text has to be read by ministers”, was a common comment.
 - **Traditional Knowledge and Cultural Perspectives:** Indigenous knowledge and worldviews were acknowledged as foundational to sustainable practices. However, debates highlighted sensitivities around framing these communities as needing behavioral change.
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4. Political Dynamics

- **Ideological Positions:** Countries exhibited differing priorities, such as:
 - One country having reservations about the discussion of subsidies and trade distortions.
 - Another country having reservations about the term "environmental justice."
 - Yet another country advocating for stronger emphasis on the role of colonialism and the importance of indigenous rights.
 - **Compromise and Pragmatism:** Authors and chairs often removed contentious terms or reframed them to achieve consensus, guided by evidence and the principle of inclusivity.
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5. Observers' Reflections

- **Value of Observation:** The experience as EAERE observers was deemed valuable for understanding the intricacies of international biodiversity policymaking and the role of economics within these frameworks.

- **Need for Preparation:** Observers noted that deeper prior engagement with the background documents would have enhanced their understanding of the discussions.
- **Future Participation:** It was recommended that EAERE continue its observer role in future COP meetings, as it provides insights into international policy processes and the integration of economic considerations into biodiversity governance.
- **Opening up opportunities to PHD students:** Observing the process could be an interesting opportunity/experience for PHD students. Clearly at this stage there is little that could be contributed to the final texts, but witnessing the process through which agreement is attained and the diligence shown towards differences opinions in reaching agreement could help develop skills in this area.