PRESS RELEASE

New IPBES report suggests transformative change urgently needed in global approach to infectious diseases

- *Human activities that drive climate change and biodiversity loss also drive pandemic risk.*
- *Transformative change needed in global approach to dealing with infectious diseases.*
- *Decreasing disruptive human activities, increasing biodiversity conservation and reducing unsustainable exploitation of biodiversity are key responses.*

29 October 2020 – Addressing disruptive human activities and unsustainable consumption and increasing biodiversity conservation are some of the changes needed to proactively deal with infectious diseases, suggests a major new report on biodiversity and pandemics.

The report, from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), an independent intergovernmental body comprising over 130 member governments, says unsustainable exploitation of the environment has led to almost all pandemics.

The report notes that reducing anthropogenic global environmental change will help reduce pandemic risk. Pandemics and other emerging zoonoses cause both widespread human suffering and potentially more than a trillion dollars in economic damages annually. According to IPBES, the cost of strategies to prevent pandemics are estimated to be between $40 and 58 billion annually, or two orders of magnitude less than the costs of responding to them.

IPBES says COVID-19 is the sixth global health pandemic since the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918. Although it has its origins in microbes carried by animals, like all pandemics its emergence has been entirely driven by human activities.

“Biodiversity loss and disease emergence share many of the same drivers: human-made changes to nature that disrupt biodiversity, such as deforestation, land-use change and the way we manage agricultural and food production systems, to mention but some,” said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity Secretariat.

Pandemic risk, says the report, could be significantly lowered by reducing the unsustainable consumption of commodities from emerging disease hotspots, and of wildlife and derived

wildlife products, as well as by reducing excessive meat consumption from livestock production. In addition, the conservation of protected areas, and measures that prevent human encroachment into high biodiversity regions will reduce the wildlife-livestock-human contact interface and help prevent the spillover of novel pathogens.

“It is very clear that we must do better to prevent the emergence of infectious diseases rather than reacting to them once they are already here. Reducing present and future pandemic risks can only be effective, and transformative, if we address the common drivers of biodiversity loss and ill health” says Mrema.

Conclusions reached in the report support the conclusions and recommendations put forth in the recently released fifth edition of the *Global Biodiversity Outlook* (GBO-5). The GBO-5 outlines eight major transitions needed to slow, then halt nature’s accelerating decline. These include:

- the **land and forests transition**, that avoids reduces and mitigates land-use change though actions such as conserving intact ecosystems, restoring ecosystems, combatting and reversing degradation, and employing landscape level spatial planning.
- the **sustainable food systems transition**, which enables sustainable and healthy diets with a greater emphasis on a diversity of foods, mostly plant-based, and more moderate consumption of meat and fish, as well as dramatic cuts in the waste involved in food supply and consumption; and,
- the ***One Health* transition**, which calls for managing ecosystems, including agricultural and urban ecosystems, as well as the use of wildlife, through an integrated approach, to promote healthy ecosystems and healthy people.

The IPBES report suggests global strategies to prevent pandemics based on reducing the wildlife trade and land use change and increasing *One Health* surveillance would cost between $40 and 58 billion annually – two orders of magnitude less than the damages pandemics produce, providing a strong economic incentive for transformative change to reduce the risk of pandemics.

The IPBES report supports the lessons learned over the last decade of implementing the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and provides directions for the way forward in developing the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to be agreed in 2021. These include:

- still greater efforts to address the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, including through integrated and holistic approaches to planning and implementation,
- greater interaction among government ministries, economic sectors and society generally;
- engaging women, indigenous and local people, business and other stakeholders;
- strengthening national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and associated planning processes, including their adoption as whole-of-government policy instruments, and ensuring their timely implementation.

"The post-2020 global biodiversity framework," says Ms. Mrema, "can play a significant role in building the resilience that the IPBES report identifies as needed need in the face of growing environmental, health and development challenges."

NOTES TO EDITORS

IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body comprising more than 130 member Governments. Established by Governments in 2012, it provides policymakers with objective scientific assessments about the state of knowledge regarding the planet's biodiversity, ecosystems and the contributions they make to people, as well as the tools and methods to protect and sustainably use these vital natural assets. For more information about IPBES and its assessments visit www.ipbes.net

Global Biodiversity Outlook 5: www.cbd.int/gbo5

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
Opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entering into force in December 1993, the Convention on Biological Diversity is an international treaty for the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of the components of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits derived from the use of genetic resources. With 196 Parties, the Convention has near universal participation among countries. The Convention seeks to address all threats to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including threats from climate change, through scientific assessments, the development of tools, incentives and processes, the transfer of technologies and good practices and the full and active involvement of relevant stakeholders including indigenous and local communities, youth, NGOs, women and the business community. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing are supplementary agreements to the Convention. The Cartagena Protocol, which entered into force on 11 September 2003, seeks to protect biological diversity from the potential risks posed by living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology. To date, 173 Parties have ratified the Cartagena Protocol. The Nagoya Protocol aims at sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies. It entered into force on 12 October 2014 and to date has been ratified by 128 Parties.

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