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ValuES: Methods for integrating ecosystem services into policy, planning, and practice

The preservation of biodiversity, ecosystems and their services is essential

Nature is the source of life. Our wellbeing depends on the benefits we humans derive from it. Ecosystem services, such as clean water, soil fertility, pollination and protection against erosion or floods are essential for the production of food and other goods.

The foundation for the sustained provision of many ecosystem services is biological diversity – the diversity of genes, animal and plant species and of healthy ecosystems. Yet in politics and society the value of biodiversity is often not recognized and frequently neglected. As a result, ecosystems and their services are degrading worldwide. Their restoration or replacement is expensive or, in many cases, impossible.

One key to solving this problem is mainstreaming, which means the systematic inclusion of the importance of ecosystems and biodiversity across all sectors of policy and society. To this end, in 2010 member states of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. The 20 so-called Aichi targets contained therein demand, among other things, an improved consideration of the value and benefit of biological diversity in politics (Target 2) and the necessary capacity development to do so (Target 19).

The concept of ecosystem services is particularly useful for demonstrating nature's value and the derived benefits, as it illustrates both our dependence on ecosystems and the impact of human activities on the environment. The concept thus promotes the implementation of ecosystem-friendly measures and policies. Examples from planning, decision-making and management processes in a variety of countries attest to the usefulness of this notion.

Practical challenges in the application of the concept of ecosystem services

However, the practical application of the concept is fraught with challenges. Oftentimes, it is unclear to practitioners how ecosystem service analyses should be designed and how the results should be integrated into political decision-making.

An array of methods and tools exists for identifying, measuring, valuing and portraying ecosystem services. However, there is insufficient know-how regarding the specific application of findings from ecosystem analyses, their impact and their integration into policies. In addition, it is difficult to access information regarding methods and tools; information exchange between practitioners is very limited.

Consequently, many practitioners and decision makers find it difficult to select and apply appropriate methods for specific problems, given the wide range of monetary, quantitative and qualitative methods for assessing ecosystem services.

Objectives and approach of ValuES

This is where **ValuES: Methods for integrating ecosystem services into policy, planning, and practice** comes in. This global project supports practitioners, advisors and decision makers in ministries and other organizations in the integration of ecosystem services into decision-making and planning processes. In order to provide assistance for implementation, the project promotes the comparative analysis of and training in valuation methods; it also promotes international experience exchange.

ValuES operates in five key action fields:

(1) Analysis of existing experiences

Consider existing analyses of ecosystem services and the application of results in decision-making and planning processes. Identify best practice case studies and generate lessons learned.

(2) Inventory of methods and tools

Develop an inventory of methods and tools to guide practitioners and decision makers in the selection and application of methods, tools and indicators that suit their information needs.

(3) Advisory services to partner countries

Provide country-specific advisory services to practitioners and decision makers to identify and include the value of ecosystem services in specific policies and projects.

(4) Capacity building

Design and facilitate trainings regarding the selection and application of methods and tools for the valuation of ecosystem services. These trainings aim at improving capacities to integrate the findings from ecosystem service analyses into decision-making processes.

(5) Network support and international exchange

Support relevant international networks and existing South-South and North-South exchange platforms. Develop and disseminate lessons learned and recommendations related to the design and use of valuation methods and tools at international forums.

Project partners

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the ValuES project is implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in close collaboration with the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) and the Conservation Strategy Fund (CSF).

ValuES has arranged cooperation agreements with GIZ partner projects in Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Mexico, Namibia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Philippines and Vietnam. The project strives for cooperation with other interested initiatives and regional networks.

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| Partner countries | ValuES is a project with a global focus. Currently, cooperation agreements exist with Brazil, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Mexico, Namibia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Philippines and Vietnam |
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