

Participatory monitoring and evaluation of biodiversity: results of the EFRN e-workshop

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Participatory biodiversity assessment (PBA) provides a way of reconciling the need for national assessment, monitoring and reporting; with the increasing focus on involvement of all relevant stakeholders and particularly indigenous / local communities. PBA, i.e. biodiversity assessment by and with non-scientists can provide short-cuts to scientific assessments; provide data which is useful to local resource managers in a way which scientific assessment is not; link in to scientific information which is relevant to local needs; enhance inclusivity of decision-making.

The workshop sought to elucidate: the ways in which values affect the assessment process; approaches and methods in relation to objectives and information needs; the costs and benefits; and priorities for institutional / policy change to create an enabling environment. 300 Participants from 55 countries included the CBD secretariat, international donors and NGOs, universities, grassroots organisations.

All have different reasons for PBA, and varying information needs. Most national or regional decision makers expect information in quantitative spatially comparable forms. Participatory processes may not supply this so readily (or efforts to quantify may distort local perceptions) but may provide qualitative information of different and complementary value. It is very important to match objectives with methods and stakeholders, rather than apply a blanket set of recommendations to all situations which appear to need a participatory approach.

Assessment is affected by value judgements, regardless of who is conducting the assessment. It is often assumed that local people value only useful species; but research reveals spiritual, cultural and ethical values; and that species or habitats with non-material values may be at least as important as those with uses.

In documenting methods, the main debate was between those who sought local knowledge to develop wider-scale quantitative measures of change, and those who emphasised the importance of strengthening community capacity to make decisions about resource management, which in turn enhances their motivation to conserve. It appears that methods linking local and scientific assessments or values are scarce, and more work still needs to be done on the analysis and communication of results.

Participatory approaches take more time and different skills compared with scientific surveys, but there are benefits that are worth this cost. The potential for real synergy between different actors depends not only on good communication, but also on realistic understanding of the costs and benefits of involving different actors in such assessments, and above all ensuring that local people can take part in analysis and decision-making. The *process* of negotiating, observing and analysing indicators may bring about more change than the data gathered itself, and in particular can enhance benefit-sharing, as well as be more sustainable than externally led processes. However to achieve this, changes in education, training of scientists, and institutional networking are needed.

The conference ran from 8-25 January 2002. Please see the conference website:

<http://www.efrn.org/efrn/workshop/biodiversity/index.html>

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