

Reaction to some summary discussion points under theme 2

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Contributed to the PAMEB discussion on January 15, 2002

I intend to react to some of the summary points, so I shall present the point that I am reacting too, first and then my comments.

1. Incorporating values into biodiversity assessments

I believe not. If scientists consider their methods totally objective then they are doing the scientific community a dis-favour and quite frankly deluding themselves. If they are not acknowledging what values and influences are behind our work then it is hidden and that is more of a concern. There is a scientific culture that is subject to same messiness as other cultures, the language wraps it up differently so it sounds imposing, authoritative and objective.

2. Is it possible (for anyone – scientist, forest user or whoever) to be objective in conducting a biodiversity assessment?

Yes, fundamentally so, but new ways of communicating and negotiating common meanings need to be found.

> different stakeholders have different values so it may be difficult to compare their assessments. The theme introduction in particular relates such differences to ways in which distinct taxa are recognised by different stakeholders, and how different values should be taken into account in a multi-stakeholder assessment. Biodiversity is more than a list of species (as I have said and will continue to say). Communities I have worked with have various ways of classifying forest, indicator species per forest classification and soil type. They classify species according to how its used and what part of the plant is used or how it makes them feel in it. But this is only indicative of a relationship with the biodiversity. To simply compare different names, different lists is to under-estimate the importance of biodiversity. You don't need a scientific survey to recognise when its being degraded. People living with and in biodiversity will know the regeneration capacities of particular types like rattan, but also recognise its degradation as a change in the diversity as a reduction in the quality of life as an experience within their own lives. Getting this recognised collectively can be a key step.

Kyamiza points out that in order to reduce dependence on outside financial and technical support it is important to empower local communities to conduct biodiversity assessments – to enhance sustainability of their resource use.

Sorry all my experience indicates so far says that, producing lists or taxa based assessments is unnecessary to enhance the sustainability of their resource use. If sustainability of resource use is the goal of the assessment then we need to seek to understand key local relationships with biodiversity that are destructive or unsustainable. Participatory methods using spatial analysis, comparative ranking techniques and vulnerable species approaches are likely to lead to greater sustainability, they are a starting point to understanding biodiversity relations which include people. We can then start processes to negotiate with local people how they can strategise change and move to more sustainable practices.

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> The emphasis on scientific assessment and building of computerised checklists and databases serves to remind us that without good taxonomy, "we cannot assess biodiversity".

I would disagree because from this definition biodiversity is simply a species list and not an understanding of the interrelationships within various species, structures, ecosystems etc (including People). I strongly believe that biodiversity simply as a list and data base distracts from its importance,

unless you want to work for a pharmaceutical company and are looking for medicinal uses and functions or other ways to exploit biodiversity as a commodity. In the Philippines situation some scientists that are returning to areas where they first found and logged their species, have nothing left of their list in the real world. Their list has become a history of what was, because it didn't contribute to conservation, policy or local experiences of biodiversity.

> Is it necessary to do this, for comparison between stakeholders – or is this making things too complicated, as Adrian Newton suggests?

We have to stop being afraid of what is complex, real life is complex and the pressures affecting biodiversity in developing countries are part of that complexity. We have to find new methodologies to understand and navigate the complexity that is there, I believe from first understanding the local relationships within, and with biodiversity. For me that includes unpacking the various ways in which local people are living in biodiversity and how they are negotiating how to use it, value it and change it. By understanding the complexity we may go about finding better ways of conserving it with local people, where sustaining biodiversity is integral to the strategies of ordinary life. Assessments and taxonomic analysis have a role, but it cannot be a priority if we still expect to have similar levels of biodiversity in the future. The role I believe these assessments have is that they can allow a strengthening of local skills, affirmation of knowledge and practices, provide a means for government to give a tenure instrument for resource use and acknowledge local control and as a way of building social fences to conserve biodiversity. We must find out what is known first as science cannot determine the conservation strategy alone, it can only support locally defined strategies. It cannot define them because the problems are sociocultural and political, not scientific. I speak purely from a developing country context, Southeast Asian in particular, where the pressures degrading biodiversity are very real. sorry I have little experience elsewhere.

A challenge indeed to participants. In our particular case, is participatory assessment more time or less consuming, more or less useful, than other approaches? And does it achieve more conservation – or community development – than other approaches?

In my experience, Yes participatory assessments take more time, but they need to because their purpose is not just the list, at the end of the day they have to achieve more and there be local benefits, otherwise frankly they are not justified. Unfortunately though there are all types of participation and not all of the methods have the same effectivity or give the results we expect. Participation can achieve more conservation and community development, but the catch is just because your method is participatory it may not achieve these aspects. it has become another buzz word and the inclusion of participatory processes or methods is no guarantee of anything, it can even be damaging. I would suggest that we need to review these methods as part of a tool box, one that does not exclude non participatory methods or scientific analysis such as using GIS and satellite images. Participatory methods can be just as ineffective and a waste of time and money, as any other inappropriately designed methodology. We have to be equally critical of all of them.

Thanks

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