

Introduction to Theme 6: Enabling factors: Supportive policies and institutions; capacity building and communication

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Introduction

As outlined in the background paper, Theme 6 takes us into relatively uncharted territory, namely the issue of institutional and political factors which enable the development of more effective participatory biodiversity assessment and monitoring strategies. The theme presents us with a double challenge: (i) first we need to enable 'biodiversity assessments' – which mean so many different things to different people; (ii) second, we specifically need to enable the participatory approach to biodiversity assessment - leading us into the debate about how to enable and scale-up participation more generally, already the subject of much discussion (e.g. in the forestry sector, in the development of country Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), etc.)

Common framework and language

A key enabling factor must be to establish a common framework of understanding in order enable stakeholders with different cultural backgrounds and interests to communicate effectively and agree objectives for M&E. Several contributions to this conference have highlighted the need for people engaged in any kind of biodiversity M&E programme to clearly set out the definitions of biodiversity that they are using and link this to the scale at which they are operating. Only in this way can the results from many separate assessments (possibly using different methods and carried out for different purposes) be aggregated into a meaningful whole. Local communities must be given the opportunity to discuss biodiversity issues in the context of local understanding of what biodiversity is. As mentioned in the introduction to Theme 3, the needs of wider-scale analysis should not dictate methods to local participatory biodiversity assessments. Rather we need to establish a framework of terms and definitions (relating both to biodiversity and participation), which allows different methods to 'speak' to each other.

This framework is needed not just to facilitate communication between communities and authorities/outside, but also within often heterogeneous communities, as well as between scientists of different disciplines. As mentioned in an earlier theme, biologists have much to learn from the methods and approaches developed by social scientists.

While the idea of producing all-encompassing guidelines on participatory biodiversity M&E may be attractive (and requested by fieldworkers increasingly burdened by the new approaches imposed upon them), participatory approaches by their very nature do not lend themselves to recipe-book type prescription. More useful would be an overall theoretical framework highlighting the key issues that need to be taken into consideration when planning different types of participatory biodiversity M&E (this could be drawn together from existing documents of the CBD, UNCED, etc). This could then be used as the basis for the development of more specific national- and local-level guidelines. As has been suggested in this conference, some of these guidelines could be aimed at supporting practitioners and decision-makers with the design of mechanisms to implement CBD obligations on biodiversity assessment; others might be more concerned with helping communities to assess their own resources for management purposes.

Communication

A common understanding of the subject is the first step to achieving good communication. As discussed in Theme 5, effective communication linkages are required both vertically and horizontally; and there is a need to examine the power relationship between suppliers and users of information. Methods are needed to help all stakeholders participate in negotiations on an equal footing. This may include making available support for internet communication (where available) to enable communities to network with each other, share experiences, check on the credentials of 'experts', etc. A report for

the 4-8 February meeting of the CBD Working Group on Article 8j (Traditional knowledge etc) on 'Participatory Mechanisms for indigenous and local communities' suggests the creation of registers of indigenous knowledge, which would be another means of making information widely available (though information and users might need to be carefully screened). [This report can be downloaded under Theme 6.]

Capacity building

Capacity-building is strongly linked to communication. It is needed in various forms.

At the community level, the CBD report highlights the need for capacity-building to ensure that traditional knowledge-holders have an equitable say in decision-making processes. Communities must be given the scientific, legal and possibly linguistic support to accurately assess how their traditional knowledge is to be used; the implications of such use; what conditions they should attach to its use; the most suitable means to protect their traditional knowledge, and how they can benefit from its application.

Capacity-building of the general population to understand the concept of biodiversity might require changes in education policy, promoting locally appropriate curricula which can involve local people in long-term monitoring of local biodiversity. There is a need to move beyond schools-based environmental education, and to transform awareness raising from a frequently patronising activity in which the outsider (whether a national expert or expat) comes in to raise local awareness of how they are damaging their environment, to a two-way learning process.

Policy and institutional change

Perhaps the most essential enabling factor is to have a positive policy and legal framework. At the international level, the CBD already goes some way towards achieving this. At national and sub-national level, however, policies may be progressive, but unless provided with budgetary commitments during the public expenditure planning process, they will not be implemented.

What would constitute a supportive policy environment? A key issue would surely be the recognition by government that communities have the right to manage their own biodiversity. Introducing participatory M&E without giving the participants the rights (if not responsibility) to take decisions based on the results of the M&E would be grossly unfair. Given the global values of biodiversity, decentralisation of resource management may not always be the answer but needs to be considered as an option.

A very useful book on this issue is an annotated bibliography by Michel Pimbert and colleagues at IIED and IDS (2000) on 'Transforming bureaucracies: institutionalising participation and people-centred processes in natural resource management'. In it they argue that changing the institutional workings of development organisations is one of the key challenges facing the scaling up of participatory approaches and methodologies. This requires a change in the attitudes and behaviour of staff, which can be achieved through training, counselling and experimental learning. However, this focus on the individual and his/her ability to change should not be at the expense of addressing the bureaucratic structures that encourage and reward particular attitudes and behaviours. Steps directed at structural transformation within bureaucracies include fundamental changes in the operational procedures, reward and incentive systems, culture, career patterns, and use of time and space within organisations. All this will only work if there is high level government support, together with a critical mass of people with relevant training and experience.

The CBD report suggests that among the most important measures that Parties and Governments can undertake to facilitate the effective involvement of indigenous and local communities in decision-making related to the use of their traditional knowledge, are those concerned with:

- ensuring indigenous and local community representation on any statutory or other body established to provide advice or oversee any activity related to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity;

- formalising, in either legislation or policy, procedures to address the need to secure the prior informed approval (or consent) of knowledge-holders;

Financial support

Finally we come to the issue of funding. As yet, it is not clear that participants in biodiversity assessments have necessarily received any direct benefits. Yet if we want people to give up their time to provide information, they need to be compensated for their input. Financial rewards might not appeal but compensation could also be in the form of increased knowledge, or participation in decision-making on the basis of the knowledge provided.

If participation is to extend to the responsibility for managing an area for its biodiversity (among other possible objectives), then communities need to be given the financial wherewithal to do so, i.e. any revenue from the area (in the form of taxes, fines, tourist income) should be available to them to manage the resource. And governments should not make the mistake of assuming that decentralising resource management will necessarily be a cheap option. Nor is the volume of funding the only issue – it must also be secure.

Where can this funding come from? Depending on the scale, we may be talking about payments from donors or NGOs (cf the ‘stimulation fees’ mentioned by Jeannette van Rijsoort in the Yunnan, China, project) where communities are being asked to carry out new and additional tasks. Other options mentioned in the CBD report include:

- national contributions directly to enable indigenous and local community participation at various levels;
- application to the Global Environment Facility;
- other sources of funds e.g United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations.

Lastly, in thinking about the best use of a limited amount of funding for biodiversity conservation, we need to reflect on Doug Sheil’s provocative statement that monitoring and research activities may divert scarce funds from fundamental management priorities.