

Supporting decision making and building capacity through national ecosystem assessments

National ecosystem assessments, and the processes through which they are delivered, are an effective means for increasing understanding of the multiple values of biodiversity and ecosystem services. They provide a basis for integrating those values into national policy setting and decision making processes.

Outcomes and objectives

The **principle outcomes** of this project are to develop a greater understanding of the national ecosystem assessment process within each partner country and, to identify if a national ecosystem assessment accompanied by a national science-policy platform would be useful tools to support decision making.

These outcomes will be achieved by addressing **two objectives**, drawing as appropriate on guidance from the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and experience of other countries carrying out national ecosystem assessments:

1. Implement a stakeholder-driven process (within constraints of Covid-19 circumstances) to explore national needs and priorities for a national ecosystem assessment in each partner country, and how assessment findings will be used; and
2. Identify capacity needs in each partner country that would require addressing to support the implementation of national ecosystem assessments in the future.

Context and justification

Human well-being is dependent on healthy functioning ecosystems and the services that they provide. This recognition is fundamental both to the delivery of the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020* adopted by Governments in 2010, and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Nonetheless, most ecosystems are being reduced and threatened, with consequent loss or degradation of many key functions. This inevitably risks the ecosystem services that they deliver.

Many different sectors are dependent on ecosystem services, which are often also critical for a country's development policy. It has been argued, however, that national policy setting

and decision-making processes do not fully account for the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services due to a lack of understanding, and the absence of tools integrating current knowledge about these values into these processes.

In recognition of this, IPBES was established by Governments in 2012 with the specific aim of strengthening the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human wellbeing and sustainable development. IPBES carries out and promotes **assessments** and develops and promotes the use of **policy support tools** and creates the necessary enabling environment through facilitating **capacity building** and **knowledge generation**.

In decision IPBES-3/1, the IPBES Plenary identified support for carrying out national ecosystem assessments and using their findings as a priority capacity-building need. Ecosystem assessments can provide an effective mechanism to develop an evidence base that meets the needs of different sectors and encourages integration. In doing so they help building recognition of biodiversity and ecosystem services as key components of natural capital.

UNEP-WCMC is currently supporting national ecosystem assessment processes in 12 countries funded by the German International Climate Initiative. The initiative also provides a range of knowledge exchange and capacity building activities. There is growing interest amongst countries to undertake a national ecosystem assessment. There is also an opportunity to build on existing knowledge and skills around assessment processes and promote mentoring and leadership between countries.

UNEP-WCMC is a world leader in biodiversity knowledge. We work with a global network of scientists and policymakers to place biodiversity and ecosystem services at the heart of environment and development decision-making. Based in Cambridge UK, UNEP-WCMC is a unique collaboration between the UN Environment Programme and the UK registered non-profit WCMC.

Activities and outputs

The following **activities** will be carried out, the precise form varying with national circumstances:

1. UNEP-WCMC to provide training through a virtual workshop on developing a scoping document and other related issues including national science-policy platforms
2. Countries to implement a scoping process (similar to the IPBES process)
3. Countries to explore options for the development a science policy national stakeholder platform to support a national ecosystem services, as well as national implementation of global agreements and processes such as IPBES and CBD (if no other appropriate national platform or process exists); and
4. Countries to identify country-level capacity-building needs and suggest capacity building activities such as workshops and fellowship programmes for key stakeholders to engage in the assessment process.

Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, training and support will be provided virtually through an online platform.

Implementing these activities will deliver the following outputs:

1. National ecosystem assessment scoping report for each project country;
2. List of capacity-building needs and how they might be addressed for each project country

Country selection

The project will focus on countries within Southern Africa. Countries will be initially engaged through their IPBES or CBD National Focal points to gauge interest in investigating the idea of a national ecosystem assessment. Suggested countries that might be interested include: Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe.