Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA): Headline findings
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ESPA and ICIMOD Regional Symposium on Ecosystem Services and Poverty Alleviation in South Asia
ICIMOD, Kathmandu, 13-14 March 2018
ESPA is an interdisciplinary research programme funded by the UK Government since 2009
ESPA was launched in response to the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
ESPA aims to tackle poverty, improve wellbeing and reverse environmental degradation for current and future generations.
ESPAs’s research questions:

• Do ecosystem services provide safety nets for people in poverty?
• Can ecosystem services help vulnerable people to diversify their livelihood options and enhance their wellbeing?
• Can societies manage ecosystems better to support national wealth and deliver greener, more inclusive development?
ESPA in numbers (as of mid 2017)

922 Researchers
50% from developing countries

53 Countries
where research has taken place

5,438 Citations
Number of times most influential paper cited 1,166

125 Research Projects
supported by ESPA

£43.9m Total value of ESPA programme
ESPA’s research approach...

- is highly interdisciplinary
- employs systems thinking
- involves partners in global South and North
- uses innovative methods for data collection and analysis
- insists on feedback to stakeholders
Headline results of ESPA’s research
The environment’s ability to support human life and wellbeing is at risk

- Some ecosystems are too degraded to provide critical functions needed for human survival and wellbeing, e.g. Lake Erhai, China
- Other ecosystems are entering ‘danger zones’ where active measures are needed to avert ecological collapse and safeguard human lives, e.g. Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna delta
Hidden costs of natural resource use – for the poorest

• ESPA’s overarching message is that policy and programmes that utilise environmental resources will inevitably carry implications for human wellbeing and may even bear hidden human costs – unless there is due assessment and care
Land use intensification

- Implemented to increase yields of food and fibre
- Often has negative impacts on food security and incomes, particularly for the poor
- May harm the broader set of ecosystem services that regulate the environment and maintain its health, and human wellbeing
Protected areas

- Important aim to conserve biodiversity
- Adjacent populations bear disproportionate costs, e.g.
  - May have to give up shifting cultivation
  - May be affected by human-wildlife conflict
- Compensation may be poorly targeted
Modeling social-ecological systems to explore trade-offs

- Participatory ‘toy’ model to explore impacts of fishing restrictions in coastal Kenya
- Created four future scenarios
- Revealed different outcomes for men and women
Modeling society-ecology interactions in coastal Bangladesh

- The ESPA Deltas project is exploring the impacts of development options in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna delta including socioeconomic and environmental impacts of climate change adaptation.
A focus on wellbeing

- Different social groups use and value environmental resources differently
- A ‘blind spot’ around gender?
- Wellbeing is a dynamic and multidimensional phenomenon incorporating objective, subjective and relational aspects
- More rounded and respectful term than ‘poverty’
Core principles of good governance can highlight and address trade-offs fairly

- An environmental justice framework encompassing recognition, procedure and distribution can help reconcile diverse perspectives on environmental management and change.
- It highlights how the costs and benefits of environmental decisions are felt across society, and how different social groups value the environment.
Good governance practices

- **Accountability**
  - To affected people
  - Across scales from local to global

- **Transparency**
  - Of process
  - Of intended outcomes

- **Participation**
  - Full and effective
  - For all affected groups
Recognising and rewarding local stewardship

• Local people’s stewardship of environmental resources and their contribution to flows of ecosystem services and goods to other people must be recognised and rewarded

• Options range from Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) to conditional transfers of cash and in-kind resources
Adaptive processes and learning

- We live in a dynamic world of constant change: of local places that change continuously; of national, regional and global events and pressures that have local consequences.

- This requires adaptive governance for use of and access to environmental resources.

espa
ecosystem services for poverty alleviation
The ESPA approach is not easy, but it is exciting and offers promise for the future

- Goes beyond a narrow sectoral focus to integrate the natural and the social
- Explores the real-life complexity of social-ecological systems, including local to global interactions
- Encourages recognition of different people’s rights and values
- Understands how different people access and use the environment to achieve their wellbeing
- Explicitly addresses trade-offs in environmental decision-making through open, just and democratic processes
Find these projects and much more to explore and manage how ecosystem services can support people’s wellbeing:

www.espa.ac.uk