Understanding ES valuation through the lens of wellbeing and justice

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Why are we interested in wellbeing and justice?

- Ecosystem services are indispensable to the wellbeing of all people in all places (directly or indirectly)
- Many unresolved questions:
  - What is the relationship between the flow of ecosystem services and the level of human wellbeing?
  - How does the relationship change over space and time?
  - What trade-offs exist between how different people use ecosystem services to meet their wellbeing aspirations?
- Ecosystem-based interventions create justices and injustices (Sikor 2013)
Conventional assessment of poverty alleviation

- Conventional measures focus on income per capita per day
- Global Multi-dimensional poverty index (health, education and living standards)
- Declaration of Human Rights Article 25:
  - “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services”
- Are these sufficient to capture all aspects of what we need for our wellbeing?
  - MA framework talks of ‘freedom of choice and action’
  - IPBES framework talks of ‘good quality of life’
Multidimensional Wellbeing

- Drawing on Sen, wellbeing comprises of:
  - What people **have**
  - What they can **do**
  - And, how they **think** about what they have and can do

- Multidimensional wellbeing considers
  - **Objective** conditions of people,
  - their **subjective** assessment of their lives and conditions, and
  - their **relational** dimensions including social relationships and how these shape wellbeing achievements

- Wellbeing is dynamic and differentially experienced and perceived across cultures and socioeconomic gradients
Shifting from a poverty framing to one of ‘wellbeing’ (Coulthard et al. 2018)

• Poor people are not defined by their poverty alone. Poverty focuses on what people lack, and misses the (often innovative) strategies they pursue to achieve wellbeing.

• A positive focus on wellbeing is a more respectful and well-rounded way of trying to understand a person’s life, avoiding labelling and disempowerment of ‘the poor’.

• Offers a more holistic account, centered on the person and a more socially enriched analysis.
How do ecosystem services contribute to wellbeing?
Zoonotic diseases as ecosystem disservices (Dzingirai et al. 2017)

• Social and ecological factors can affect the transmission of disease from animals to humans

• Lassa fever (Sierra Leone): transmitted by burrowing rats
  - Rats favour agricultural mounds and homes with mud walls and thatch roofs
  - Risk is higher for women who weed, water and harvest the agricultural mounds, and for the poor

• Trypanosomiasis (Zimbabwe): spread by tsetse flies
  - Risk is higher for recent migrants clearing fields, young men herding livestock, foragers (usually women) and hunters
  - Higher risk in the dry season when flies, humans and livestock congregate in forest patches.

• More effective interventions need to know who gets sick, when and where
Does improving ecosystem quality improve wellbeing? (Daw et al. 2016)

- ‘Ecosystem elasticity’ – how wellbeing responds to changes in ecosystem quality

- **Positive elasticity**
  - **High:** (e.g. conservation of charismatic species leads to increased income for tour guides)
  - **Low:** (e.g. improved coral reef status slowly enhances shoreline protection)

- **Negative elasticity**, e.g. human-wildlife conflict.
Gender and ecosystem services a ‘blind spot’ (Brown and Fortnam 2018)

- Invisibility of women’s activities and views
- Assumptions that communities are homogenous
- Focus on income-generating and provisioning vs subsistence ES
- Poor participation by women in decision-making, agenda-setting, and framing of ES interventions
- Gendered physical spaces and livelihood strategies
- The intersection of gender with factors like age, caste and ethnicity can further reduce the inability of women to make their voices heard.
Whose voice/view counts?

YO! AMIGO!!
WE NEED THAT TREE TO PROTECT US FROM THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT!

DEVELOPED COUNTRIES
Environmental justice and equity
Global inequities in ES for PA? (O’Neill et al. 2018)
**Justice, equity and poverty**

- Justice and equity both imply fair treatment:
  - By an impartial person/body
  - with no self-interest in the matter
- ‘Equity’ is favoured in policy circles
- ‘Justice’ is favoured by social movements
- Equity and poverty do not necessarily co-vary
  - Some initiatives can alleviate poverty (by raising aggregate income) while increasing inequity (excluding landless)
- Equity highlights the distribution of power & resources underlying poverty
1. Recognition

- Recognition revolves around the status afforded to different social and cultural values or identities and to the social groups who hold them (Martin et al. 2016)

- Who gets to have a say in decision-making?
  - Who counts as a subject of equity? (McDermott et al. 2013)
  - Affected people must be recognised as having a voice in decision-making

- Relates to growing interest in rights-based approaches to governance of land and resources
  - Officially recognised tenure rights for affected people
2. Procedure

• Who makes decisions and how?
  • Formal rules and processes or informal interactions?
  • Requires attention to unequal power relations

• Key processes relating to ES for PA:
  • Allocation of (access to) resources
  • Dispute resolution

• Importance of governance principles:
  • Accountability
  • Transparency
  • Participation
The challenge of meaningful participation

- Participation...is effectively taking part in decision-making and implementation, either directly or through legitimate representatives
- May require challenging power relations
- Some international and national laws require participation
  - Are there rules (statutory and/or customary) about participation of women and minorities?
- Barriers to participation:
  - Vested interests that do not benefit from participation
  - Lack of transparency (e.g. of time/place of meetings)
  - Lack of skills to facilitate participatory processes
  - Difficult logistics
  - ‘Assumed’ representation
3. Distribution

• Distribution is concerned with the allocation among stakeholders of costs, risks and benefits resulting from environmental policy or resource management decisions

• Costs of interventions – often borne by the poorest – should be avoided, mitigated or compensated

• Benefits should be distributed according to agreed principles, e.g. equally, according to need or merit

• Process may be more important than outcome
Madagascar: local perception of distribution of conservation benefits (Bidaud et al. 2016)
Barriers to implementation of equity and justice approaches (Dawson et al. 2018)

• ‘Justice gap’ between implementing institutions (national and international) and affected communities
  • *Implementation gap* – good policies not implemented because of governance deficiencies, lack of capacity, knowledge, resources
  • *Normative gap* – different ideas about what should be done and how

• Unequal power between interest groups
  • e.g. along value chains (community to company)

• Complexity: governance approaches focus on access restrictions and financial compensation; at expense of dealing with complex issues like rights, tenure, cultural practices, participation
Implications for ES valuation

• Use of a range of methods (incl. participatory) to assess wellbeing (capturing its multiple dimensions) AND the value of ecosystem services
  • Consider monetary and non-monetary values
  • Consider relative value of ES for different people’s wellbeing aspirations

• Environment-related interventions should have clear equity goals (McDermott et al. 2013)

• Use an environmental justice framework (recognition, procedure and distribution) to help reconcile diverse perspectives on environmental management and change