

Contribution to GSDR 2015 – chapter 3

Conceptual grounding on the biodiversity – poverty nexus

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Identification, specification and assessment of causal connections (nexus) between biodiversity (and other kinds of natural capital) and poverty, including poverty alleviation, requires a robust conceptual scheme. Such scheme has been established by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) as “ecosystem services approach” (ESA). ESA bridges the gap between nature and human welfare as follows: First, a distinction is drawn between nature as such and a concept of natural capital being defined as a broad source contributing to human welfare. Second, it is assumed that stocks (or funds) of natural capital provide different flows by which human beings are benefitted in different respects. Those respects are, third, typed as

- Supporting services
- Provisional services (food, fiber, timber etc.)
- Regulating services (water, climate, soil, flood regulation etc.)
- Cultural services (aesthetics, recreation, spiritual etc.).

The category of supporting services is, however contested, because it underlies, as ecological functions and structures, the other three categories and, therefore, implies much double counting.

There are many links between ecosystem services, especially components of biodiversity, and human welfare. Quite often, these services are to be monetized (via contingent valuation). Monetization of ecosystem services, however, faces limits, especially with respect to cultural services. Given such limits, qualitative ways of investigating the meaning and significance of ecosystem services and local biodiversity should be promoted (as, f.i., discursive and participatory approaches). The ESA model can, fourth, be oriented to specific social groups (strata, classes) within given societies. The Sustainable Development Goals focus poor and vulnerable groups in coastal zones aiming at improving their overall situation (poverty alleviation or even eradication). Since ecosystem services contribute to human welfare but are often not reflected in monetary income, ESA implies, fifth, a reflective approach towards livelihoods which might be modest in terms of monetary income but are decent in other respects.