

Embedding an Ecosystems Services Framework in Decision Making



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Background



UK National Ecosystem Assessment
Follow-on

Synthesis of the Key Findings



Assessment Follow-on

Work Package Report 9:
Embedding an Ecosystem Services Framework in appraisal:
Key barriers and enablers

Russel, D., Turnpenny, J., Jordan, A., Bond, A., Sheate, W., & Adelle, C. (2014) UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-on. Work Package Report 9: Embedding an Ecosystem Services Framework in appraisal: Key barriers and enablers. UNEP-WCMC, LWEC, UK.

What is the problem?



- “Ecosystem services are critically important to our wellbeing... but are consistently undervalued in conventional economic analysis and decision making” (UK NEA, 2011a, p.13).
- “we already have sufficient understanding to manage our ecosystems more sustainably and good evidence of the social benefits that would arise from doing so” (p. 14).
- **The problem is not only about knowledge production but inadequate knowledge utilization.**
- How, by whom and in which context is ecosystem knowledge embedded in decision-making?

Appraisal – A policy making venue



- Many different venues for embedding ecosystem knowledge into policy:
 - expert advisory bodies,
 - legislative inquiries,
 - planning systems,
 - **policy, programme, plan and project-level appraisal** (impact assessment).

- Appraisal attempts to formalise the provision of information for the decision making process in a series of steps to be undertaken when developing a policy a plan, a programme or a project.

- Natural Environment White paper (2011)/ Treasury's Green Book (2012) promote the use of an Ecosystems Services Framework approach.

Methods



Content Tests: RIAs,
SEAs, EIAs



Stakeholder Interviews:
officials, consultants



An Ecosystems Framing



- **Supporting** services that “provide the basic infrastructure of life”
- **Regulating** services range from the impacts of pollination on ecosystem goods such as food, to the regulation of flood water
- **Provisioning** services deliver the direct goods people acquire from ecosystems including food, fuel and water.
- **Cultural** services generate cultural goods and benefits in environmental settings in which humans interact

Content Test - Results



Very few appraisals used, or even mentioned, an ecosystems services framing

Appraisals revealed a stronger environmental or sustainable development framing without explicitly mentioning an ESF.

Micro-level Barriers



Barriers

- Limited resources (inc data) available to officials undertaking appraisal;
- Limited awareness of the concept of the Framework;
- Difficulty in understanding the concepts underlying the Framework.

“People internally find it difficult to grasp what the ESF means. It is the current sexy term but people struggle to understand what it means.”

“... people resist it because they think it is just about monetising biodiversity which runs against their core values”

“There is a problem both in terms of accuracy of data, but also in terms of how we can repackage existing data for the ESF.....the information we hold on environment is not in the right format to stick into Cost Benefit Assessment format.”

Meso-level Barriers



Barriers

- ❑ Fragmented working across government departments
- ❑ Different institutional cultures

“Although the [Environment] White Paper is a Government Document, it is clearly perceived by other departments as Defra’s White Paper. It’s not got the other government departments interested. They still see it as Defra or the environment sector’s agenda....”

“You start to run into existing practices and ways of doing things. If you are actually doing nothing it is easier to bring in the ESF. But where you already have existing approaches you get adaptation rather than significant change.”

Macro-level Barriers



Barriers

- Underlying societal values – and, hence, political priorities – not being aligned with ecosystem protection

“[government is keen to] not let environmental regulation get in the way of infrastructure development and housing”

Enablers



Micro level

- **Awareness-raising** about the Framework, highlighting its value in government and beyond;
- Simplifying and tailoring the language of the Framework to suit different audiences;
- Having more **demonstration projects** to show what the Framework can contribute to appraisal.

Meso level

- High-level leadership, statutory **quality control** measures and peer review
- Integrating the Framework into existing institutional mechanisms and processes
- Creating neutral spaces such as workshops and knowledge networks to encourage communication and learning

Enablers



Macro Level

- Engaging with the many potential uses of the Framework (e.g. **using it as a platform to stimulate debate between different stakeholders**)
- Using political 'windows of opportunity', such as floods, periodic media interest, or changes in government
- Encouraging partnership between government, non-government and international bodies to promote and employ the Framework.

Conclusions



- Possessing 'more knowledge' does not mean that it inform decision making.
- Existing governance mechanisms can be venues to embed/mainstream new knowledge into policy making.
- BUT new ideas take time to diffuse: An Ecosystems Framing is taking time to diffuse even within the environment ministry.
- An Ecosystems Framing may not always be appropriate in non-environmental contexts and at different decision making levels.

Further Reading



- Russel, D., J. Turnpenny, A. Jordan, A. Bond, W. Sheate, C. Adelle (2014). UK National Ecosystem Assessment Follow-on. Work Package Report 9: Embedding an Ecosystem Services Framework in appraisal: Key barriers and enablers. UNEP-WCMC, LWEC, UK. <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=rLZkrNvpObo%3d&tabid=82>
- J Turnpenny, Russel D & Jordan AJ, 2014, The challenge of embedding an ecosystem services approach: patterns of knowledge utilisation in public policy appraisal, Env Plan C vol. 32, no. 2, 247-262.