6th annual international Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) conference

Special session

On Tuesday 27th August the SGA Network secretariat convened and facilitated a 'special session' at the 6th annual international Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) Conference in Bali, Indonesia. In total there were ten special sessions at the conference; these were reserved for main partners and sponsors of the ESP, demonstrating that the SGA Network is continuing to develop its institutional and strategic ties with other networks and initiatives.

The 1.5 hour session focussed on 'Bridging the science-policy interface: experiences from, and the role of, sub-global assessments'. This session brought together some of the Network members (Jeanne Nel from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), South Africa; and Christian Albert from the Institute of Environmental Planning, Leibniz Universität Hannover, Germany), in collaboration with the Secretariat, to deliver lessons learned from sub-global assessments and to facilitate a participatory discussion with the audience members.

This session was run in two main components: the first section featured some introductory presentations from the SGA Network secretariat and some lessons learned from sub-global assessment case studies from South Africa and Germany; and the second section featured a facilitated plenary discussion.

Objectives

The objectives of this special session were to:

- · Identify the main challenges in bridging the science-policy interface at sub-global levels;
- · Share experiences and lessons learned in overcoming these challenges;
- · Identify the role that SGA's play in bridging the science-policy interface;
- · Identify the role that the SGA Network plays in supporting and enhancing SGA efforts;
- · Identify specific ways through which the SGA Network and other related networks could support/contribute to IPBES.

Facilitated plenary session

To help guide the plenary discussion section a set of 'core questions', developed prior to the conference, were shared with the audience. It was intended that these might help the participants consider and reflect on the main issues that they have encountered or faced regarding the bridging of the science-policy interface through their assessment experiences. These core questions were:

1. What are some of the major challenges/barriers that sub-global assessments face in integrating assessment findings into policy-making?

    e.g. Identification and prioritization of key scientific information required by policy makers/ Identifying the benefits of ecosystem assessments for specific decision making processes e.g. Effectively communicating scientific assessment findings to policy makers

2. What are some of the specific tools and approaches that are used by sub-global assessment practitioners to address the challenges identified above?

e.g. biophysical maps and models; scenario development; effective stakeholder identification and engagement (e.g. bridging agents and strategic partnerships)

3. Are there good (positive and negative - as long as lessons have been captured) examples of where ecosystem assessments have led to or supported the mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem services into national policy-making?

   If so, what are the tangible lessons that can be shared with other sub-global assessments?

4. What are some of the priority capacity building needs of sub-global assessments in respect of bridging the science-policy interface, and how can the SGA Network or other similar networks/entities help to meet these?

Challenges identified

Some of the main challenges identified during the plenary discussion were:

- The importance of ensuring that assessments are user-driven and meet user needs.
- The importance of a very robust scoping exercise (which can ultimately make or break an assessment).
- Most assessments are still largely driven by non-governmental actors. How do we then get governments to catalyse assessments at different scales – national/sub-national?
- There is a need for a common framework for assessing and comparing the outcomes of sub-global assessments and the outputs of sub-global assessment networks.

Notable points

Some of the main points that were highlighted regarding the challenges of bridging the science-policy interface included:

- We have to make a case for the added value that ecosystem assessments can deliver; e.g. in South Africa, in 2004, there was a very small group of scientists working on the biodiversity assessment. By the second time around, the assessment was mandated by the government.
- In undertaking assessments, especially those repeated on short time-scales, there is a challenge in identifying what is a methodological trend versus a biophysical trend – because of the pace of methodological advancements.
- In the German assessment, there has been a big challenge in releasing data from scientists/state level.
- In speaking with stakeholders, there is a lack of good examples of where assessments have made a difference.
- How are decisions made? Who do assessments support in decision-making? e.g. UK NEA called for by the government.
- What is a sub-global assessment? There is a patchwork of assessments that exists out there – who will compare the outputs/outcomes/impacts etc of these?
- There are two types of assessments:
    i. Target for justification of a policy
    ii. Looking at supporting policy (investigation)
- In respect of making the case for ecosystems and ecosystem assessments, there is a good example from South Africa where slides are being compiled and put onto a biodiversity portal – this affords coordination on the communication tools/ materials.

Support required from the SGA Network

In addition to the challenges and experiences that were highlighted and shared, there were also some areas where support from the SGA Network is required that were raised. These included:

- Could the SGA Network collate and document examples of where SGAs have made a difference – as a tool to be used by stakeholders in helping to make the case for undertaking assessment work?
- Coordination of materials/ tools that can be used by policy makers
- Platform for case studies emerging from sub-global assessments
- Expert feedback to SGAs on the work that they are undertaking: perhaps the SGA Network can convene a committee for this
- Can the SGA Network develop a platform for case studies?
- Can there be an opportunity for the SGA Network to provide comments/views on the SGAs being undertaken?

Summary and output

This workshop attracted approximately 30 participants, and some interesting and important points were raised and shared. The areas that were highlighted by the participants, both in the area of lessons learned and experiences from bridging the science-policy interface, and in calling out for support from the SGA Network, will be integrated into future strategic thinking for the SGA Network secretariat in terms of developing workshops and training events.

Acknowledgements

The SGA Network secretariat would like to extend many thanks to Jeanne Nel and Christian Albert for joining us in this special session and sharing your experiences and lessons learned with the audience. Special thanks also go out to the participants of this workshop for joining us and contributing to an interesting and stimulating session.

Post-conference training session

In collaboration with the Natural Capital Project (a partnership combining research innovation at Stanford University and the University of Minnesota with the global reach of conservation science and policy at The Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund), the SGA Network convened a 2.5 day post-conference training session. This workshop ran from Friday 30thAugust to Sunday 1st September. The focus of the training workshop was on 'tools for integrated ecosystem assessment and management including hands-on training with InVEST and lessons learned from sub-global assessment case studies.'

The Network secretariat brought together six Network members to present lessons learned from the assessments in which they have been involved. The Network members delivering lessons learned were Keren Klass (HaMAARAG, Israel's National Ecosystem Assessment Program), Ralf Seppelt (the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ), Germany), Keisha Garcia (The Cropper Foundation, Trinidad and Tobago) and Alex Stoll (CEAZA, Chile) - ProEcoServ, Mandy Driver (South African National Biodiversity Institute), and Anne-Gaelle Ausseil (Landcare Research, New Zealand).

The post-conference training session was targeted towards early-career stage ecosystem services scientists. We were delighted to welcome forty participants to this event.

Objectives

The objectives of this workshop were to:

· Introduce participants to the InVEST ecosystem service accounting tool, how it works and its capabilities and limitations; and
· To provide case-studies from the SGA Network, including lessons learned from the application of mapping tools from Network members.

Programme

Along with hands-on training with the InVEST package, the programme was interspersed with presentations from members of the SGA Network; these presentations delivered case studies of real world assessments, therefore galvanising the messages being delivered from the InVEST trainers. The presentations included:

· Israel National Ecosystem Assessment: challenges in planning a national-scale assessment (Keren Klass)
· Mapping and assessments: lessons learned (Ralf Seppelt)
· Perspectives from the ProEcoServ – Trinidad and Tobago component (Keisha Garcia); and, Development and human well-being in the municipality of San Pedro de Atacama, Chile (Alexandra Stoll)
· South Africa perspectives (Mandy Driver)
· Ecosystem services mapping – developing indicators in New Zealand (Anne-Gaelle Ausseil)

Training components delivered by the NatCapProj team (Gregg Verutes, Liz Rauer and Lisa Mandle) included interactive mapping exercises; running and interpreting model outputs in InVEST; introduction to specific InVEST models, for example habitat quality and rarity, carbon, and aesthetic quality; practical exercises using InVEST to compare multiple services and weigh tradeoffs; finding data and preparing inputs for use with InVEST; post-processing, visualising and communicating results with InVEST; an introduction to the InSEAM tool and how it can be used for stakeholder engagement and creating scenarios; and an introduction to the Resource Investment Optimization System (RIOS).

Feedback

The training session was a great success, providing a good insight into ecosystem assessment and management tools, such as InVEST, and how they are being used in ecosystem assessments around the world. Participant feedback reflected the positive reception of this workshop; when asked for comments regarding "things you found the most useful from this course" on the workshop feedback forms, comments included: "very good insight into SGA case studies", "application of InVEST in some case study!", "national level cases presentations", "experiences from different countries", "very helpful case study examples that help me situate in applied context", "presentation on case study".

Outcome

There are many valuable lessons to take away from this workshop, on to which we can continue to build and develop in order to develop effective capacity building events. One real positive within this is our developing relationship with the Natural Capital Project team, and our collaboration in developing and providing training opportunities such as this. This is the second time that we have worked with the NatCapProj team on a conference workshop and we continue to see value in developing this relationship and working together.

Acknowledgements

The SGA Network secretariat would like to extend thanks to: Gregg Verutes, Liz Rauer and Lisa Mandle of the NatCapProj in helping to develop and present this training workshop; the SGA Network members – Keren Klass, Ralf Seppelt, Keisha Garcia, Alexandra Stoll, Mandy Driver and Anne-Gaelle Ausseil – for sharing mapping experiences from their assessments; and to Dolf de Groot for providing us with this opportunity and assisting with the organisation of the post-conference sessions. We look forward to hosting many more events like this with our various partners in the future.