

Ecosystems Knowledge and Learning Forum – 13th February 2012

Summary of outcomes

Dear Colleague

Thanks to all those who made the trip to Birmingham recently. We hope that you found the event a useful opportunity to meet like-minded projects and find out who is doing what. The event was an important step in shaping the themes and activities of the Ecosystems Knowledge Network, and we benefited greatly from your contributions. This document is a summary of what we learnt on the day.

As we explained at the Forum our intention is to cultivate a network that helps deliver practical outcomes 'on the ground'. The aim is to provide opportunities for interaction that are not only meaningful, but also practical and realistic. The information and insights you provided will therefore have an important bearing on how we approach this task. I do hope you feel this document captures the sentiments expressed on the day. We welcome any comments you may have.

Over the next couple months you will be hearing more from us as we begin the process of initiating knowledge exchange and learning opportunities on the many dimensions of taking an ecosystems approach. Our dedicated Network web platform will be coming on-line in the near future and we anticipate this will be an important focal point for learning about the Network and the different ways you can be involved. Very soon you will also be receiving our very first Network newsletter, which will be a regular feature of the Network's work.

As we explained in Birmingham, the Network has resources to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange activities - both electronic and face to face - about an ecosystems approach. In conjunction with you all, our intention is to now begin instigating these activities. We are grateful for the many suggestions you have already made for activities and encourage you to continue to contact us with your ideas.

On behalf of the Network co-ordinating team



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Summary of participant views on priorities for learning

We explained that our vision for the Network is to develop activities around practical and focused concerns. In advance of the Birmingham event we drew up some potential areas for knowledge exchange and learning and organised them around some general themes. Our discussions with you helped us to elaborate and refine these themes which we are now taking forward.

1. Cross-cutting areas of learning

Demystifying concepts and terminologies

- A concern of participants was to understand better the different *concepts and terminologies* that relate to an ecosystems approach. This included learning more about this approach as a general area of policy development but also investigating how key terms (e.g. “limits and thresholds”) are used and applied in different ways.

Linking policy areas through an ecosystems approach

- Participants at the forum wanted to learn more about how an ecosystems approach can underpin work in related areas of policy and practice (e.g. Nature Improvement Areas; Catchment Sensitive Farming). The connection to meeting regulatory bottom lines was an important aspect of this (e.g. Water Framework Directive, Habitats Directive). Exploring how an ecosystems approach can be used to tie together thinking in diverse policy areas was seen as an area of potential exploration, as was understanding how an ecosystems approach relates to other similar areas of environment and biodiversity enhancement, (e.g. green infrastructure).

Classifying ecosystem services

- Classification was identified as an issue that could be explored by the network. For example activities that explored frameworks such as the recent work on a “Common International Classification of Ecosystem Services”¹ was identified as being of potential interest, and this is likely to be one of the areas explored soon via the web platform

Building a data infrastructure

- Participants wished to learn more about the data sets available to inform this approach, including data on different types of ecosystem services and natural capital stocks and flows. They wished to understand better how these data could be accessed and shared.
- Working with data sets was also flagged up as a cross-cutting concern and included issues such as dealing with uncertainty (see also mapping below), working with commercially sensitive data, and creating secure archives.

¹ See for example www.cices.eu

2. Measuring and mapping ecosystem services

Measuring and mapping ecosystem services emerged as a substantive theme with a number of different facets:

- The Ecosystems Knowledge Network could usefully clarify and explore the different purposes that mapping could be put to.
- Understanding the range of techniques available for mapping stocks and flows of ecosystem services was identified as a need. This included base-line mapping of ecosystem services but also the mapping of ecosystem services historically. In addition mapping of future scenarios was identified as a potential need, to help people explore risks, uncertainties, conflicts, options and choices.
- Exploring the strengths and weaknesses of community mapping tools: how to capture and present the values and visions of different actors/groups was signalled as an area of potential learning; exploring techniques such as deliberative mapping. (See also '*Partnership working*' below).
- Working with uncertain data: there was interest in the problems of extrapolation, generalisation, inference and transfer of knowledge via mapping, together with the quantification of error.
- Communicating with maps: exploring pitfalls and good practice when communicating and sharing map-based insights with different audiences was highlighted as an area of potential learning (See also the '*Partnership working*' below).

3. Valuing ecosystem services

Participants were keen to explore valuation as a substantive topic for the Ecosystems Knowledge Network. This included:

- Approaches to economic valuation of ecosystem services. A recurring need was to understand better what techniques are available to decision makers to undertake simple but credible monetary assessments of environmental assets. Participants wanted information that summarises the strengths and weaknesses of different types of economic valuation and in what contexts they could be used.
- Understanding how a project can incorporate expert judgement on valuation (as a complement to empirical evidence) was highlighted as potential area to explore.
- Combining monetary and non-monetary valuation of ecosystems services. Participants were interested in techniques that compare/integrate understanding of the social impacts with those of economic appraisal. How, for instance, would techniques such as multi-criteria analysis be used? How can qualitative techniques and expert opinion be used alongside numerical/monetary techniques? How to explore the difference between what is 'x' worth and whether 'x' is worth doing?
- Involving and working with different stakeholders in the valuation of ecosystem services. This area could consider how to incorporate peoples' understanding of local identity and

'sense of place' as a platform for talking about landscape, ecosystems, local values and priorities as well as approaches to resolving conflicts. How this information could be expressed geographically was also highlighted (see '*Measuring and mapping*' above)

- Exploring how to better identify and highlight links between an ecosystems approach and their distributional impacts on different aspects of well-being (such as public health) was cited as an area of potential learning.
- Communicating the value of ecosystem services for different audiences. For instance, what is good practice in terms of the way economic information is communicated to different stakeholders in a decision process?
- Exploring how sustaining ecosystems services can be a pretext for opening up new revenue streams. The use of cultural ecosystem services by tourism businesses – good examples of positive marketing – was cited as area of potential interest to explore (see also '*Partnership working*'). Participants were interested in learning more about these and other approaches, such as 'branding biodiversity'

4. Partnership working

Exploring and consolidating principles of good partnership working was identified as a general need with a number of potential elements, e.g.:

- Conducting stakeholder analysis to engage a diverse community, and engaging people at early stage of a project as well as preventing (or dealing with) stakeholder fatigue.
- Engaging 'hard to reach' audiences in an ecosystems approach. A particular focus on 'making the business case' to small (locally based) and big business (national enterprises) emerged.
- Building partnerships across different scales (institutional and geographical) and aligning social and ecosystem boundaries for decision making.
- Community target setting. Exploring how community values can be reflected in a project's objectives at an early stage so progress can be monitored against them.
- How to 'win' communities over to projects where priorities and interventions have already been established.
- Exploring approaches to conflict resolution around the question of different values relating to places, and the promotion of behavioural change.

Summary of participant views on how the EKN might structure its activities

As we explained in the run up to the Birmingham event, it is very important that we cultivate activities that individuals feel they would like to participate in, and that use available resources to maximise learning and interactions. The event provided us with a very clear view of how participants would like the network to function and we will consider these options as we shape EKN activities.

1. General approach to communicating with network participants

- Provide regular notifications of Network activities. The Network might consider using:
 - social media – for instance a network twitter feed;
 - email alerts, which could be tailored to participant needs; and
 - regular newsletters/bulletins to keep people abreast of developments.

2. General learning about an ecosystems approach and ecosystem services

- Produce short notes/user friendly/plain English written guides (one/two page max) or short videos/podcasts on key aspects of an ecosystems approach. This information should be produced not only for the benefit of network participants but also advocacy and learning among different audiences. This information could:
 - distil academic/policy evidence on good practice;
 - explain key concepts and terminologies relating;
 - provide links to follow up resources/ documentation; and,
 - summarise different institutional positions (e.g. Defra, Natural England).
- Create an open access mechanism that allows people to upload, share, access and archive data on ecosystem services from projects and elsewhere. Data should ideally be segmented by different ecosystem services.

3. Making the connection between EKN and related initiatives and agendas

- The Network should provide information on, and contexts for interaction with, other networks, initiatives, policy and geographical areas related to an ecosystems approach including: Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management; the Natural Capital Project; Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management; Natural Capital Network; Natural Value Programme; Valuing Nature Network; Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Sustainability programme; Upland change network; Planning Advisory Service; Local Nature Partnerships; Local Enterprise Partnerships; Health and Wellbeing Boards, Welsh Local Service Boards and others in the devolved administrations. Providing a library of links would be a good start.
- Provide links to new funding initiatives. Network members might be able to collaborate with each other for funding via the Network.

4. General learning about projects

- Provide a database of projects that is easy to navigate and provides different levels of detail from project 'snapshots' to 'deep' project profiling. This may include:

- overall project aims & objectives;
- policy context and approaches to funding;
- summary of methods and approaches used;
- project contacts and links to further info including links to related networks and initiatives;
- key words (such as policy areas and areas of expertise);
- short project podcasts or videos that elaborate on experiences and benefit (as well failures and problems) of undertaking an ecosystems approach (or particular aspects of it); and,
- virtual field courses that participants could interact with and mine for different types of information.

5. Approaches to interaction among projects

- Develop *themed* networking activities over time to prioritise and focus network activities. In particular the Network should consider “topic months” to structure a series of linked face to face and electronic activities. What has been learnt from the networking process should be systematically captured and distilled. Learning should be summarized and form the basis for: i) understandings/statements of good practice ii) areas of future research development.
- Hold short *electronic seminars* about a particular project or theme.
- *Survey* projects on particular issues to stimulate debate about experience and understanding of key issues relating to an ecosystems approach.
- Develop a *question/answer board* (portal) on aspects of an ecosystems approach. Tie this to email alerts.
- Develop a *wiki* on different topics that participants could elaborate and contribute to.
- Set up a buddying scheme between projects working on similar issues or topics, or between projects and mentors from other sectors, such as the business sector.
- Provide opportunities for *field based/ workshop learning*. Concentrate on a smaller number of quality activities to maximise benefits. Target areas of known good practice and involve both practitioners and beneficiaries of research, as well as senior policy makers and potential funders. Include a mix of environmental settings. Consider use of overnight meetings to encourage serious interaction.
- Consider holding a *networking conference*. Consider having a periodic conference, no more than annually, to explore successes and failures in applications of an ecosystems approach and to review network priorities.