

African conservationists pioneer ecosystem services assessments at important sites for biodiversity

Title

In February, a four day workshop was held in Thika, Kenya to share the experiences of a group of African conservationists in conducting ecosystem service assessments using the Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment (TESSA).

The workshop was run by the [Tropical Biology Association](#) and BirdLife International and was a follow up to one they ran in April 2013 on the ecosystem services concept and how it can be applied to biodiversity conservation at the site scale. Eleven participants went on to implement TESSA at sites (many of which were IBAs) in Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, Uganda and Zimbabwe across a range of habitats including tropical forest, miombo woodland, grasslands, wetlands and coastal mangroves.

The participants reported back on their findings, presenting interesting results from each of the sites and providing vital insights into the likely impacts of land use change on the continued delivery of these services and the livelihoods of local people. They also provided feedback on the TESSA which will be used to continue to improve the content and format of the toolkit so that it can be widely applied by anyone with an interest in assessing the ecosystem service values of a site.

Already, these pioneers of the TESSA in Africa are using the results to inform policy and management decisions that affect biodiversity conservation. For example, in Cameroon, it was found that certified cocoa provides greater ecosystem service benefits than the non-certified product but both provide significantly fewer benefits than the native forest. This information was presented to Community Forest users who are now considering maintaining some areas of native forest instead of converting to cocoa plantations. Using TESSA enabled a better understanding of the social, political and economic factors related to site conservation and what could be done to achieve better outcomes for both biodiversity and human livelihoods.

“Conducting these workshops has demonstrated clear conservation impact through

developing the capacity of skilled conservation practitioners who have gone on to understand and assess ecosystem services and inform real-world decision making.” said Jenny Birch, Ecosystem Services Officer at BirdLife International and workshop trainer.

“This experience has also proven the substantial value that first-hand user feedback can have on the development of user-informed tools that have real use for conservation on the ground.”

The African studies have generated novel data to contribute towards future global analysis of site-scale ecosystem service values and have been instrumental in progressing our understanding of how sites provide benefits to human well-being and of how to make better decisions for both biodiversity and people.

This project is funded by the CCI Collaborative Fund for Conservation and is a collaboration between the Tropical Biology Association, BirdLife International, RSPB, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre.