

Summary of Rik Leemans' talk

The 2010 Biodiversity target and longterm protection targets

Global change is everywhere, in response to the needs of a more integrative and holistic view of the topic of sustainability, they have started a new journal called "Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability".

Content of the talk

- Short communication on indicators
- Governance: Conventions, EU directives etc
- 2010 Biodiversity targets
- Achieving long-term climate protection: A safe landing
- Avoiding dangerous climate change
- Conclusions

Communication threats to policy makers:

- there is some urgency to deal with the problems;
- general feeling of uncertainty;
- as perception of risk may differ hence one must be aware and cautious of different biases and the dynamics of the system.

A clear distinction was, once again, made that an assessment (like the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and IPCC) is not research, in a sense that it does not seek to amass new information but to synthesis the already available knowledge.

How to get info? Because measurements are sometimes arbitrary taken depending on ones agenda so there is a need to standardize.

Millennium Development Goals

Most countries focus on poverty while ignoring the others, MDA stresses that there must be an integrated approach that takes into consideration all aspects.

There has been some progress but highly dependent on how we measure it and how we present it (as there is a tendency to overall or emphasise some minor or major points).

Indicators are information tools used to summarise data on complex environmental issues, they need to have a metric against which policy interventions can be

assessed. Indicators define a system, by giving partial pictures of the whole system so must be interpreted well.

Examples of indicators : number of species per km² as a measure of biodiversity

Criteria for indicators

- must be able to encapsulate the dynamic nature of the system;
- be sensitive, significant and simple and scientifically credible;
- must be policy relevant and easily understood.

Governance: Conventions, EU, national legislation

- UN conventions, EU (habitats and water), CITES, RAMSAR
- National legislations state, municipal families and individuals
- Higher level governance defines the context and local level does the implementation (A much more desirable model is to empower people at local level to be able to take decisions on their own to be more effective in implementing)

Nations are very important because we don't have the world government.

The Convention on Biological Diversity

It sets targets on biodiversity issues, but unfortunately it didn't set targets for halting species extinction, perhaps that's why biodiversity agenda has lagged behind from climate change, superimposed with lack of lobbying for policy adjustments. Its members are national representatives, most of which are not really biologists but bureaucrats.

The objective of the CBD

- Is not only about nature conservation but also about sustainable use of its components, fair and equitable sharing of benefits;
- As a result, the US is not a members of the CBD because it wants to take genetic material from tropical countries and patent those.

Proposed CBD indicators: species richness, invasive, population, number of protected areas.

Its not only biological data also socio-ecological data that must be collected to assess the causes of biodiversity decline.

World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

- Has a target to significantly reduce biodiversity loss by 2010 (2010 target);

- However, this is ambiguous as it does not say by how much and how to achieve the target. This is partly because we can't really measure biodiversity to its fullest;
- Although we can't fully measure biodiversity, but there are good indicators like species richness that we can use to indicate the general patterns;
- The EU say it want to halt species loss, because the WSSD wording of "reducing" imply that some loss is acceptable!
- EU has made some progress to halt biodiversity loss, but it does not really comply with the target, however, climate change is complicating the story.

Achieving long-term climate protection

Safe landing analysis (uses the traffic light approach):

- it involves lots of stakeholders, CoP meetings and delegates;
- it provides insights but not answers;
- choice of policy option is usually a political one not a scientific one;
- it gives a feeling of how we are doing and whether we'll reach the target or not.

Conclusions

- Indicators are essential to assess the dynamics of changes and monitor policy;
- Policy targets are rarely met.

By Musa Mlambo