The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity – TEEB

The Brief in brief

This Spiral brief reflects on how the TEEB initiative has functioned as a Science-Policy-Interface and how its role has evolved over the different phases of its existence. Independence combined with intense collaboration between different sectors and very active communication and outreach work were key success factors.

Setting the scene

In 2007 the G8+5 Environment Ministers called for a study on the economic significance of biodiversity loss. In its first phase until the 9th conference of the parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) an interim report was written by the study leader, a team of scientists, and administrators from EEA and DG Environment of the European Commission to size the problem and make clear how an economic approach could contribute to better understanding and addressing biodiversity loss. At COP 9 there was a call for more elaborate information and presenting it for different levels of decision making until COP 10 in October 2010. Several other countries including the UK, Norway and the Netherlands joined Germany and the EC in funding the TEEB initiative during this second phase. Japan and South Africa funded several TEEB activities as well thus broadening the funding base beyond European countries. During Phase 2 there was intense collaboration via a coordination group including TEEB management and its funders via weekly conference calls.

The strategic plan adopted at COP 10 includes several TEEB-related topics particularly in Aichi targets 2, and 3[1]. After COP 10 and half a year of intense outreach including a series of workshop across the globe, TEEB entered its current Phase 3 of facilitation and supporting country level implementation.

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[1] http://www.cbd.int/sp/

Since then several TEEB country studies have been started, some with the support and sometimes funding of UNEP TEEB office and/or the TEEB funders, others independently. The European Union has included TEEB related tasks in its Biodiversity Strategy.

Approach taken in SPIRAL to study the test case

The authors were directly involved in the TEEB initiative during its second phase and are still affiliated in the current third phase. They have thus participated in many relevant meetings and the ongoing telephone conferences. The process was reflected via the Spiral project and results were fed into the ongoing discussions.

Key lessons learned from the Test Case

Regarding TEEB Phase 1 and 2, there are three key lessons learned:

1. Relevance was achieved through the strong mandate from policy and the direct and personal links to policy makers both via the conference calls and via direct interaction with a much broader set of policy makers at many different events. This helped formulate the reports for different contexts and in relevant language. A broad and strong advisory board, representing academia, civil society, high level policy makers as well as business also helped TEEB to coordinate with other initiatives as well as taylor, finetune and mainstream the messages to the different target audiences.

2. Maintaining independence was crucial in this situation. Here the initiative benefited from a very open structure, with different coordinators and core teams for each of the reports and a broad advisory board as well as calls for evidence allowing all interested parties to contribute,. To counterbalance the dominance of European funding, it was helpful that UNEP hosted the initiative.

In addition, the mix of a charismatic leadership (Pavan Sukdev, a former banker) and a reliable knowledge base (through the involvement in particular of UFZ in the coordination group) created balance and sufficient momentum.

3. Leadership and knowledge in process management at the interface were crucial elements of success. They resulted from the combination of
- The personality and dedication of the study leader with his background in banking and a very active approach to communication, bringing in new ideas

and a broad understanding of the needs and demands from the different target audiences, counterbalanced by

- a coordination group with broad experience in process management and different organizational cultures (at the level of international organizations, international negotiations, public administration, private sector, coordination of large and heterogeneous transdisciplinary projects);
- Discursive and consensus-oriented discussion style, seeking for pragmatic solutions and carefully balancing credibility and timely delivery.

TEEB was started due to a clear demand from policy (G8+5 Environment Ministers). The basic intention was that environmental policy makers wanted a compilation of scientific evidence to make their case towards other policy sectors. This has led to intense collaboration between parts of the policy community (environmental policy) and the emerging group of scientists. Now in Phase 3, where a main focus is on country-level studies, it is more challenging to maintain this direct link and immediate interest from policy, particularly if there is a change of government while the country study is ongoing. Most country initiatives are, however, succeeding in at least maintaining close links to environmental policy and the global initiative still counts on very close links, due to the trust and personal relationships built in Phase 2 –even though several of the people have changed.

An open architecture format was chosen in phases 1 and 2, where anyone could contribute evidence (via calls for evidence). There was active recruitment of chapter authors for all the reports and another part of the scientific and wider community was involved through review requests. Phase 3 is maintaining this format, but it becomes more difficult to continue mobilizing the wider community to contribute/react to the more focused products and several of the country studies are working with smaller groups of authors, conducting either expert-group or consultant-type studies rather than broader assessments.

TEEB phase 3 has maintained important parts of the operating structure that ensures close links between environmental policy, project management and scientific coordination. The wider scientific community is now involved much more sporadically. So it is shifting from a temporal structure to synthesize scientific results (mainly by compiling state-of-the-art methodologies and a wide set of examples) into a semi-permanent structure to support country-level initiatives to replicate similar efforts at the country level.

At the country-level the important challenge now consists in establishing and balancing the social processes necessary to not only produce specific studies but to enable change on the ground.

Looking for more information on science-policy interfaces?

For more SPIRAL results, including separate briefs focussing on results from other test cases, see companion SPIRAL briefs at http://www.spiral-project.eu/content/documents

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