

Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Forest Governance – A Scoping Study from Uttarakhand

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In India, quantification and valuation of Ecosystem Services (ESs) is an emerging discipline which has not been addressed adequately in the planning process of the country despite the fact that they are important for the human survival and require adequate investment for their sustenance. Valuation of ESs is a balanced approach for conservation of ecosystems that calls to conserve whatever remains and restore areas where it is possible, rather than spending time and resources only on selected biodiversity rich areas. Despite making considerable contribution in Uttarakhand's economic and ecological systems, the forests of the state do not get proper recognition of their contribution in the State Domestic Product (SDP) in the absence of proper valuation and lack of information to decision makers. Its contribution reflected in the SDP is only 3.50% (Rs.5109.6 million) as only few goods and services from forest of Uttarakhand are marketed and thus accounted in the current calculus of SP of the State. The undertaken project by LEAD India intended to sensitize and raise awareness amongst the stakeholders on the value of various life supporting services that societies derive from the forests ecosystems. The author estimated the value of the forest ecosystem services in Uttarakhand Himalayas under different scenarios and suggested mechanisms that facilitate developing Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) for identified forest ecosystem services to benefit local communities and other key stakeholders who are conserving and providing these services including the traditional van panchayats. Further the knowledge gaps to be filled for realistic valuation for planning and sustainable development of forests of Uttarakhand were identified.