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Values, Valuing and Human Interrelationships with Nature
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The Human Dependence on Nature (HDN) Knowledge Basket promotes the uptake of existing knowledge and expects to generate new knowledge on the interrelationship between humans and nature, focusing on the contribution of biodiversity to local livelihoods and wellbeing. In this paper we discuss the different conceptualisations of 'value' and 'values' that are used by local and indigenous communities, governments, and development/conservation practitioners regarding human interrelationships with forest ecosystems and species, and how such conceptualisations affect their use and management. As a starting point, the paper discusses different types of values and associated benefits, including intrinsic, instrumental, material and non-material (intangible) values, relating to human dependence on forest ecosystem goods and services. The paper also considers factors which may influence the process of attributing value (i.e. valuation) and describes the different conceptual frameworks and estimation approaches used by economists, social scientists and ecologists in considering the values and benefits of ecosystems and species. In many cases these conceptual frameworks and valuation approaches differ significantly from those of the local peoples and indigenous communities using forest ecosystem goods and services. There is a growing interest in studies that estimate the economic value of the goods and services humans derive from ecosystems, including forest ecosystems. This interest is based on the view that the results of such studies can be used to demonstrate to governments and businesses that the protection and sustainable management of ecosystems provide fundamental and cost-effective inputs to local and national economic activity. Thus funding and investment to protect and enhance ecosystem quality can be justified in terms of its contribution to continued growth in the economic and social wellbeing of the community. Certainly, the use of economic techniques to estimate the values of ecosystem services can generate useful information for policy makers and resource managers if carried out with a proper understanding of the appropriate context, concepts and techniques. However, care needs to be taken to ensure the proper application of economic principles, and avoid confusion between different economic concepts, and inflated estimates of the 'total economic value' of ecosystems and species. Such estimates per se may provide little practical use for decision-makers facing choices between different resource allocation options. Furthermore, assessments which only consider economic perspectives of value are likely to ignore the range of alternative perspectives of the values of forest ecosystem goods and services, in particular, those held by local and indigenous peoples themselves. The paper suggests that more pluralist approaches are needed to include these different perspectives of value into policy development and resource management approaches.