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Summary of Discussion up to 29th November 2009

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This e-forum has been set up to give people the opportunity to help develop a 'Common International Standard for the Classification of Ecosystem Services' (CICES). By the end of the first week over 80 people have registered, and discussion has mainly focused on the following three topics from the six initially identified as the basis for the discussion:

Topic 1: The scope of CICES

It has been suggested that the scope of CICES should take in both commercial and non-commercial aspects of ecosystem services. Nevertheless, it has also been argued that it would be valuable if CICES could link to the accounting information systems used by economic agents. For these kinds of application it was noted that 'double counting' may not be an issue, because businesses need indicators of the interactions between their activities, biodiversity and ecosystem services, so that they may associate costs and revenues and thus identify the contributions that ecosystem make.

Topic 2: The design of CICES

This topic has attracted most interest, and discussion has mainly focussed on whether the classification should focus only on the biotic outputs of ecosystems or be extended to also include goods and services dependent mainly on abiotic ecosystem components. The consensus to date is that the classification should be inclusive and comprehensive. Thus it should, for example, cover both biotic and abiotic materials, and ecosystem outputs such as renewable energy from wind and hydro as well as from biofuels. It has been suggested that CICES should help "define boundaries between ecosphere and anthroposphere rather than between biotic and abiotic resources".

There was also support for including the concept of 'habitat regulation' identified in TEEB in CICES, as part of the broad grouping 'Lifecycle maintenance & habitat protection'. It was suggested, that the definition of this group should allow also reflect existence and bequest values.

The distinction made within the classification between the local and global aspects of climate regulation was also considered helpful.

The most recent posts imply that we need to look more closely at how we define the final products within the provisioning service group, because it was felt that food products, for example, are the result of combined natural and human inputs. **The question of whether definitions of ecosystem services should be based on the ecosphere's contribution to those products and not include human inputs is one that needs to be debated further.**

Topic 5: CICES and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services

Although debate on this issue has to date been more limited, an interesting point that has been made concerns the distinction between "counting" and "valuing". It has been argued that for transparency these should be kept separate, and while counting (in bio-physical units) can be undertaken in "a quite objective way, the questions of valuation need broad and open discussions and include economical, ethical and political considerations". **However, the issue of how the groups and classes used in CICES can help with the problem of counting and valuing needs to be examined further and there is clearly some overlap here with the points made within Topic 1.**