

PAYMENTS FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN THE GLOBAL DISCOURSE

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In its Green Economy report, UNEP stresses the role of ecosystems and the services they provide to human societies. It is the most prominent example of ecosystems being introduced into a discourse hitherto focused on technologies. The report's core message, in line with the 2010 report on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), is that ecosystem services are lost at an alarming rate because they are undervalued, and that (economic) valuation, including through market-based instruments, is a core means of ecosystem conservation.

Market-based instruments, notably Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), have gained significant attention beyond conservation circles over the last years. Focusing on water-related ecosystem services, the paper will trace how PES have been continuously integrated into the global discourses on water, development, and now Green Economy (which, in the context of Rio+20, has a strong development component). This includes the integration into the international agreed paradigm of Integrated Water Resource management, in global multi-stakeholder water fora, and official development assistance (ODA) committees.

On method: According to the post-structuralist approach proposed by Hajer (1993) and Howarth (1995), discourses do not remain an assembly of mere verbal statements, but will, if successful, be reflected in the establishment of institutions. The discourse analysis will thus encompass documents (formal positions, working papers, declarations etc) as the manifestation of verbal statements, as well as institutions, such as newly founded departments and funding schemes, to elicit the uptake of PES by various actors, governments, international organisations, and private sector associations.

On the discourses in focus: According to Allan (2003), the technological paradigm dominating the water discourse up to the 1970s was superseded by the 'environmental awareness' paradigm in the 1980s, and the latter was joined by the economic and politico-institutional paradigms in the 1990s and 2000s, respectively. In terms of predominating beliefs, this implies that, until the 1970s, there was a shared belief that water supply could be mastered through technology, and nature (as the source of water) could be controlled. With growing awareness on environmental risks and influence of the green movement, the river basin as a hydrological unit gained recognition. Overexploitation of freshwater sources, and insufficient investment in water infrastructure esp in developing countries, however, eventually gave rise to the conviction that water has an economic value which should be reflected in water prices. Since the 1990s, the paradigm of Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) has become "the discursive framework of international water policy" (Conca 2006), synonymic to sustainability in the water sector, and based on a set of agreed principles (Dublin principles 1992).

In parallel, the discourse around economic instruments for environmental protection at large has gained traction, leading up to the assessment of "The economics of ecosystems and biodiversity" (TEEB report 2010), and the development of (carbon, biodiversity) offset and compensation (PES) schemes for specific pieces or services of nature.

Since the 1990s, also, water has received more and more attention internationally as a key to economic development, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability, which is reflected in a series of international conferences and the creation of global multi-stakeholder fora. It is interesting to note that these platforms and fora have begun to actively promote PES as a policy tool, partly by presenting PES as a (quasi-natural) component of IWRM. Similarly, donor and international organisations are advocating PES as a solution to ensuring long-term water supply (e.g. World Bank 2009, USAID 2007, The Nature Conservancy 2010) and thus a fundamental basis for a Green Economy (e.g. UNEP Green Economy Report 2011, OECD Green Growth Strategy 2011).

Similarly to how international conferences and water fora have been used to promote the notion of water as an economic good, so the global discourse on ecosystem services in development and the Green Economy is aimed at convincing critical voices, including governments from the global South (cf ALBA nations' declaration opposing commodification of nature in the context of Green Economy, Nov 2010).