

## **Ecosystem services: The past, the pitfalls and the potential for supporting wellbeing of people in the Western Indian Ocean**

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What has the science of ecosystems services got to offer the people and policymakers of the WIO region? And what are the opportunities to use this now widespread concept to sustainably support human wellbeing through these turbulent times. I outline key insights, challenges and opportunities from ecosystem services and wellbeing research.

First, I will briefly review where the term 'ecosystem services' comes from. I will outline its different usages and some pitfalls and critiques. Then I will draw on examples from WIO and around the world to illustrate three key insights from research using the concepts of ecosystem services and human wellbeing: 1. The importance of trade-offs 2. The 'co-production' of ecosystem services by people and nature, and 3. The complexity of the relationship between humans' wellbeing and their environment. This leads to two key challenges and research frontiers: How can we interpret and understand change? And how can we navigate hard choices and tradeoffs? Finally, I focus on two opportunities for this research to contribute in WIO. The first opportunity is to use greater understanding of how ecosystems are linked to wellbeing to generate interventions for sustainably improving people's lives. The second is for scientists to leap out of our comfort zone into transdisciplinary research with coastal people, policy makers and other disciplines. The insights from research shows that management of ecosystem services is messy, political and uncertain. As, scientists we cannot be expected to provide simple solutions, but we have a responsibility to engage, inform and provoke decision makers at all levels as they navigate through uncertain futures.