

Bridging Limits?: Lessons from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's Multi-Scale Approach

Chad Monfreda

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment's (MA) unique multi-scale approach has generated significant momentum for rethinking the design and practice of global environmental assessments. While global environmental assessments have become an increasingly important link between global science and policy, they have been less successful at linking global science and policy to the sub-global socio-ecological contexts that matter most for human well-being. By including a wide array of stakeholders representing diverse knowledges at multiple scales, the MA offers a powerful example for how future global environmental assessments could bridge this gap. Yet, the experience of the MA's multi-scale approach also provides lessons into the challenges and limitations of integrating sub-global knowledges, scales, and stakeholders into global environmental assessments. This paper uses document analysis and interviews with MA practitioners to trace the changing goals for multi-scale assessments in the MA over the decade from its conception through the MA Follow-up Process. The findings show how the MA's multi-scale ideal offers promise for more effective and legitimate mechanisms of environmental governance but also significant obstacles for reconciling the goals and ways of knowing of diverse global and sub-global actors.