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Ecosystem services – how can we turn words into action on climate?

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Abstract:

For better or worse, climate disruption is now a 'lived experience' for many peoples around the world, catapulting us from the realms of scientific theory and modelling into rapidly managing change. As a species, humanity needs to acknowledge the urgency of integrating respect for nature, natural cycles and ecosystem resilience as core to wise decision-making.

Faced with the rapidly intensifying reality of climate-forcing, key challenges to life as we've known it include threats to food, water and energy security, as biodiversity decline and ecosystem stress reveal the world is gradually crossing potentially irreversible thresholds. Wars and political instability – driven by poverty, greed, conflicting views on religion or competition for resources – exacerbate the situation and drive population displacement.

The Ecosystem Services concept sits at the nexus of economics and ecology, fulfilling a vital role by making transparent to all the benefits of working with, not against, the forces of nature.

A similar confluence of scientific and spiritual paradigms is evident in the groundswell of 304 eminent global faith leaders from 58 countries calling for urgent climate action at COP22 in Marrakesh (see <http://www.interfaithstatement2016.org/>). This call for governments, civil and church communities to recognize our responsibilities ('ability to respond') for the sake of future generations is backed by strongly worded Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Sikh Climate Declarations and Pope Francis' Ecological Encyclical *Laudato Si*.

Individual and collective commitment is required to demonstrate the relevance of ecosystem services to global policy development through practical deployment at regional and local scales. Projects showcasing integrative approaches to food and water security and renewable energy can assist 'just transitions' towards sustainability, with co-benefits for jobs and health. I will provide two examples, drawn from Port Augusta SA and the Western Sahara, Morocco.

The key challenge remains the vital transition from words to action.