

Abstract: Within the ECO-BEST project in Thailand, a practical assessment guideline is developed for the identification and planning of economic instruments for protected area and buffer zone management. The identified economic instruments are supposed to support biodiversity conservation efforts but also contribute to improving local livelihoods through benefits from ecosystem services. The guideline emphasizes the integration of relevant local stakeholders in the assessment process, such as representatives of communities and municipalities in buffer zones, line agencies of relevant ministries and administrations, conservation or development NGOs working in the PA and buffer zones, or representatives of locally important economic sectors.

As part of the assessment guideline, we propose “ecosystem service opportunities” (ESO) as a heuristic framework for analyzing which opportunities based on ecosystem services arise in a specific context, and which economic policy or management instrument may be suitable.

The ESO framework

- Is issue-oriented, by starting out with identifying relevant local issues and how they relate to the provision of ecosystem services;
- Is actors-oriented, by explicitly analyzing how relevant (groups of) actors relate to the provision of ecosystem services;
- Orders opportunities based on ecosystem services along simple economic principles: the steward-earns principle, the beneficiary-pays principle, the polluter-pays principle, and what we label as “innovation-principle”;
- Presents a direct correspondence of the four economic principles to commonly used economic instruments for biodiversity and ecosystem service protection.

The guideline and the ESO heuristic are exemplified for the distinct local contexts of three ECO-BEST project sites in Thailand.