**SESSION DESCRIPTION**

**ID:** G3

**Title of session:**

Young Ecosystem Services Specialists: nurturing cross-disciplinary learning to strengthen capacities on Ecosystem Services research in Africa

**Hosts:**

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**Abstract:**

Research on Ecosystem Services (ES) and human well-being has experienced a boom in recent years, with much of the work focusing on Sub-Saharan African (SSA) amongst the most outstanding examples of the potential of this inter-disciplinary field of study. Either focusing on land, marine or urban ecosystems among others, ES research is providing critical insights to expand our understanding of the varied ways in which local communities relate to Nature, and to inform policy-making for the sustainable management of natural resources. However, either at the conceptual, methodological or applied level, the diversity of frameworks and tools available can easily overwhelm early career researchers striving to operationalise the ES approach. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of ES research, further challenges arise as a consequence of diverging ontologies amongst disciplines exploring nature contributions to human well-being from different standpoints.

With this session, we aim at supporting young scholars’ learning across disciplines to enhance the capacities of this new generation of researchers to further develop their careers on ES research. With this goal, we especially welcome contributions portraying best practices in conducting empirical ES research, but perhaps more importantly, generalizable examples of the challenges that young scholars working on ES might encounter. This session is intended for young scholar working on empirical ES research, but with a broad understanding of the field. Therefore, not only disciplinary researchers most obviously connected to ES research are invited to this session (e.g. geographers, biologists or ecologists), but also scholars exploring...
the relations between ecosystems and human well-being from other perspectives, as sociologists, political scientists, economists and beyond. Senior researchers interested in contributing to this learning process are also encouraged to participate in the session, or at least attend the session and enhance the discussion by sharing their experiences.

**Goals and objectives of the session:**

Main objectives of the session are:
- To exchange both successful experiences and emerging challenges in operationalising the ES approach amongst young scholars in SSA, particularly to nurture cross-disciplinary learning.
- To enhance participants’ awareness and understanding of the available frameworks and tools to address the emerging challenges and further exploit the positive experiences of ES approaches.
- Lay the ground for future collaborative research endeavours amongst ES scholars in SSA.

**Planned output / Deliverables:**

- Findings of the session will be compiled in a joint report and disseminated through the Young Ecosystem Services Specialists (YESS) network.
- Depending on the quality of the material presented in the session, other dissemination channels might be explored (e.g. joint review paper, contribution to ESP newsletter, blog posts in different research networks, etc.).

**Voluntary contributions accepted:**
Yes

**Related to ESP Working Group:**
General Section