

## Seminar on Transformative Change for Biodiversity – Key Messages

### Preamble

GIZ, KfW and BfN, with the support of adelphi conducted a six days seminar on “Transformative change for Biodiversity: Challenges, concepts and implementation” in January/February 2021 for experts in the German development cooperation.

The objectives of the seminar were that participants

- obtain a first understanding what transformative change means in the context of biodiversity conservation
- familiarize themselves with conceptual approaches to transformative change
- understand what role transformative change plays in international policy frameworks
- unpack principles and key elements of transformative change and apply these insights to specific case studies
- learn about implementation tools of transformative change at the project level
- reflect on next steps to spur transformative change in their work context and development cooperation

The key messages of the seminar are summarized below.

### **1. Transformative Change goes beyond addressing direct drivers of biodiversity loss.**

Biodiversity loss is happening at an unprecedented rate. Next to the direct drivers, e.g. land and sea use change, direct exploitation, climate change, pollution or invasive alien species, the Intergovernmental science-policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) identified several underlying causes deeply rooted in our societies. Poor governance and a lack of cross-sectoral planning, equity issues, production and consumption patterns as well as social narratives and values are the main root causes of biodiversity loss (IPBES 2019).

Recognizing that biodiversity loss is indirectly caused by the political, economic, financial, social and value systems that the direct drivers are embedded in, IPBES calls for Transformative Change, defined as „a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values“ (IPBES 2019, p.14).

Mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society is key to the Transformative Change agenda as it challenges “silo thinking” and the conception of biodiversity loss as a concern only for actors from the environmental realm (e.g. environmental ministries, conservation agencies etc.). However, as the IPBES definition implies, Transformative Change as a “fundamental, system-wide reorganization” goes beyond biodiversity mainstreaming focused on the direct drivers and key sectors in which biodiversity loss occurs. By addressing the indirect drivers and root causes of biodiversity loss, Transformative Change also aims to remove the barriers for a sustainable future in a broader sense.

Biodiversity in the context of Transformative Change can be seen from two perspectives. Biodiversity conservation can be the goal of a Transformative Change process. At the same time, biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use are means to achieve Transformative Change aimed at a range of other societal challenges.

## **2. Transformative Change remains an under-conceptualized term that still needs to be further understood and adapted to local contexts.**

While transformation has been discussed within environmental policy for longer, in the biodiversity community the concept gained prominence within the context of the 2019 IPBES assessment. A comprehensive, consolidated understanding of what the concept means for biodiversity at different levels is still lacking. IPBES is currently preparing a stand-alone assessment focused on Transformative Change.

Discussions on transformative change within the biodiversity community can learn from similar discussions in other communities, e.g. climate change community. What seems clear is however, that transformative change will always mean different things for different contexts, people and sectors. The concept has to be adapted to the local context to become meaningful and the ambitious character of the term always has to be renegotiated.

There are a few key principles though that seem non-negotiable and keep being emphasized. Concerning areas of action, for example, it is clear that without profoundly changing production and consumption patterns of food and energy, truly Transformative Change won't be possible. Transformative Change has to address social and economic inequalities and establish inclusive governance structures. Transformative Change for Biodiversity means expanding the action arena of biodiversity conservation to a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach, thereby harnessing co-benefits for people and the planet. Similar principles are outlined for example in the Eklipse report (Eklipse 2020).

## **3. Transformative Change should take a key role in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.**

The Convention to Biological Diversity (CBD) 2050 Vision aims at valuing, conserving, restoring and wisely using biodiversity, thereby maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people – in short, “living in harmony with nature” (CBD 1992). The 5<sup>th</sup> UN Global Biodiversity Outlook (CBD 2020) and the IPBES Global Assessment (IPBES 2019) concluded that biodiversity is in heavy decline and that the Aichi Targets from the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity (2011-2020) were largely missed. If the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) is to fill the widening gap between biodiversity conservation efforts and the unchanged CBD 2050 Vision, actions directed at achieving Transformative Change are needed.

The Updated Zero Draft of the GBF from August 2020 refers to Transformative Change in its Theory of Change and calls for “broad-based action for a transformation in society’s relationship with biodiversity” (CBD 2020). This includes the call for political action to transform economic, social and financial models and for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, promoting the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, representative multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral platforms, gender equality, synergies among multilateral environmental agreements and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as mainstreaming biodiversity in all sectors.

The 2030 Action Targets proposed in the Updated Zero Draft can only be achieved through Transformative Change. Several targets relate to addressing the direct drivers of biodiversity loss: Under “reducing threats”, target 4 on management of wild species, linked to economic cycles, target 6 on pollution, a direct consequence of unsustainable production processes, and target 7 on nature-based solutions to climate change, provide important entry points for transformative change. Under “meeting people’s needs”, targets 9 (managed ecosystems, agriculture) and 11 (access to green infrastructure, particularly in cities) also provide important entry points. Target 9 on sustainable food systems is critical for mainstreaming biodiversity into the agricultural sector. Under “tools and solutions”, five targets of the Updated Zero Draft (13 on integrating biodiversity values, 14 on sustainability of economic sectors and

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businesses, 15 on sustainable consumption and lifestyles, 17 on incentives & subsidies and 18 on resource mobilization) are key to addressing indirect drivers and root causes of biodiversity loss.

#### **4. NBSAPs are possible entry points for Transformative Change.**

National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) as mandated by the CBD can serve as entry points for the Transformative Change agenda. Transformative NBSAPs should apply a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and strive for synergies with other international conventions such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development & SDGs, the Paris Agreement & NDCs or the UNCCD. To create and increase ownership of possible agents of transformative change, the NBSAPs should represent different biodiversity narratives, ranging from the private sector to local communities and traditional knowledge bearers. By linking NBSAPs to existing policy processes and incentivizing targeted collaboration, NBSAPs can increase transparency, enable institutional learning and address responsibility gaps.

#### **5. Transformative Change needs more determined, integrated, coherent and multilateral action.**

Although biodiversity is increasingly recognized as a global public good, conservation efforts have to become more determined, integrative and multilateral in order to achieve the ambitious CBD 2050 vision. The German development cooperation sector should aim for enhanced credibility and coherence in terms of biodiversity conservation both on a national and EU level. This includes, but is not reduced to consequent mainstreaming of biodiversity, for example in agricultural programmes. On national level, the BMZ should be made “fit for transformation” by upgrading biodiversity as a quality criterion for its portfolios. On EU level, the momentum of the EU Green Deal could be seized to address topics such as biodiversity in international trade or sustainable finance.

#### **6. Development Cooperation should engage in mainstreaming processes and the creation of a common transformative vision for biodiversity.**

German Development Cooperation should support the co-creation of transformative visions and new narratives to overcome the supposed opposition between human development and biodiversity conservation. By emphasizing diverse co-benefits and synergies (e.g. pandemic prevention), development cooperation could engage in dialogues and mainstreaming processes with different sectors and actors and thereby extend the action arena for Transformative Change. To convince actors outside the biodiversity community to engage in biodiversity conservation, target group interests should be firmly anchored into biodiversity reasoning. New common visions for biodiversity can only evolve when also listening to biodiversity narratives created outside the conservation community, e.g. in the private sector.

Since development cooperation can only stimulate, support or accelerate but never impose processes of change, initiative and ownership from partner governments are key. Development cooperation actors should therefore identify and support existing visions of transformative change in their respective partner countries.

#### **7. Development cooperation should engage in capacity building to facilitate the overall governance and implementation of Transformative Change.**

Political actors lack practical guidance on how to stimulate, nudge, and navigate change processes and socio-ecological transformation. We need transformative governance to strengthen societal conditions for the negotiation of the choices and consequences of transformation and the “who” (actors), “what” (policies) and “how” (modes of governance) of the transformation processes. Development cooperation

can contribute to transformative governance by conducting capacity building and supporting the enabling structures needed for the implementation of Transformative Change.

The theory-practice gap is also visible in development cooperation organizations themselves where existing knowledge on Transformative Change is not always translated into action and could be better set to value. The capacity building framework currently under development could improve the promotion of best practices and the application of lessons learned.

On the international level, development cooperation should engage in the design of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to ensure ambition and a strong focus on implementation. Development cooperation can then support partner countries in transferring the aspiration of the GBF into national policies and implementation structures

## **8. Transformative Change should be equitable and take place through inclusive, deliberate processes.**

Equity is a central element of good governance. Also, biodiversity conservation itself touches equity issues since biodiversity loss reinforces global inequalities which at the same time reinforce biodiversity loss. Also, conservation approaches that do not take equity considerations into account contribute to further conflict, inequality and non-effectiveness of conservation. Transformative Change therefore necessarily has to take place through inclusive processes. In line with the BMZ guiding principle to “leave no one behind”, development cooperation should ensure that the supported transformative change processes are equitable processes.

The equity framework proposed by the Convention on Biological Diversity includes three dimensions: Recognition (accepting the legitimacy of rights, values, interests and priorities of different actors); Procedure (ensuring the inclusive and effective participation of all relevant actors) and Distribution (of costs and benefits of conservation, including trade-offs between people in different places and generations).

It is likely that transformative action generates disagreements and contestation “which require space to be heard and in-depth consideration”. It is important that trade-offs or opposed interests are not silenced but heard and that ‘just transitions’ are ensured. But at the same time, it is paramount that resistance by those with a vested interest in the status quo will be overcome.

## **9. A wide range of tools can help to find entry points and to guide Transformative Change.**

A growing number of tools can help to identify entry points for Transformative Change in different contexts and guide practitioners. The so-called scenario back casting tool aims at facilitating the development of a macro vision of change and helps creating a roadmap towards a desired future. It can also be used to guide NBSAP revision processes.

There are also some tools that offer more concrete guidance. The “Acting on Ecosystem Service Opportunities (ESO)”<sup>1</sup> tool is one example. Although not explicitly mentioning Transformative Change, it can be used to identify leverage for Transformative Change as it emphasizes the idea of co-benefits for biodiversity and contributes to understanding the root-causes of biodiversity loss as well as identifying new action arenas and entry points for biodiversity conservation. While encouraging deliberate processes and co-production, the tool also takes a proactive approach to resistance.

GIZ recently published guidance for Transformative Change that explicitly targeted at development cooperation (GIZ 2020). The publication “Transforming our work: Getting ready for transformational

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.es-opportunities.net/home.html>

projects” outlines principles for the design and evaluation of transformative projects and advises on their implementation in practice.

With the “Toolkit for Policy Prototyping”<sup>2</sup>, originally developed by adelphi for the “SEED – Promoting Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development” Initiative, context-specific approaches within a specific sector can be created that can be upscaled and mainstreamed later. The tool is designed to facilitate an open and creative brainstorming of ideas, the subsequent “testing” of these ideas as well as the design of a preliminary roadmap. It can help to develop new perspectives and ideas for sector specific development projects and to assess their transformative potential.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://seed.uno/programmes/ecosystem-building/practitioner-labs-policy>