



TOWARDS POST-2020 EXPERTISE ON #30

EMBEDDING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY GOVERNANCE



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Achieving the ambitions of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) requires transformative change. Embedding six key principles at the heart of the GBF provides the concrete means to trigger transformative action for all levels of government and across the whole of society.

“IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THE ROOT DRIVERS OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS ARE ADDRESSED - ESPECIALLY AS DOING SO ALSO BRINGS OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS INCLUDING ENHANCING HUMAN HEALTH AND WELLBEING AND CREATING GREEN JOBS” World Economic Forum.

There is now a consensus across both science and policy communities that current approaches for addressing the loss of nature are inadequate and that a transformative approach is needed to meet biodiversity goals and to realise sustainable development for society at large. Despite this imperative, a significant challenge remains in translating the idea of transformative change into an effective governance framework to guide and enable meaningful action for nature and people.

The finalisation of the post-2020 GBF provides a critical moment to ensure that key principles for transformative change are embedded in international policy. Rather than providing a blueprint, the GBF must establish the conditions through which transformative change can emerge and be realised by multiple actors working across diverse contexts. This will support action to bend the curve on biodiversity loss and ensure nature's contributions to people are sustained and shared equally, while also enabling society to respond to other critical challenges ¹.



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1. WHY DO WE NEED TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE?

International assessments ³ (e.g., IPBES Global Assessment, IPCC 1.5 degrees report, UNEP’s Global Environmental Outlook, IPCC & IPBES workshop report) demonstrate that society has failed to halt biodiversity loss and degradation, generating risks to development and human well-being ⁴. Urgent action is needed to transform the governance of socio-ecological systems to create climate-resilient and nature positive development pathways ⁵.

The IPBES Global Assessment defines transformative change as “a fundamental, system-wide reorganization across technological, economic and social factors”. For some, this means scaling up efforts to ensure that system-level change takes place, i.e., that sufficient policies, measures, and technologies are adopted to deal with the scale and urgency of the biodiversity challenge. Others suggest that transformative change involves shifts in the structures and conditions generating environmental harm, e.g., social, economic, and political inequality. A third perspective focuses on getting the enabling conditions for transformation right by fostering the agency, values, and capacities necessary to manage uncertainty, act collectively and enact pathways to desired futures ⁶. Despite their differences, these approaches suggest that a transformative agenda requires a significant shift in both the extent (how much) and essential character (what kind) of change needed to govern biodiversity. The diversity of approaches to transformative change, and its contested nature, means that it is neither possible nor desirable to develop a “one size fits all” method that dictates from afar what it means for different stakeholders and communities.

What is needed is a set of shared principles acting as a guiding compass, establishing a common direction of drawing on the range of perspectives and experiences of transformative change.

While the GBF has the stated ambition of galvanising “urgent and transformative action by Governments and all of society”, there is little detail on how this will take place. Transformation is effectively defined in terms of outcomes – fulfilling ambitious goals for 2030 and 2050 – with a theory of change assuming that work will be undertaken across government and society to achieve these.

Yet, studies ⁷ suggest that we need both governance for transformative change – vision and conditions that enable others to act on this agenda – and transformation of the GBF to shape the journey ahead. Setting ambitious goals is not sufficient. If the new biodiversity governance framework is to generate transformative change, it must embed this concept at its heart and embrace transformation in its working arrangements, mechanisms, and institutions. Without this, it is likely that the stated ambition of the Parties to the Convention to enable widespread transformative change will not be realised and goals for conserving and sustainably using biodiversity will never be met.

2. REQUIRED PRINCIPLES TO ACHIEVE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Designing and implementing an agenda for transformative change at the international level is challenging. Transformation often emerges from

¹ This policy brief is based on a background report for a Workshop on transformative change in the global post-2020 Biodiversity Framework | European Commission (europa.eu -23-26 June 2020). See Bulkeley et al. (2020). Harnessing the Potential of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Report prepared by an Eklipse Expert Working Group. UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Wallingford, United Kingdom and Fritz et al. (2020). Transformative change in the global post-2020 Biodiversity Framework Workshop report 23-25-26 June 2020, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, European Commission, Belgium. A workshop report is also available as a background document at the CBD.

² <https://cutt.ly/XQZ9yOk>

³ IPCC 1.5 degrees report: <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

UNEP Global Environment Outlook GEO-6: <https://cutt.ly/rQZ9cKc>

IPBES-IPCC workshop report on Biodiversity and Climate Change: <https://cutt.ly/EQZ9Rq3>

⁴ WEF 2020: <https://cutt.ly/kQZ9Um2>

⁵ Read Expertise on Climate & Biodiversity Ambitions (#24): <https://cutt.ly/OQZ9P7P>

⁶ Scoones I. et al., (2020). Transformations to sustainability: combining structural, systemic, and enabling approaches. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, Volume 42, February 2020, Pages 65-75: <https://cutt.ly/mQZ9Kr6>

Principles of Transformative Change	Explanation
Address Root Causes	The pursuit of transformative change requires that the root causes & indirect drivers of the problem are addressed.
Take Multiple Paths	Transformative change cannot be generated through “silver bullet” solutions or blueprint plans. Multiple development pathways compatible with biodiversity goals are needed.
Expand Action Arena	Transformative change requires expanded action to encompass multiple areas of the economy and society.
Realise Diverse Co-Benefits	Harnessing positive co-benefits can enable greater traction for ambitious biodiversity action while achieving other societal goals.
Design Deliberative & Inclusive Processes	Space for disagreements and contestation is required alongside inclusive processes to take account of diverse values and interests.
Adopt Proactive Approach to Resistance	Resistance is an inevitable part of transformative change. Approaches need to be designed to ensure “just transitions” whilst also overcoming resistance from those with a vested interest in the status quo.

Table 1 Principles for transformative change (Bulkeley et al., 2020).



Cambodian woman farming in a rice field in the last sun framed by leaves. Puok, Siem Reap Province, Cambodia © Loes Kieboom

the work of local communities or non-state actors, sometimes in partnership with or enabled by national governments. Levers – the types of action – and leverage points – the intervention areas – identified by IPBES⁸ as critical for transformative biodiversity governance are rarely influenced by international agreements and institutions alone.

The power of the GBF rests in its capacity to persuade and enable others to act. Governing for transformative change means that it is critical that the GBF both sets the agenda and provides conditions and means through which it can be realised. Examples are emerging where international agenda-setting fosters transformative change (see below and opposite). We suggest six principles (Table 1) that encapsulate the core features of transformative change that can be adopted by and embedded within the GBF to generate new levels of ambition, engage diverse agents of change, and together ensure that action for biodiversity also enables equitable and sustainable outcomes for society. These guiding principles can help ensure we stay on the right path, celebrate success and correct course to maintain ambition levels. With them, the GBF can provide **a compass for action by all levels of government and the whole of society.**

“FROM DISCUSSIONS DURING THE FIRST-EVER WORKSHOP ON TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN THE GLOBAL POST-2020 BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK, WE UNDERSTOOD THAT POLICYMAKERS URGENTLY NEED HELP FROM RESEARCHERS TO FACILITATE TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE CONCRETELY ON THE GROUND.”⁹ Marco Fritz, European Commission.

GETTING TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM? ADDRESSING THE CAUSES OF BIODIVERSITY LOSS WITH REDD+

An analysis of 271 National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP) and Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) produced by 2016 shows that only 14 explicitly mention the importance of addressing the root causes of agricultural commodity production on forest loss¹⁰. Yet a more detailed analysis of eight different countries reveals a different story. While this link remains absent in some cases, there is evidence of more active approaches to consider agricultural commodity production's role in deforestation within REDD+ strategies and actions through institutional reform (e.g., Bolivia, Malaysia) or partnership with key sectors and the use of voluntary standards (e.g., Argentina, Cameroon). This suggests that transformative action may currently be taking place outside of the key policy arenas and reporting mechanisms recognised within the CBD. Explicitly expanding the action arenas identified as central to the implementation of the post-2020 GBF can allow for these emerging efforts to be better captured and supported, and the learning shared between Parties.

AN INCLUSIVE AND INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY IN CAMBODIA

When it comes to the principle of designing deliberative and inclusive processes, we can see that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requirement for the timely submission of NDC that show increased levels of ambition is also able to generate more transformative approaches. In Cambodia, the updated NDC, submitted in 2020¹¹, contains the goal of enhancing the inclusion of women and youth in key sectors alongside a commitment that in the forests and other land use sectors, its implementation “will seek to promote the rights of indigenous people, specifically concerning land ownership”. Reviewing this updated strategy,¹² finds that it places nature-based solutions across several ecosystems –from agricultural land to wetlands and oceans –as central to addressing climate change and as fundamental to enhancing resilience and economic development. This shows, in turn, the importance of **multiple paths** and diverse development trajectories to supporting action on both the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss.

EXPANDING ACTION ARENAS – DUTCH CENTRAL BANK DISCOVERING THE DEPENDENCY

OF THE FINANCIAL SECTOR ON BIODIVERSITY Inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to strengthen the sustainability of the national financial sector, the Dutch Central Bank DNB has identified the degradation of biodiversity as a risk¹¹. Banks, pension funds and insurers have enormous portfolios of assets that depend on and impact biodiversity (for example in the agri-food sector). Financing economic activities that negatively impact biodiversity will result in physical, reputation and transition risks¹². DNB, as a financial supervisor, now recommends Dutch financials to identify these risks in their portfolios. Here, we see a new institution starting to govern for biodiversity, illustrating how an expansion of action arenas can take place and how new pathways are developed to reform the financial system and to address root causes (as recommended by IPBES). Central banks have the mandate and authority needed to overcome resistance and push financial institutions to favour funding of biodiversity positive activities.

3. BRINGING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE INTO THE POST-2020 FRAMEWORK

Rather than positioning transformative change as the outcome of implementing the GBF, to govern for transformative change will require a transformation of the Framework. We highlight three areas in which progress can be made.

⁷ Patterson, J., Schulz, K., Vervoort, J., Van Der Hel, S., Widerberg, O., Adler, C., ... & Barau, A., (2017). Exploring the governance and politics of transformations towards sustainability. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 24, 1-16.

⁸ Chapter 5 IPBES global assessment: <https://cutt.ly/wQZ3m2U>

⁹ For more information on Horizon Europe's research portfolio: <https://cutt.ly/AQBrNTH>

¹⁰ Sabine Henders, S. Ostwald, M., Verendel, V., Ibsch, P. (2018). Do national strategies under the UN biodiversity and climate conventions address agricultural commodity consumption as a deforestation driver? *Land Use Policy* 70: 580-59: <https://cutt.ly/5QZ3w8K>

¹¹ <https://cutt.ly/xQZ3ogA>

¹² WWF, 2021. NDCs Increasingly Becoming a Force for Nature. <https://cutt.ly/jQZ3stw>

¹¹ DNB, 2019. Values at Risk? Sustainability risks and goals in the Dutch financial sector. Authors: Guan Schellekens and Joris van Toor.

¹² DNB and PBL, 2020. Indebted to nature - Exploring biodiversity risks for the Dutch financial sector. Authors: Joris van Toor, Danijela Piljic, Guan Schellekens (DNB), Mark van Oorschot, Marcel Kok (PBL).



Deforest environmental problem. Khao Lak, Phang-nga, Thailand © Rich Carey

ENABLING CONDITIONS

The First draft of the GBF acknowledges the importance of “a participatory and inclusive whole-of-society approach that engages actors beyond national Governments”. Yet the importance of accounting for the diverse values that multiple actors have for nature through deliberative governance processes needs also to be explicitly recognised. There is also limited evidence that a proactive approach to resistance is being adopted. Requiring key contributing sectors to be visible in national processes and reporting, while signalling the role of industrialized and emerging economies for action on indirect drivers of consumption and production could address this challenge.

GOALS AND TARGETS

While alignment with the SDG framework is a welcome means to ensure that the GBF expands the action arena of biodiversity governance and diverse co-benefits are realised, headline indicators remain focused on national governments, potentially limiting action by subnational governments and societal actors. The removal of the term nature-based solutions – now widely used across the whole of society – limits the relevance of the GBF and its potential to generate multiple paths towards biodiversity goals. A focus on universal indicators – e.g., total green space or per capita food production – masks the importance of the underlying drivers of inequality. Equally, few indicators can be used to track progress on addressing indirect drivers – monitoring the amount of plastic in the ocean¹³ is not the same as focusing on how much is used in the economy.

RESPONSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY MECHANISM

A mechanism for planning, monitoring, reporting, and review is identified by the First draft of the GBF¹⁴. For it to be transformative, it must focus on goals and targets regarding both indirect and direct drivers of biodiversity loss. It should include the whole government (beyond biodiversity policies) and the whole of society to also show progress in new action arenas. Such a mechanism is also crucial to reveal where vested interests are in the way and learn from new coalitions able to develop effective, proactive approaches. A “ratcheting mechanism”¹⁵ could help to raise ambition towards the achievement of the 2050 vision and goals of the CBD over time. By showing their contribution to the realisation of the post-2020 targets, non-state actors such as sub-national actors (through the Edinburgh process¹⁶), businesses and the financial sector can help governments step up their delivery of the GBF on the ground.

“ACHIEVING THE SCALE AND SCOPE OF TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE NEEDED TO MEET THE GOALS OF THE UNFCCC AND CBD AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS RELIES ON RAPID AND FAR-REACHING ACTIONS OF A TYPE NEVER BEFORE ATTEMPTED”

IPBES-IPCC Co-sponsored workshop Biodiversity and Climate change, Scientific Outcome.

4. PUTTING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE AT THE HEART OF THE POST-2020 GBF

If the GBF is to herald a new era of transformative change for nature and people, it must do more than establish ambitious targets. It must provide a guide and governance mechanisms for our collective journey to those ends. Embedding transformative change at the heart of the GBF means creating a positive vision and narrative on the possibilities it holds, while supporting new shared understandings, relationships and intentions about the need and scope for action, the multiple values involved and how diverse approaches can be mobilised. This will require transforming global biodiversity governance itself.

The GBF comes at a pivotal point where the international community must show commitment by:

- + Establishing enabling conditions that generate diverse and inclusive approaches and extend biodiversity governance to tackle the root causes of the problem and capture the benefits nature provides for resolving societal challenges;
- + Creating goals, targets and indicators that encourage and empower all levels of government and the whole of society to take responsibility, tackle biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation¹⁷ through multiple pathways, and generate diverse co-benefits for nature and people in an equitable manner;
- + Requiring efficient and robust measurement, reporting and verification procedures that hold Parties and other actors to account for action on the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss and make progress visible to society at large.

¹³ Read Expertise on Marine Biodiversity (#16): <https://cutt.ly/YQZ3SzX>

¹⁴ Read Expertise on Transparency and Accountability (#19): <https://cutt.ly/tQZ3HQn>

Read Dialogue on Responsibility and Transparency mechanism for Biodiversity (#25): <https://cutt.ly/5QZ8utk>

¹⁵ A ratcheting mechanism feeds into the monitoring, reporting and review framework to ensure that actions become increasingly ambitious over time to ensure that agreed goals and targets will be met.

¹⁶ Read Dialogue with – Edinburgh Process (#18): <https://cutt.ly/pQZ8lyz>

¹⁷ Read Expertise on Integrated Approach: better choices for restoring ecosystems (#23): <https://cutt.ly/pQZ8EAt>

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