



Wilton Park



Report

## **Making transformational change for climate action post COP26 – How?**

Tuesday 1 February 2022 | WP2027V



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**This meeting is held in partnership with: The International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), Climate Investment Funds, Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, University of Sussex, Institute of Development Studies, United Nations Development Programme Independent Evaluation Office, International Evaluation Academy, International Fund for Agricultural Development.**

## Background

Climate change is a defining issue of our time. It continues to threaten societies globally and its economic, social, and environmental impacts are a challenge for us all. The Glasgow Climate Pact does not mention transformational change as necessary to shift the world from the brink of a climate catastrophe. Yet it is clear from the urgency of its message that major changes will be necessary in our economies and societies and our relationship with the environment. There is widespread public recognition that these changes need to transform human and natural systems and be effectuated in record time. In order to succeed, they will need to be systemic and comprehensive and include perspectives such as climate justice, just transition, and the full range of Sustainable Development Goals.

After a first event in June 2020, in collaboration with the World Bank and its gLOCAL week of global interactions, this series of dialogues on transformational change for climate action restarted in September 2021 ([read the report here](#)). It explored how the world of research, evaluation, policy and action can collaborate to promote transformational change.

A second meeting, as part of a series continuing into May and September 2022, was held on 1 February 2022, just over two months after COP26. A group of about 45 participants from the often disconnected worlds of policy action, research and evaluation discussed existing evidence and ways to break down the many practical, political and structural barriers that challenge transformational change for climate action. Participants at this meeting were highly engaged and enthusiastic to contribute experiences and reflections on the practicalities and issues they face, as well as working towards briefings and concept notes that could support this agenda.

Reactions to [transformationalchange@wiltonpark.org.uk](mailto:transformationalchange@wiltonpark.org.uk).

“Where we draw the boundaries of systems is deeply political.”

“Without disruption, we will not be able to transform.”

“Power and justice are at the heart of the initiative and challenge top-down framings of people as vulnerable.”

## Key points

- COP26 and the Glasgow Climate Pact provided a clarion call for action on climate change and an opportunity to push for transformational change with renewed energy. Transformational change is confirmed yet again as urgently needed to shift the world towards a sustainable future.
- Old approaches to interventions and policies are not adequate to the tasks ahead. Three cases presented during the meeting showed different methodological and conceptual constructs, and pathways to transformational change, with systems thinking informing holistic, emergent and context-specific approaches.
- Processes for transformational change are complex and non-linear; they require adaptive management to navigate highly challenging political and economic contexts. Pathways to change need to be identified, but blueprint project approaches tend not to work, because positive and negative interactions between systems may lead to diversions or shortcuts on the way to transformational change.
- Evaluation and science need to capture evidence around truly transformative change processes, mechanisms, outcomes and impact. A key question is how to play a disruptive role, as without disruption, transformative change is less likely.
- Qualitative data and communicating transformational change processes and outcomes are crucial for advocacy to a broader range of stakeholders.

## Pathways toward transformational change: cases

Discussion focussed around three cases demonstrating pathways towards transformational change in practice.

### **Transformation as Praxis - exploring socially just and transdisciplinary pathways to sustainability in marginal environments (TAPESTRY) - Institute of Development Studies**

1. IDS presented lessons from three sites of work – Kutch in Northwest India, Mumbai and the Sundurbans in Bangladesh – that share characteristics of politically, socially and economically marginalised people in increasingly precarious environments exacerbated by climate change. The focus was on transformative change to address the root causes of vulnerability to climate change while looking at the identity, wellbeing and agency of communities and working to co-produce alliances building on livelihoods.
2. The work demonstrates that promoting transformational change requires understanding and then grappling with power and social change. It inevitably means engaging with diverse and often unruly political alignments and challenging existing power relations and structures. Solutions tend to be local rather than regional and/or transboundary. When ecosystems are transboundary and solutions need to be brought to both sides of the border, it is especially difficult. This case offered insights in how these processes can be supported and strengthened.
3. Lessons show a need for deep, location-specific understandings of historical marginalisation processes; vulnerabilities do not emerge from nowhere, they are a result of deep-seated power process. There is a need to forge strategic hybrid alliances for change, countering entrenched narratives and understandings with policy actors, scientists, and civil society organisations. Also, transformations are not “one” thing and are not equity neutral. There is a need for co-produced processes of learning, sharing, and strengthening of agency.

## Green Climate Fund - Independent Evaluation Unit

“Overall, adaptation projects are far more likely to be transformational.”

4. The Green Climate Fund presented a case to underscore that adaptation activities have great potential for transformational change, provided the private sector can be brought in to collaborate. This offers hope that mitigation efforts and adaptation efforts can mutually reinforce transformational change towards a carbon neutral future. An interesting lesson from this case is that although the GCF is the largest financially endowed institution to invest in the environment, they chose to go for depth instead of scale; this is how transformative change is likely to happen.
5. Catalytic action is required to create enabling environments in different contexts and geographies, build institutional strengths and capacities and put in place the right incentives for private sector engagement. The GCF has a private sector facility that aims to catalyse high impact and transformative projects, but more transformational change is required. The question is how to ensure that transformative climate finance is effective in mobilising and catalysing the private sector so that communities benefit in real terms?

### Transformative innovation portfolios and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL practices) – Climate-KIC

“System transformations are the result of multiple interventions in different domains of change over time that complement each other.”

6. Climate-KIC presented a portfolio approach that focuses on system transformation and understanding how simultaneous and different actions in multiple domains can influence transformative change. Using monitoring, evaluation and learning practices and concepts from systems and transitions, the approach can reveal potential synergies within current strengths of a system, and point to parts of the system on which to focus to achieve changes - these are called transformative outcomes.
7. The work demonstrates that evaluation and science need to adopt a transformative theory of change that will move from action to transformation through adaptive management of the process of change. A very promising aspect of this approach is the possibility to look at and manage the transformational promise of a portfolio of interventions, rather than to focus on one intervention.
8. This theory of change approach, as detailed in the Motion Handbook, is in its main characteristics very similar to the concept note of the Transformational Change Learning Partnership and the generic theory of change of the Global Environment Facility, as well as other transformational change guidance and raise the issue of synthetic work on these various approaches.

### Lessons

On the bases of these cases, what have we learnt about the pathways toward transformational change?

“How do we look at who is benefitting from the change? And who is not? We need just and equitable transformations.”

9. The urgency of transformational change is clear. The need is confirmed to inform governments, societies, the private and financial sectors, communities and the planners and policy makers that serve them, about the existing evidence on transformational change, as well as the theoretical and practical advances in its application, and how it can shift the world towards a sustainable future.
10. While more is known about actual transformational changes and how to support them, this knowledge does not translate into ‘blueprint’ solutions for transformational change. Looking at the options and ways to strengthen and support transformational change, it is clear that the old blue-print approach for interventions and policies, working out in detail what needs to be done to achieve a new, well detailed situation, is no longer adequate.

“We have confirmation that transformational change is difficult, but necessary and is something that cannot be planned in the old ways.”

“Paradigm shifts can seem very abstract but change starts with ourselves and is initially personal, as we need to think and act in new ways to support transformational change.”

11. Understanding the context taking into account institutional pathways, actors and systems is crucial. It is effective to take a holistic and emergent approach integrating political, economic and social aspects, leveraging specific points in the system according to context, applying feedback loops and learning and adapting accordingly. Transformational change is not linear or predictable. Tipping points and windows of opportunity are critical.
12. Transformation is not equity-neutral and is seldom beneficial for all who are intended to benefit. Tensions in the underlying values of those working to shift systems (or divergence between such values among stakeholders), trade-offs and unexpected consequences are rife and should be carefully considered in the design and implementation of interventions aiming at transformational change.
13. On the social side, processes for transformational change are complex and long-winding; they take place in highly challenging political contexts, with questions of power, equity and political economy that need to be tackled and solved, while integrating economic and environmental perspectives in solutions.
14. On the economic and environmental side the emphasis is very much on innovation and exploring new possibilities for energy markets and ensuring reducing carbon footprints of technologies, markets and consumers habits. There is a symbiotic relationship between the public and private sectors and the interplay between the two is critical for transformational change.
15. Evaluation and science need to adopt transformational approaches, as they are increasingly doing, in order to support and strengthen transformational change. Yet these transformational approaches are not yet fully mainstreamed. Evaluators and scientists need to bring more real time lessons to policy debates, and also ensure learning reaches the local level.
16. Qualitative data and communicating the processes and outcomes of transformational change through storytelling is increasingly important to advocate the urgency and importance of transformative change, and get buy-in from stakeholders.

## Conclusion

The three cases discussed at the meeting provided important emerging lessons for transformational change for climate action post-COP26. The dialogue confirmed yet again the urgency of the need to apply transformational change concepts, methods and processes with depth rather than scale in different contexts, and that practitioners, researchers, scientists, evaluators and policy makers need to now do things differently. Instead of asking for more, ask for better. Disruption is necessary for transformational change, which along with an emphasis on depth and context can inform meaningful follow-up work post-COP26, also addressing how international finance is being organised.

The gathering of evidence in order to learn and share knowledge about flexible and adaptive approaches to transformational change requires a more concerted effort from this community. Participants articulated the need for an exchange mechanism and clearinghouse for transformational change approaches, evidence and practice and considerations for hosts for this could include TCLP, IDS, ISC, and OECD.

Looking to the immediate future, this series of meetings will continue with further discussions on May 10 2022 at a virtual meeting that will explore more cases, including transformational perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, and on 7 - 9 September 2022 for a face-to-face meeting, with a focus on emerging ideas regarding transformational change and potential exchange mechanisms on its science, design, practice and lessons.

## Resources

Transformational Change Learning Partnership (TCLP) Learning Brief  
[https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/cif\\_enc/sites/cif\\_enc/files/knowledge-documents/tc\\_concepts\\_brief.pdf](https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/cif_enc/sites/cif_enc/files/knowledge-documents/tc_concepts_brief.pdf)

Evaluation of GEF Engagement with Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)  
<https://gefieo.org/evaluations/msme>

Transformative Innovation Policy Consortium - Motion handbook: developing a transformative theory of change  
<https://www.tipconsortium.net/publication/motion-handbook-developing-a-transformative-theory-of-change/>

Watch Resilient40 member, Yandeh Sallah-Muhammed, inspiring young people in Africa to combat #climateviolence. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPAwium7sB4>

### **Alison Dunn and Rob D. van den Berg**

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