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BETWEEN RADICAL AND REALISTIC: BIODIVERSITY, TRANSFORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Tilman Hertz

Between Radical and Realistic: Biodiversity, Transformation and Development Cooperation

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Foreword by EBA

At the end of 2020, the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) and the Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) undertook a review of the government's governance of Sida, and of the agency's internal efficiency and management procedures. One of the recommendations was that Sida should develop its work with theories of change to strengthen learning and the application of experience, evaluation and evidence in the implementation of the government's strategies. To contribute to this work, EBA decided to produce an anthology with texts that shed light on theories of change from different perspectives.

This working paper is one of the contributions to the forthcoming anthology. The text builds not only on the expertise of its author, Tilman Hertz from Stockholm Resilience Centre, but also on a roundtable discussion with leading international experts convened by EBA. Tilman Hertz first provides a background to one of today's most important global challenges – the rapid loss of biodiversity. He goes on to discuss the role of development actors in general and donors, such as Sida, in particular. He formulates three questions, focusing on the potential role of development actors in supporting or fostering the transformation needed to reach not only biodiversity objectives but the SDGs in general. The main conclusions from the roundtable discussion delving into these questions are presented in the second part of this working paper.

The author describes the significant body of work developed by IPBES and other actors, and both the background section and the roundtable summary provide a discussion on some of the more important choices that faces Sweden as a donor. EBA hopes that this working paper will provide helpful insights in the work to develop an overarching theory of change on how to support the protection of biodiversity.

EBA working papers are shorter studies that investigate a question of limited scope or that complements a regular EBA study. Working papers are not subject to a formal decision from the expert group but instead reviewed by the secretariat before publication. The authors are, as with other EBA publications, responsible for the content of the report and its conclusions.

Stockholm, April 2022

Jan Pettersson, Managing Director

Setting the Scene: Linking Poverty Eradication, Biodiversity and the SDGs

The last decades have seen the emergence of global and complex challenges related to biodiversity loss, climate change, desertification, and many others. The failure to address these successfully explains partly why the world has not reached the overarching goal of eradicating poverty. Indeed, the prevalence of malnutrition and hunger is one sign that the world is far from eradicating poverty – a situation the current COVID pandemic may not have caused but exacerbated significantly (FAO 2021).

As part of a long process of international collaboration, the latest framework for addressing these challenges is the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which the General Assembly of the UN agreed upon in 2015 with the goal of reaching them by 2030. Underlying the SDGs is the recognition that poverty cannot be addressed in a silo-like manner but needs to be addressed within the general framework of sustainability.

The SDGs are interconnected and complex: Holistic approaches are necessary if we are to succeed in our efforts towards sustainability. Our work on biodiversity is part of that effort. Addressing issues related to biodiversity cannot be done without, for example, addressing issues related to poverty while at the same time being based on principles such as gender equality and human rights.

The work on biodiversity is not only connected to goals 14 (Life below Water) and 15 (Life on Land) but to all SDGs. The Aichi targets[1], the predecessors of the new post-2020 Biodiversity targets, were – by and large – not met. It is unclear, at the present moment, whether the SDG goals will suffer the same fate as Aichi but the evidence, as of now, points towards it (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2021)[2].

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[1] The 20 Aichi targets were adopted by the conference of the parties to the CBD in Nagoya (Japan) in 2010 and were meant to address the global biodiversity crisis as part of a "Strategic Plan for Biodiversity" for the years 2011–2020. For more info see: https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/

[2] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2021.pdf

Nine years before the deadline which the world has set itself for reaching the SDGs, and one year before the world will agree to a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), it seems critical to *re-think* the role of development cooperation.

This working paper has two parts. A first part starts by introducing a series of tensions and concepts that define some crucial issues for development actors when conceptualising their role in the transformation needed to reach the post-2020 Biodiversity targets. Next, three strategic questions facing development cooperation are formulated. This first part guided a roundtable discussion held February 2022. The second part of this working paper summarises the key insights from that discussion and articulates tentative recommendations for those actors in development cooperation which are mandated to design a Theory of Change (ToC).

Tensions: thematic vs systemic, direct vs indirect, local vs global

For re-thinking the role of development cooperation it is useful to characterize what we may call a field of tensions within which development cooperation worldwide operate. Those deciding on and designing a ToC and corresponding programmes for development cooperation need to choose, first, between what can be called a **"thematic"** orientation and a **"systemic"** one. Underlying this tension is the question of whether we are facing a "biodiversity crisis" that can supposedly be addressed by designing targeted biodiversity programmes, or whether it is not possible to isolate our work on the matter, and the focus should be on the intertwinedness of the biodiversity topic with various other topics of concern. The first draft of the new post-2020 GBF (CBD 2020) describes the situation as follows:

> "The framework is a fundamental contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the same time, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals will help to create the conditions necessary to implement the framework".

But then, what and how to prioritize? And how to ensure that what is prioritized is the most effective?

This introduces a second tension which is not only about the difficulty of prioritizing but about what development cooperation is effectively mandated to do and what not. Irrespective of whether development cooperation aims to go thematic or systemic, how far can (or should) it go to address the root causes of a problem? This point can well be made by referring to the IPBES Global Assessment Report from 2019. Here, a distinction is made between **"direct"** and **"indirect"** drivers. Clearly, focusing *only* on the impacts of direct drivers and acting accordingly, such as adapting a particular habitat to climate change, or developing alternative livelihood schemes to reduce the exploitation of some particular resource, will not suffice in the long run. Such problems are ultimately caused by indirect drivers such as, for example, global consumption patterns. To use causal terminology, one could say that direct drivers are an *effect* of indirect drivers. Implicit in this line of argument is that thematic and systemic portfolios need to account for and address direct as well as indirect drivers. But if development cooperation were to address these, then this might require interventions at different administrative and geographic scales which possibly go beyond what development cooperation is mandated to do.[3]

Finally, third, while a **"local"** problem can have complex indirect drivers, this complexity is exacerbated when dealing with **"global"** public goods, such as the climate, the ozone layer, oceans and biodiversity (as an aggregate). In regard to global public goods the indirect causes tend to be more diverse and multifaceted, and where a variety of different actor types may need to be included. Numerous scholars highlight that a mode of delivery via traditional north-south cooperation focusing on the provision of capacity building and financial resources might not be the most promising approach for managing global public goods (Kaul 2015, Scholz and Kaul 2013; Mordasini 2012).

In practice, development cooperation focuses – to varying degrees – on both, thematic and systemic concerns, and addresses both direct as well as indirect drivers, by tapping on different tools, e.g. targeted thematic portfolios as well as mainstreaming thematic concerns into all operations. What is more, we see that different instruments and mechanisms are used

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[3] For example, if development cooperation from country A wants to support country B in addressing direct exploitation of resources in some area, then it might turn out that the best way of doing so would be to address consumption patterns in country C – which might be difficult for a development cooperation from country A.

for addressing local and global public goods respectively (for example, support to biodiversity action is not exclusively channelled via bilateral aid but also via global mechanisms, such as the global BIOFIN initiative[4]).

Re-thinking development cooperation?

Yet, in light of the limited success of Aichi and at a time when the world will conclude a new post-2020 GBF (see CBD 2020) it is timely to re-think the modus operandi for development cooperation. What would "re-thinking" mean? Concretely this would mean to reflect on what modus operandi might be best suited for 1) reaching post-2020 biodiversity goals, while 2) at the same time acknowledging that development cooperation operates in the midst of the tension fields identified above. Naturally, such a re-thinking needs to be based on the principles set out by the Paris Declaration (2005) as well as the Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

One prominent example of such a "re-thinking" can be found in the OECD's recent development co-operation Report (2020). As part of this, Kaul (2020) argues for a new architecture for international cooperation consisting of three pillars. First, the existing arrangements for bilateral or regional development assistance should be retained. Second, there would be a new pillar focused on the provision of global public goods and a third one aimed at ensuring instantaneous and decisive support to both countries and global public goods in crisis. She notes,

> "The creation of such a tripod-shaped architecture with these three pillars would be an act of policy making that catches up with reality and creates a system fit to meet the different types of global challenges confronting us today".

Separating funds for traditional, bilateral or regional development assistance from those for global public goods, the argument goes, might be a promising way to more efficiently address indirect drivers and to design appropriate and effective mechanisms for the management of global public goods. Amland (2021)[5] summarizes:

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[4] https://www.biofin.org/
[5] https://www.development-today.com/archive/dt-2021/dt-7--2021/norads-test-balloon-separate-funding-for-global-public-goods-from-aid – Amland draws on a report prepared by Nikolai Hegertun for Norad titled "Aid and global investments: What is the next step for development cooperation?"

> "The dynamics that drive effective aid and global goods investments can differ. Sometimes effective efforts to eradicate poverty do not consider "bigger" global issues. At others, global public goods can be delivered faster by putting money to work in countries that are not defined as recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA). In other words, both aid and global public investments might become more effective if their mandates were less intertwined."

In addition, this re-thinking should naturally consider past experiences: What substantive approaches have worked, what barriers have been faced and what kind of instruments have worked – and which have not?

This issue can be explored by discussing it alongside three biodiversity-specific questions, presented below.

1. What do development actors prioritize in the area of biodiversity? What leverage points have the potential to maximize the transformative potential?

The concept of "leverage point" and "levers" originally come from the field of systems analysis (Meadows 2008). Leverage points refer to places, or key points for intervening in a system in view of transforming it. A powerful leverage point, for example is a point where a small amount of change has an exceptionally large effect on a system, whereas a weak leverage point is one where a high amount of change has only little effect on the system. Leverage points are diverse, found on different levels and do not have specific "levels", nor "actors" in mind. Rather, they may be targeted by international institutions, national governments, development actors, civil society or academia, or individuals, for that matter.

O'Brien and Sygna (2013) argue that leverage points can be mapped onto three spheres: a practical sphere (e.g. practical interventions such as technical responses to a problem or changing behaviours), a political sphere (systems and structures influencing the practical sphere) and a personal sphere (beliefs values and worldviews and paradigms that influence how we see systems). Some argue that much of our attention and efforts have gone into leverage points situated in the practical and/or the political spheres and/or trying to align those two spheres while – arguably – not paying enough attention to those leverage points from the

personal sphere which determine our very understanding of systems (O'Brien 2019). Indeed, successfully transforming a system might require us to first transcend the very way we understand a system. This would involve, for example, moving beyond our dominant way of conceiving of "nature", where nature is mainly conceived of as a resource and which would allow, in turn, rethinking our interactions with it. When we stick with the given, current understanding of a system, the argument goes, we can at best hope to buy some time and postpone the necessary transformation while proceeding as usual (Stengers 2014). Contrary to popular belief, changing values, paradigms and worldviews is certainly difficult and complex, but might not necessarily be impossible. As Meadows (1999) notes:

> "You could say paradigms are harder to change than anything else about a system, and therefore this item should be lowest on the list […] But there's nothing physical or expensive or even slow in the process of paradigm change. In a single individual it can happen in a millisecond. All it takes is a click in the mind, a falling of scales from eyes, a new way of seeing. Whole societies are another matter – they resist challenges to their paradigm harder than they resist anything else. So how do you change paradigms? […] In a nutshell, you keep pointing at the anomalies and failures in the old paradigm, you keep coming yourself, and loudly and with assurance from the new one, you insert people with the new paradigm in places of public visibility and power. You don't waste time with reactionaries; rather you work with active change agents and with the vast middle ground of people who are open-minded."

For the area of biodiversity the IPBES Global Assessment report (2019) identifies eight key leverage points:

1. enabling **visions of a good life** that do not entail ever-increasing material consumption;
2. lowering **total consumption and waste** by taking account population growth and per capita consumption differently in different contexts;
3. unleashing **values and action**, for example extending norms of responsibility to include impacts related to consumption;
4. addressing **inequalities** related to income and gender;

5. promoting **justice and inclusion in conservation**, for example by ensuring fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of conservation decisions;

6. addressing socioeconomic-environment interactions that produce negative **externalities** (directly or via distances, so called **telecouplings**);

7. ensuring that **technology, innovation and investment** have positive impacts at the global scale (and not only at the local one);

8. promote education and knowledge generation and sharing, particularly with respect to indigenous and local knowledge regarding nature, conservation and its sustainable use.

Leverage points have associated "levers", or governance interventions that can activate the leverage points in view of letting them unfold their transformative potential. Put differently, if leverage points are conceived of as being the places in a system one should focus on, the levers are those elements that can activate their leveraging effect. The IPBES Global Assessment report (2019) identifies five of these (which can be mutually reinforcing): 1) incentives and capacity building to foster environmental responsibility, 2) coordination across sectors and jurisdictions to promote across sectors and jurisdiction, 3) pre-emptive action to avoid, mitigate and remedy the deterioration of nature, 4) adaptive decision-making to deliver decisions that are robust in a wide range of scenarios and 5) strengthening environmental law and its implementation.

Undoubtedly, all leverage points are important. But, from the experience with working towards Aichi over the past ten years, are there some leverage points that should merit particular attention? What is more, as it is noticeable that many of the leverage points identified by IPBES go beyond the area of biodiversity *per se:* Who to work with, considering that the approaches and mechanisms for the work on local or global public goods differ? Finally, is the list of corresponding levers complete or are there important ones missing which have emerged in the past few years?

2. Barriers to implementation: The particular case of policy incoherence

But, are the most powerful leverage points also necessarily those that development cooperation should prioritize? What prevents, in practice, the use of particular levers to tap the transformative potential of such leverage points? Development cooperation is often faced with barriers

which either lead to the development and implementation of levers not being sustainable, or being in outright contradiction to what's in place. Barriers to implementation are manifold, and a recent work by Koh, Ituarte-Lima and Hahn (2021) identifies those that countries themselves reported to be of major importance when implementing Aichi. These range from barriers related to the difficulty of defining metrics, to those related to monitoring, lacking institutional capacities, to inconsistent or incoherent policies, to name just a few.

Next to the barriers related to metrics and monitoring which have only been partially addressed in the draft of the new post-2020 GBF (see e.g. Birdlife, WWF and IUCNs initial reactions to the first draft) the barriers related to policy inconsistency or incoherence have been identified by the Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 (GO5) (2020) as being a particular area of concern. Here, the GO5 singles out especially harmful government subsidies for agriculture, fossil fuels and fishing. Earlier attempts (as part of Aichi Target 3) to phase out harmful subsidies have not had the desired effect [6], and last year the executive secretary of the CBD, Elizabeth Maruma Mrema emphasised again that each year governments worldwide provide the staggering amount of $345bn in such subsidies.[7] In the presence of these, it is questionable whether, for example, a capacity development campaign for the sustainable management of fish stocks (see lever 1 above) can activate leverage point 6 to have the desired and lasting effect. This is a clear example of conflicts between the practical and the political spheres which demonstrates the importance of keeping both, direct (resource exploitation) and indirect drivers (subsidies) in mind. The first draft of the post-2020 GBF (CBD 2020) advocates levers of type (2), notably a "whole-of-government" approach:

> "The implementation of the global biodiversity framework requires integrative governance and whole-of-government approaches to ensure policy coherence and effectiveness, political will and recognition at the highest levels of government".

[6] https://www.cbd.int/aichi-targets/target/3

[7] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/02/redirect-harmful-subsidies-to-benefit-planet-un-urges-governments-aoe

The argument is that a whole-of-government approach can ensure an alignment between the practical and the political spheres, thus rendering initiatives aimed at preserving biodiversity more sustainable. However, the request for a whole-of-government approach is equally addressed to developed countries, which makes sense if one aims to tackle key indirect drivers, e.g. international consumption patterns that manifest in developing countries. This points towards the need of thinking beyond the dichotomy of developing and developed countries. But then development cooperation quickly ventures into arenas where they might not have a mandate, nor the power to act, as this is often perceived as being in the domain of the political/structural sphere and the task of policy actors at ministerial or governmental levels.

For the key barrier of harmful subsidies, and the policy incoherence they bring about: How can development cooperation support the ministerial and government levels (their own *and* the ones from developing countries) in the quest for international policy alignment? Trying to better synchronize activities between those working in developed countries and developing countries alike, e.g. focusing on areas such as sustainable food chains with the aim of providing alternatives to biodiversity-harming, subsidy-supported food? Funding research to better understand indirect drivers? Increasing activities "at home" in view of achieving domestic policy coherence?

But beyond that, what can be the role for leverage points from the personal sphere in this process, considering that these are responsible for how one sees and understands systems, and thus are also partly responsible for how the structural sphere manifests? The draft of the new post-2020 GBF mentions next to the "whole-of-government" approach also a "whole-of-society" approach which might be a promising approach for aligning all three spheres. The IPBES clearly sees an important potential in leverage points from the personal sphere in bringing such an alignment about, considering the importance given to leverage points such as "embrace diverse visions of a good life" or "unleash values and action". But what kind of change agents to focus on to increase domestic and international policy coherence?

3. Elements of a successful *Theory of Change (ToC)*: How should development cooperation organize itself and what instruments to draw on?

The previous discussion about most powerful leverage points and key barriers to their implementation culminates into following questions: What does it all mean for a Theory of Change (ToC) and, subsequently, how development cooperation should organize itself? Do we need a tripod shaped architecture, as proposed above by Kaul (2020), or are there other ways? And, depending on the specific architecture, what mix of instruments to draw on, e.g. what is the right mix between specific thematic portfolios and mainstreaming? Currently, mainstreaming biodiversity seems to be the instrument of choice when it comes to, on the one hand, strengthen and deepen the work of development cooperation on biodiversity and, on the other hand, aligning operations of development cooperation with the post-2020 GBF (see for instance the decision of the Swedish Government from 2020 requiring Sida to mainstream biodiversity into all operations). What is more, mainstreaming is considered to be an obvious candidate for bringing about the required policy coherence discussed in the previous section. But there are voices that call for more clarity with respect to the application of this instrument, a recent example being OECD's concept note[8] on transformative change which identifies:

> "the need to move beyond focussing on mainstreaming in individual projects to include a longer term and more systemic perspective […] At the same time, raising the bar to support climate and sustainability transformational change and not only safeguarding the environment in individual projects poses interesting challenges versus more traditional modes of mainstreaming."

The concern is that by simply mainstreaming biodiversity in all operations one is unlikely to be able to realize the commitments made across conventions (next to other difficulties related to e.g. monitoring). The tool of mainstreaming might be too passive, mostly being based on a "do no harm" rationale. More critical – even though slightly dated – Jerneck and Olsson's (2008) note:

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[8] Can be provided upon request by EBA.

"Mainstreaming, as a process, may not solve burning social, political and environmental issues. […] Mainstreaming may create conflicting goals, loss of political edge, and methodological problems resulting from an overloading of the discourse. As examples, sustainable development is more complex than the 'greening' of development projects, while gender inequalities are more complex than the often simplified 'gendering' of development projects." (Kabeer, 2005)

As part of another piece, Jerneck and Olsson (2010) summarize that for the wider transformation to sustainability a mainstreaming approach might disregard three core links within sustainability: between nature and society, between rich and poor and between past and future societies. They conclude with the provocative statement that mainstreaming might just postpone a necessary transformation to sustainability because it keeps the status quo – an understanding of development on the basis of resource extraction – in place rather than replacing it.

Are these critical statements with respect to the instrument of mainstreaming justified? If only partly, how concretely are we to "do" mainstreaming to avoid above concerns from realizing while at the same time tapping its potential benefits?

Way forward …

The elements discussed above – biodiversity, leverage points, levers, different spheres of action and transformation towards sustainability – can be brought together in an analytical framework (source: Sida, Government assignment on Biodiversity, available upon request from EBA).

According to this framework, transformative change requires a focus on all spheres simultaneously, tapping on different leverage points and levers. The conceptual clarity that this framework provides, however, is rarely reflected in the practice of development work. Finding a good mix amid the tensions articulated above, and being as radical as realistically possible doing so, might be one step in the right direction. The aim of the roundtable discussion was to contribute to this endeavour.

Summary of the roundtable discussion

> "One shouldn't complicate things for the pleasure of complicating but one should also never simplify or pretend to be sure of such simplicity where there is none.
> If things were simple, word would have gotten around"
> (Jacques Derrida)

The background paper stimulated a lively discussion among the participants and the quote by Derrida (1988) which opens this summary – while being slightly used out of its context – echoes a key point of it: The issue is complex and messy and there are no easy or quick solutions. Attempting to get rid of this complexity/messiness by simplifying it, be that as part of purely disciplinary or sectoral approaches, might only provide a partial answer. On the contrary, we need to embrace the issue in its full multi-sectoral, transdisciplinary dimension, as forcefully reminded us French philosopher Edgar Morin (2007).

What emerged very clearly in the discussions was that it is not possible to address the biodiversity crisis without recognizing that this crisis is inextricably intertwined with many other crises. Thus, participants agreed that one could not hope reaching post-2020 biodiversity goals, without at the same time addressing other concerns and vice versa. This puts the emphasis on finding the right constellation of agents (development cooperation and others) to allow collaboratively addressing the tensions identified above. It is within such a concrete and context-specific collaborative arrangement that a theory of change for development cooperation needs to take shape, that is, with respect to what it does (leverage points and levers) and how it does it (modes of delivery). In what follows, we attempt to summarize the gist of the discussion and identify future areas of work.

Commenting on the challenges identified by the background paper … and adding new ones

Participants highlighted that development cooperation not only need to spend a lot of time and effort to coordinate/collaborate with other agents, but the situation is made more difficult by the fact that national and international systems for aid administration have not developed at the

same pace than the challenges they are meant to address. While clearly a change in discourse has taken place since 2015 (the year the SDGs were agreed upon) this has not been echoed by practice: The ODA (official development assistance) system is deemed unfit to deal with such global challenges. One participant remarked that, strikingly, no leverage point/lever identified by IPBES is able to be thoroughly addressed by ODA. This might be due to the fact that, as participants observed, there might be a tendency about sticking with existing institutions. Many actors are concerned and hesitant to abolish this system now because it might be difficult to set up a different (supposedly better) system, given the geo-political power dynamics that characterize today's global political arenas, where aid increasingly tends to be seen as serving national interests. Indeed, it was observed that the very nature of aid developed from a focus on poverty alleviation to increasingly focus on how it best serves national interests of donors. It was argued that not only does development cooperation needs re-thinking, but that the *very nature of aid* needs re-thinking if we are to address the power dynamics that manifest across the three spheres, and which are held in place by them being continuously reproduced through our daily practices.

Also, an issue that was perhaps not discussed enough in the first part but that came out strongly on several occasions during the discussion was that there is a need to complement the above conceptualization of the task in terms of "tensions fields" by a more rigorous elaboration of the notion of transformation. Put differently, there needs be clarity about what perspective on transformation one takes, as this term varies quite strongly across contexts and stakeholders, see e.g. Linnér and Wibeck (2019).

Complexities involved in fostering transformations vary. Sectoral, or partial transformations are of a different nature than those of whole civilizations, with the latter one requiring a humbler approach. Depending on what perspective is adopted, stakeholders might have different understandings of the scope, timescales and actions required for transformation to happen. While some refer mainly to incremental changes (e.g. mainly focusing on the practical/structural spheres targeting partial transformations), others refer to profound, enduring, and non-linear structural change in a system (e.g. encompassing all three spheres that might foster civilization wide transformation). Differences in perspectives on transformation lead to differences as to where to situate oneself in the tension fields identified above and thus to differences in what to focus on, what drivers to address, what mechanisms to deliver support. A particular perspective on transformation thus defines what can

or cannot be a successful leverage point. It is thus important to be clear about what is meant by transformation in a particular situation as this will in turn define the particular approach to transformation. And, most crucially, the question of how to design a theory of change is tightly associated to this.

This variety of perspectives and approaches on transformation and transformative change also implies, as participants highlighted, that we should not conceive of the leverage points/levers in the IPBES reports as a "blueprint" solution for the biodiversity, and connected to it, the larger sustainability crisis.

Participants by and large also agreed that the instrument of mainstreaming (as a pure "do-no-harm" instrument, e.g. via Safeguards) may be ineffective because it is deemed too passive and does not provide any positive incentives – and thus falls short of triggering or realizing transformative potential.

Lastly, other issues that were seen as preventing collective action from materializing have been found in uncertainty about consequences (of biodiversity loss), trajectories (e.g. where are thresholds of irreversible change) and measures (consequences of the measures aimed at addressing biodiversity loss).

Ideas and impulses for addressing these challenges – For development cooperation and beyond

One participant referred to the famous structure/agency conundrum introduced first by Anthony Giddens (1986), who claimed structure to be reproduced by agency, while at the same time mediating agency. The provocative question was posed whether we needed an outright revolution or whether there can be hope of achieving transformation by fostering agency via niche experiments, with the hope of upscaling successful experiments. In the past, there have been clear examples where the latter succeeded, and it was argued that development cooperation could contribute to creating the conditions for agency to unfold its transformative potential. In the discussion, fostering agency was conceived of as the most important and powerful leverage point towards reaching the post-2020 biodiversity goals as well as contributing to the

broader transformation towards sustainability. Referring back to the conceptual framing introduced in the background paper the question thus became: How can agency be fostered, and agents empowered, across the three spheres, that is, across the practical, structural and the personal spheres? In the discussion, participants adopted a broad definition of agency, that is, agency is as much a property of individuals as it is of organizations, or states. This, in turn, means that agency can be found at various scales, such as the local, regional, national and international, and development cooperation typically works at all of these. In what follows we discuss some of the levers which are meant to foster agency that emerged in the discussion.

For instance, one participant argued that in the work done by development cooperation at the local level the biodiversity topic is never seen as being separate from broader environmental concerns. While development cooperation **provides guidelines for officers** on the ground these are rarely prescriptive in a substantive sense (i.e. when it comes to defining concrete outputs). In other words, it is the partners that are in the driving seat. This is in line with an approach of seeing leverage points not as a blueprint solution, but rather as a boundary object aimed at kickstarting discussions and to explore in participative processes how partners perceive of the system and thus identify the most powerful intervention points themselves. This, the argument goes, can foster agency, and potentially empower agents across all spheres. At the same time, it was emphasized that there is a need to strengthen the ability of policy/programme officers on the ground, by developing better tools/approaches to think and implement projects systemically. In this context one participant invited development actors to engage more closely with some of the works by Michael Quinn Patton, e.g. Principles-focused evaluation (Patton 2017).

Interestingly, while a lot of critical voices surfaced with respect to the tool of mainstreaming, participants also identified some positive aspects, particularly on the basis of the Swedish Government assignment to Sida to mainstream biodiversity into all operations. Concretely, the very **process of reporting** on the assignment generated a systemic view, and provided valuable information for developing a systems approach. However, equally important, it was mentioned that there needed to be structures in place that would allow iterative **learning, and agility** (capacity to deal also with unforeseen events) on the basis of such a reporting. This was something that – while very present in discourses around the issue – is still found to be hard to comprehensively implement

in practice. Finally, during the discussion ideas surfaced that might help "empowering" the instrument of mainstreaming with respect to the deficiencies identified in the previous section and in the background paper. Participants argued for the instrument to be handled actively and for it to be complemented with trainings, clear action plans, learning and similar. In this way mainstreaming would not only be treated as a tool for checking that aid 'does no harm' to biodiversity but have the potential to contribute to transformation.

However, participants noted that more was needed, especially when addressing policy incoherence, characterized by complex indirect drivers beyond national boundaries. They highlighted several levers, such as improving decision-making capacity by undertaking **specific studies**, **intensifying dialogue** with other actors in the development field, and **developing/improving mechanisms for increasing policy coherence**. We will present them in turn.

Specific studies are needed in light of the controversies around the notion of transformation and transformative change that were identified in the previous section. Differences in the understanding of transformation can be reduced by governance approaches that are integrative, inclusive, informed and adaptive, as noted by IPBES (2019). How to best navigate the consequences of the diversity in understanding of the term across contexts and scales is however still unexplored. Thus, participants encouraged studies that empirically map the current practices of development cooperation onto the different spheres discussed in the first part of the paper. This could help, the argument goes, to get a better sense of what kind of ideas about transformation particular programmes or initiatives are harbouring. Such knowledge could be used as basis for a discussion between development cooperation and other actors in the development field, in view of increasing overall coherence of programmes and initiatives.

Another proposal discussed was to **intensify dialogue** with relevant stakeholders in view of reaching actors that actually do have mandates in areas where development cooperation hasn't. These actors could be one's own country's diplomats, national and international companies, representatives from educational systems etc. What is more, participants urged development cooperation actors working in the area of biodiversity to look beyond the Ministry for the Environment in view of intensifying dialogue with other Ministries, such as Finances and Economics, Health etc. And beyond that, as one participant noted, one could intensify

dialogue with international bodies such as IPBES or CBD to push for the inclusion of more social sciences and humanities into the major global assessment projects. This would allow better dealing with the transdisciplinary dimension of biodiversity loss in its intertwinedness with other concerns - alongside the practical and also ethical challenges that surface with it.

What came out very strongly from the discussion was the need to set up efficient **mechanisms for increasing policy coherence**, whether that'd be at the national or at the international level. The Swedish policy for global development from 2003, with its inter-ministerial coordination, could serve as an example, even though its status and implementation has been severely weakened over the years. Further proposals come from Germany, where Scholz and Kaul (2013) proposed to appoint a Commissioner for Global Affairs and Sustainable Development directly in the Chancellor's Office, which could be part of a solution to facilitate both coherence between domestic and foreign policy and inter-ministerial cooperation. There were also interesting ideas to overcome policy incoherence in its manifestation specifically around the dichotomy developed/developing country. A particular mode of delivery for support, notably global partnerships, was identified as being promising (In this context, development actors were encouraged to have a close look at Chakrabarti and Chaturvedi, 2021 as well as Hegertun, 2021). Next to going beyond this dichotomy, global partnerships also allow to break silos and to engage in systemic thinking (Gavi is an example of such a partnership - https://www.gavi.org/). Such partnerships have the potential to combine:

1. PDIA (Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation), defined by the Harvard's Centre for International Development as "a step-by-step approach which helps you break down your problems into its root causes, identify entry points, search for possible solutions, take action, reflect upon what you have learned, adapt and then act again"[9]
2. Searcher approach by Easterly (2005), which refers to a bottom-up, locally driven approach.

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[9] https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/PDIAtoolkit

What is more, as one participant noted, the younger generation clearly cares about global public goods such as biodiversity, so giving these ways and means to be addressed beyond ODA, in terms of global partnerships and alliances might allow for different forms of participation and thus foster collective action.

Finally, other elements that participants highlighted was the importance of **changing dominant narratives and developing new ones**, possibly even with novel concepts. To expand on this point with Lakoff and Johnson (1980): "Changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions". And of course, the whole array of **instruments from political economy** was highlighted. Here, participants singled out especially the importance of pooling research and development (R&D) into sectors that employ biodiversity-harming practices. The agricultural sector was identified as being particularly concerned. As a price-taking sector, fostering technological innovation in view of increasing productivity of a sustainable agricultural production that would allow it to become competitive with respect to its biodiversity-harming counterparts, was deemed to be a promising if not essential way forward. Finally, it was mentioned that transformations always tend to not only have winners but also losers. Thus, the creation of financial mechanisms for economic compensation needs to be an important element of any transformation. Such mechanisms (e.g. a universal income for those who live in and around biodiversity hotspots) were highlighted as being important because a transformation towards sustainability can only be sustainable – and this was emphasized repeatedly – if it is perceived as being just and inclusive. Beyond instruments for economic redistribution, the necessity of human rights-based approaches was seen as fundamental in this context.

Drawing on these elements might support a – if not civilization wide, but partial – transformation beyond the dichotomy of developed and developing countries in ways that do justice to the complexities of the process (iterative and adaptive).

Implications for a development cooperation theory of change in the area of biodiversity

The ideas discussed in the previous section are about creating conditions for agents to engage in biodiversity related initiatives that are at the same time transformative and go across different spheres and levels. How are we to turn these into a theory of change (ToC) for development cooperation? We propose to cluster the ideas along two dimensions: those which are more of a **processual nature** (i.e. related to how to plan and implement initiatives as part of a theory of change) and those which are more of a **substantive nature** (i.e. related to what concrete initiatives should be part of a theory of change and how it should be organized).

A central and overarching point that emerged from the discussion with respect to the **processual** character of a theory of change and that should serve as an overall lens, is that theories of change should be complexity aware. This means, for example, to move away from blueprint type of desired outputs towards processes which are structured by principles, or guidelines, as discussed in the previous section. As part of this, learning and agility (i.e. the capacity to deal with unforeseen events) were identified by the participants as key capacities. Learning, here, needs to be a central concern, not only as instrument for development cooperation itself but beyond. Also, other actors working in concert with development cooperation or connected in other ways need to be involved in learning processes. This is valid both in donor and partner countries in view of reaching "whole-of-society" approaches beyond the dichotomies 'developed' and 'developing' countries.

When it comes to the **substantive** ideas about initiatives that should be part of such a complexity-aware theory of change, and of which some have been discussed in the previous section, it should come as no surprise that there is no *one* way forward. Instead, what to choose depends on the context and the exact constellation of actors the development cooperation in a particular country is embedded in, and operates out from. Nevertheless, a few general reflections as to where to situate the work of development cooperation within the tension fields we discussed in background paper allow us to provide some examples of initiatives that could make up a theory of change.

The first tension the background paper identified was between a thematic orientation and a systemic orientation of a theory of change. It emerged from the discussion that, clearly, both are important. But perhaps the

focus on a systematic orientation should – if not increase – at least always be an option whenever engaging with partners. For this, a development cooperation could draw on many of the ideas discussed in the previous section, but the instrument of mainstreaming seems especially promising – as long as it is not understood as simply safeguarding a status quo but moves toward actively exploring opportunities for coherent action. Further work on how to concretely "empower" mainstreaming might be required.

But just "going systemic" might not be enough for addressing direct and indirect drivers (while it might dampen its effects across practices). The second tension discussed in the background paper was about to what extent development cooperation should address direct or indirect drivers, with a non-alignment between these drivers possibly leading to various policy incoherencies. Summarizing the discussion, we can say that working on direct drivers is important, but that an increased attention should be directed towards indirect drivers. More concretely, such an approach is about identifying actors that matter, and have interests as well as leverage beyond the mandates of development cooperation. Many of the ideas and initiatives identified in the previous section, such as intensifying dialogue with a wider variety of actors beyond the dichotomy "developed" and "developing" country, might allow a development cooperation to engage with these other actors. As part of this, conflicts will surface, and they need to be disclosed, discussed and communicated to a variety of potential agents of change. To give a few examples, a theory of change could then incorporate elements aimed at changing narratives, supporting R&D to increase productivity of biodiversity-friendly agricultural production systems, or financial mechanisms aiming at economic compensation in view of addressing indirect drivers.

The third tension discussed in the background paper was about how to organize and deliver support, via global or local means. It was mentioned that ODA faces limitations when addressing biodiversity concerns as many of the drivers for biodiversity loss lie outside of what ODA can address (see e.g. discussion around direct and indirect drivers in the first part of the paper). It emerged clearly in the discussion that a theory of change should have a global component to be able to address direct and indirect drivers beyond the dichotomy of developed and developing countries, in the form of partnerships or alliances that can focus on many different elements, some of which were highlighted in the previous section.

Conclusion

Hopefully, this working paper will contribute towards addressing the challenges faced by development cooperation in the area of biodiversity. Some of the suggestions seem radical (but necessary, e.g. re-thinking aid), while others seem to be possible to be implement without any major difficulties. However, designing a theory of change for development cooperation along the lines which were identified and discussed in the previous sections does not come without a further challenge for development cooperation and other actors in the development field (political and beyond): What is the right balance between letting things emerge in line with systems thinking, and with many other points mentioned above (letting the thousand flowers bloom, as one participant put it) and at the same making sure we reach the goals at the times we need to reach them to avoid crossing irreversible tipping points? What kind of mechanisms might help us here? The climate community developed an ambition raising mechanism as part of the NDCs, aiming to close the gap between top-down goals and bottom-up processes – even though this mechanism is not without criticism. The new post-2020 GBF contains global, overarching goals, but to date no mechanism to connect them to such bottom-up processes. Further work on the development of such a mechanism is thus a necessary task.

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Appendix: Participants of the EBA roundtable on biodiversity and development cooperation

Mr. Johan Schaar, Session moderator, vice chair of EBA.

Mr. Nikolai Hegertun, senior advisor, Knowledge division, Norad, Norway.

Mr. Tilman Hertz, researcher, Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC).

Mr. Mats Hårsmar, dept managing director, EBA.

Mr. Björn-Ola Linnér, Professor, Department for Thematic Studies, Environmental Change, Linköping University, Sweden.

Ms. Claudia Mayer, Head of Section, Environmental Policies, Biodiversity, Forests, GIZ, Germany.

Ms. Charlotta Rodhe, deputy director, biodiversity, Global agenda Unit, MFA, Sweden.

Ms. Dilys Roe, Principal researcher and team leader (biodiversity), Natural Resources International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London, UK.

Ms. Maria Schultz, senior policy specialist and coordinator, biodiversity and ecosystems, Sida.

Ms. Marie Stenseke, Professor, Cultural Geography, and Dept Dean, School of Business, Economy and Law, Gothenburg University, Sweden and co-chair, Multidisciplinary Expert Panel of Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

Ms. Ulrika Åkesson, lead policy specialist, environment and climate change, Sida.

Mr. Númi Östlund, programme manager, EBA.