

High level policy forum on the IPBES Transformative Change Assessment co-hosted by the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich

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KEY MESSAGES

- Operationalising the transformative change assessment requires recognizing that there are plural ways of knowing and valuing nature.
- Achieving a shift from relations of domination to relations of care is challenging, but possible, but requires changes beyond conventional areas of ‘biodiversity conservation’ action, such as transformations in finance systems and subsidies, and to achieve this will include cross-governmental action, such as investment in education, legislation and communication.
- Expanded ways of thinking about nature futures can increase future possibilities, including more radical pathways. Arts and storytelling can both help us to identify these more far-reaching options, but also in communicating diverse nature values how to achieve transformative change, building public support for positive nature futures.
- Governments should support democratic governance through enhanced investment in citizen engagement on biodiversity and nature. This can include multi-species approaches.
- Giving voice to and representation of nature in policy-making processes, and to Indigenous Peoples, youth and future-generations would enhance their plurality and inclusion, the latter being a key principle of transformative change.
- Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity can help to support the achievement and operationalisation of transformative change by learning from and sharing current experiences, strengthening capacities and willingness to act.

1. INTRODUCTION

The participatory workshop on the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Transformative Change Assessment (TCA) took place on June 3rd, 2025, at the University of Greenwich with attendees from across government, environmental NGOs and researchers. Led by Professor Valerie Nelson from the University of Greenwich, with organisational support from Defra representatives, and supported by a team of TCA authors, the purpose of the workshop was to explore ways to operationalise the TCA in practice.

The Transformative Change Assessment is the result of 3 years of work by 101 experts from 42 countries and synthesizes information from over 7,000 references into a comprehensive scientific assessment and concise summary document for policymakers. Finding ways to achieve transformative change and utilise the findings of the TCA is an urgent priority for all those concerned with biodiversity and nature and human futures. This high-level participatory workshop was organised to bring together representatives from diverse UK government departments and arm’s length bodies, environmental NGOs, and from academia, to reflect the finding that diverse sets of actors working collectively are needed to implement transformative actions and strategies. During the workshop, attendees explored how the TCA can be operationalised via actionable strategies and real-world change, especially in UK and international biodiversity policy contexts.

Participating organisations included, among others, DEFRA, IIED, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England, NatureScot, Education department, JNCC, lawyers for nature, Kew, British Ecological Society, Forest Peoples, Scottish Government Environment Strategy team, Natural History Museum, CFAS, Zoological Society of London, KPMG, Aviva, The Nature Conservancy, Environment Agency, Chester Zoo, RSPB and researchers from a range of universities and research bodies, such as Institute for Sustainability Leadership, Cambridge, University, Universities of Twente, Anglia Ruskin, and the Arctic (UIT) and Sussex, Institute of Development Studies and the University of Greenwich.

2. EVENT SUMMARY

The programme is summarized below in Box 1.

Box 1: Policy forum programme summary

Presentations:

- **Abigail Burt, artist and curator**, presented on the value of arts-based approaches to pluralising ways of knowing biodiversity and nature change, a theme covered in the TCA. She screened a clip from her recent film exploring more-than-human perspectives on coastal change with local communities in Langstone Harbour.
- **Professor Esther Turnhout (University of Twente)** presented on 'defining transformative change', outlining the overall structure and first chapter of the TCA.
- **Associate Professor Helen Wheeler (Anglia Ruskin University) and Professor Vera Helene Hausner (Artic University, Norway)** presented on visions of transformative change (chapter 2).
- **Professor Lyla Mehta (Institute of Development Studies)** presented on Theories of transformative change (chapter 3)
- **Professor Valerie Nelson (Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich)** presented on barriers to transformative change.
- **Professor Andy Stirling**, University of Sussex- 'Sustainability transformations' video presentation (shared post-event)

Participatory exercises:

- **Participants were invited to place comments on a series of five boards, each of which presented one of the five TCA strategy themes and associated actions in the TCA.** Post-it notes provided suggestions for barriers and enablers to transformative change in participants' own organisations.
- **Question & Answer session, involving discussion** amongst the speakers and the audience.
- **Post-lunch breakout groups facilitated deeper exploration of TCA strategies.** Attendees discussed practical implementations in their own areas of agency and potential challenges. Breakout groups were organised around the five strategy themes of the TCA. Rapporteurs shared insights during a plenary session, allowing for collective reflection.
- **Strategic discussion on the implications for the upcoming Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) meeting 27, aiming to identify priorities for the UK's advocacy in international biodiversity negotiations.** This was facilitated by representatives from Defra with key findings identified on post its and flip charts.

Final reflections and next steps from the organizing team.

3. Key cross-cutting themes emerging during discussions

Recommendation 1: There is a need to change the narrative about there being a trade-off between urgency and transformative approaches if the former is ineffective and unjust.

Audience members pushed the speakers on how to balance the urgency of the situation with the long-term nature of the kinds of transformative changes identified in the evidence assessment of the TCA. Pushing back on this framing, the speakers suggested that a focus on urgent action within the traditional institutional and practical bounds of conservation has limited its horizon of change because it has left destructive socioecological mechanisms (such as growth-oriented and extractive economies) in place. There is a need, therefore, to focus on addressing destructive relations between humans and nature, institutions, and practices beyond conservation if socioecological regeneration and flourishing is to be made possible. One TCA speaker stated that certain high impact changes could be made overnight if there was political will. A focus on urgency means that measures tend to become reform-oriented, rather than deeper shifts that tackle the underlying causes of biodiversity loss.

It could be a huge investment, but the outcome could be much better if it's actually an inclusive rather than a rushed job. Sometimes the process is worth it

By contrast, for transformative change to be truly effective it is those very changes which are difficult to make (despite being time consuming) that demand urgent and sustained attention because without making these fundamental changes, success in the long-term is not possible. Re-thinking the spatial and temporal dimensions of transformative change are key to just and effective change processes.

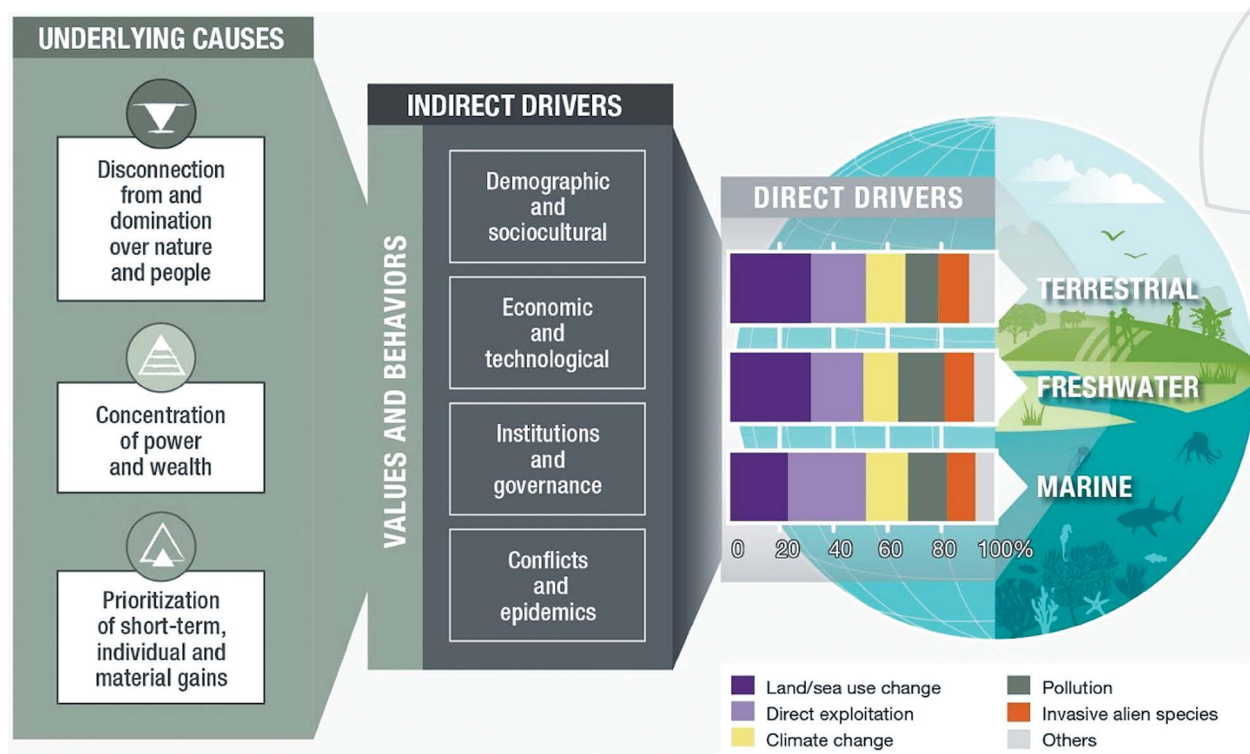


Figure 1: Underlying causes identified as leading to biodiversity loss (IPBES, 2024)

Recommendation 2: There is a need to move efforts beyond the traditional bounds of conservation work to tackle the sectors continuing to drive biodiversity loss.

The audience asked speakers for insight on the practicalities of implementing transformative change and how to support those pushing for change as part of citizen collective action, civil society efforts and social movements. Questioning the framing, the speakers suggested that the focus needs to be 'beyond conservation' to the much broader systemic, structural and socio-cultural factors that are driving biodiversity losses. For example, learning from agro-ecological movements in the Netherlands, the focus should be on ceasing the support for life-destroying forms of agriculture (via subsidy, public-private partnership, etc.) so that there is a level playing field, to enable such agroecological movements to flourish. Thus, efforts should reach beyond the traditional bounds of conservation work, such as site-based approaches, toward tackling more systemic and structural issues that lead to biodiversity losses. This demands changes to existing policy and subsidy paradigms.

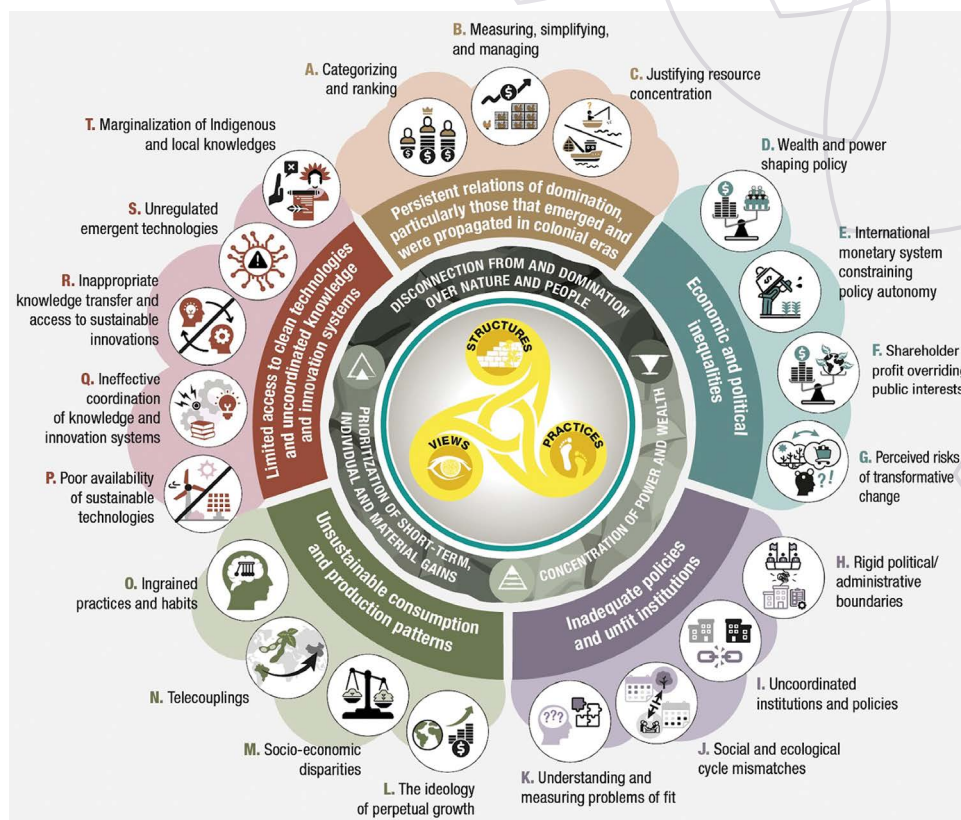


Figure 2: IPBES Transformative Change Assessment Chapter 4 (2024): Challenges and Barriers to Transformative Change.

4. RESPONSES TO THE TCA CHAPTER 5 STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Chapter 5 of the TCA identifies five strategies and sets of actions that can advance transformative change for global sustainability across a diverse set of contexts, along with associated actions – with all actors having a role.

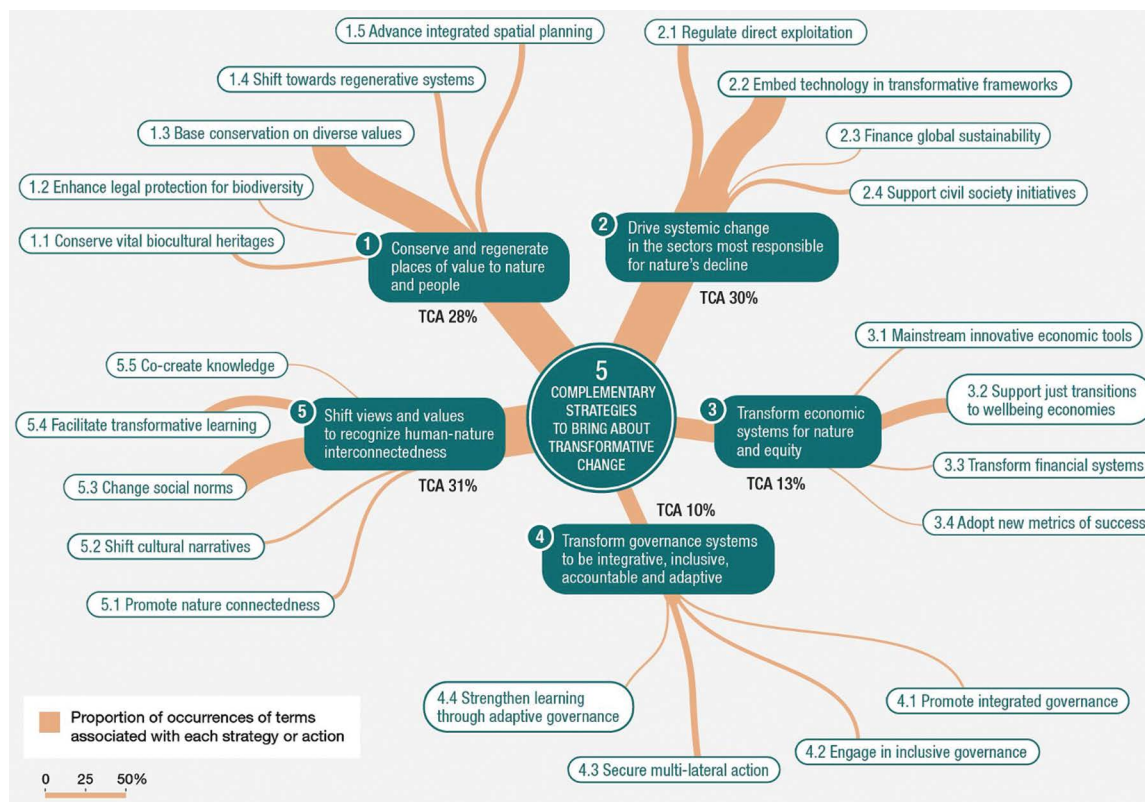


Figure 3: Strategies and actions for transformative change (IPBES 2024)

Attendees discussed the practical implementation of the strategies and actions in their own work areas and organisations and potential challenges that may arise. For each strategy, key recommendations are outlined below. We summarize these recommendations which emerged from the discussions on the day, but do not suggest that there was complete consensus on each point.

Strategy 1: Conserving and regenerating places of value to nature and people

Move beyond conservation and conventional policymaking approaches to achieve transformative change

- **Governments** can play a key role in embracing deliberative engagement approaches in relation to biodiversity actions, as well as **citizens and stakeholders**. More deliberative and pluralistic approaches are needed, such as deliberative democracy, citizens assemblies, interspecies councils, etc.) rather than top-down methodologies and approaches.
- **UK government departments beyond those with a particular remit on biodiversity and climate, such as treasury, education and health**, should recognize their role in tackling the biodiversity crisis and its connections to climate change and social inequalities, recognizing that TCA calls for shifts beyond growth-oriented economies.

Look beyond business-as-usual conservation

- **Government** action is needed to build public support for the overall conservation of nature, not just in traditional protected area approaches, but in wider landscapes including urban sites.
- **Government** support for nature recovery can helpfully focus on landscape resilience, recognizing plural nature values, more than conserving specific species. Move beyond species-led conservation (the traditional UK approach) by recognizing that ecological assemblages are increasingly shaped by stochastic processes—that is, random or unpredictable events such as climate-related disturbances. This calls for more holistic and process-led approaches that attend to the dynamic, emergent, and ever-changing nature of ecosystems.
- **Governments and researchers** should identify and generate evidence on important plant areas in the UK and overseas (e.g. Tropical Important Plant Areas at Kew Gardens).

Recognize that storytelling has underutilised potential for engaging citizens and stakeholders in nature

- **Governments and researchers** need to urgently find more persuasive biodiversity and nature protection and restoration narratives that more effectively resonate with policymakers and different social groups.
- **Policymakers and researchers** can provide data to fill transformative change knowledge and imagination gaps. However, data is also a framing and can lead to entrenchment of status quo if there is no recognition of this.

Act on the imperative to amplify the voice of Indigenous Peoples in biodiversity and nature conservation

- **Government** to support and recognize Indigenous Peoples and Local rights and role in conservation, in particular land rights and customary governance through legal reform, financial support and changed mandates of conservation NGOs.
- **Conservation agencies and NGOs** should change their ways of working of conservation organisations to act in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and local communities.



Strategy 2: Driving Systemic change in the sectors most responsible for biodiversity loss and nature's decline

Understand that a 'whole of government' approach is needed for transformative change for biodiversity

- **Governments** should provide joined-up policy across government departments to deliver transformative change in the sectors most driving biodiversity losses.
- **Governments** should strengthen the importance assigned to biodiversity across government departments and especially ensuring it is addressed at senior civil service levels.
- **Governments** should support shifts in mindsets and systems moving away from unsustainable development paradigms focused on modernist notions of progress to regenerative ones in the key sectors driving biodiversity losses such as manufacturing, infrastructure, transport, etc.
- **Governments** can implement levers including legal, regulatory and enforcement ones to reform key sectors, e.g. generating mandates for end of life / circularity to be the default for products and approaches.
- **Governments** can implement feasible incremental changes using subsidies to advance change, which may lead to transformative changes when combined with deeper leverage points, but avoid using these as stop-gap approaches.
- **Governments** can critically assess funding to amplify support for biodiversity protection and restoration, and challenge conflicts of interest to increase policy coherence on biodiversity and economic policies.
- **Governments** and NGOs should support diverse forms of education pedagogy, recognizing there are different ways of knowing nature, as a key pathway for longer term, transformative change. **Governments** should create space for out of the box thinking and room to 'fail' to find ways achieve more far-reaching changes in key sectors.

Debate roles for the private sector to avoid easy assumptions that reforms will be achieved and will lead to transformative changes. Strengthen expectations on and regulation of business for biodiversity.

- **Governments, NGOs, researchers and the public** should open a broader conversation about the appropriate role of business in society, pertaining to biodiversity and nature impacts, and the extent to which this can be reformed. Communicating evidence on the nature-related risks to non-nature sectors, i.e. why nature matters, is also urgently required.
- **Governments and private sector actors** can generate new business models where nature-positive value creation is rewarded.
- **Governments and business** need to be strategically tactical and opportunistic to 'ride' existing and likely transitions in diverse sectors, including energy, water, technology, agriculture, finance and trade etc.
- Care is needed to avoid green washing and **governments and NGOs** therefore need to hold business to account. Government should recognize that business alone will not solve the problem, but the private sector will be more supportive and receptive if their good intentions are recognized. If not, they may double down on harmful action.

Action on food and agriculture is critically important for biodiversity conservation and restoration

- **Governments**, the public, NGOs and the private sector can take steps to reduce meat consumption to advance food system transformations.
- **Governments** should collaborate with farming communities and motivate farmers to champion and communicate change.

Efforts are needed to support local communities through changes processes as biodiversity losses bite affecting livelihoods

- There is a need for specific resources user groups to compromise in certain circumstances: **governments** should support fishing and farming communities, for example, to make changes for biodiversity, while also sustaining their traditional livelihoods for vibrant biocultural heritage landscapes.
- **Governments** should invest in and institutionalise dialogue, engagement and learning with local communities for just and equitable change.

Strategy 3: Transforming economic systems for nature and equity

Significant changes in subsidy regimes and funding are necessary to bend the biodiversity curve

- **Governments** need to acknowledge and be transparent about the impacts of harmful subsidies on biodiversity and nature.
- **Governments and civil society** should challenge and change the current focus on market-based measures for funding nature. Restoration which fails to tackle the underlying causes of nature loss. Solutions are needed that make it more politically acceptable to end destructive subsidies.

As prevalent contemporary economic paradigms are flawed, new approaches are needed to escape capital flight traps and recognizing increasing economic costs of biodiversity losses and climate change.

- Mainstreaming radical changes in how we think about nature and finance requires support from **governments**. A key provocation from the workshop was the questioning of whether current financial systems are fundamentally flawed and the call for governments to consider different systems for value exchange?
- **Government civil servants, the public and civil society** should seek to provide practical solutions for politicians on how to move away from growth-focused economies without 'crashing the economy'. Recognition is needed that changes are needed in global financial / trade systems, necessitating international cooperation.
- One option for **governments and communities** to support is the local circulation of money, such as models proposed by the New Economic Foundation.
- **Governments** should recognize that given the political cycle of 4-5 years, it is important to develop a regulatory platform which brings a changing field of policymakers up to speed quickly.

Specific proposals should be implemented to achieve economic transformation

- Supportive **governments and other stakeholders** should seek to recruit private sector voices in support of reformed markets that incentivise resilience and well-being.
- Direct engagement of **central banks** by **governments** and involving intergovernmental collaboration to advance changes that can adjust fundamental economic structures.
- **Companies** can look to existing initiatives for lessons e.g. EU Corporate Social Reporting Directive, Taskforce for Nature Financial Disclosures, Biodiversity Finance Initiative.

Strategy 4: Transformative governmental systems as integrated, inclusive, accountable, and adaptable

Establishing stronger foundations of transformative governance

- **Governments** should embed more consultation and integration of social justice in 'green policies' and provide more support for local level nature initiatives.
- Citizen assemblies on nature are needed, and **governments** should take measures to mainstream this kind of engagement in policy cycles.
- **Governments** should recognize and support (customary) governance by Indigenous Peoples and Local communities.
- **Governments** should seek more integration at international level between climate change and biodiversity policy, such as through more joint working across Rio conventions. This approach should inform the approach of the UK **Government**.
- **Governments and multiple place-based actors** can pursue biocultural plans created by (more-than-human) communities as this provides the grounding for a more inclusive and accountable politics e.g. deliberative democracy, citizens assemblies, Roding River Interspecies Council (Defra Futures), Embassy of the North Sea, Future Generations Act, etc.

Strategy 4: Transformative governmental systems as integrated, inclusive, accountable, and adaptable (cont'd)

Pursue shifts towards transformative governance arrangements

- **Governments** should set new core priorities that should govern governmental policy and legislation – e.g. social justice / equality and planetary boundaries
- **Governments, nature agencies, community groups and social economy organisations** can adopt nature inclusive governance innovation, such as placing Nature on the Board
- **Governments** need to tackle areas traditionally beyond conservation remit, to achieve transformative governance that can address underlying causes, including rethinking and strengthening corruption, transparency and lobbying laws.
- Future generations of people and life forms should be represented in **government and community decision-making**.
- **Governments** should change the electoral system to be more represented (no more first past the post). Devolution to a lower level is also needed for greater community empowerment.
- **Governments** should explore what Rights of Nature entails for a growth-oriented economy.
- **Governments** should provide funding for biodiversity action and research that is consistent and long-term, not piecemeal and project based.

Communication of transformative changes

- **Governments** and other **social and environmental organisations and groups** need to be strategic about how to translate the TCA findings into action by thinking about how to influence key actors and how to overcome political barriers to change and influence the public.
- **Governments** and **environmental stakeholders** should find common cause with social justice agendas; many of the drivers of nature loss also harm people's health and wellbeing and drive inequalities. There is a need for a combined agenda.



Strategy 5: Shifting societal views and values to recognize and prioritize fundamental interconnections between humans and nature

Recognizing that there are plural worldviews and ways of knowing nature opens rich possibilities for transformative change

- **Governments** and **multiple environment actors** should recognize that connections to nature should be moved beyond solely a health and wellbeing focus to a deeper-centred focus on connections through the notion of a web of care.
- **Governments, researchers, and civil society** should make it 'imaginable' to say no to big business. This should be made a key political ask, linked with social justice. Providing examples would be helpful for persuasion.
- Storytelling is an important means for affecting change and requires **government** support for the arts.
- One of the key areas the arts and **governments** could explore is whether evidence systems can recognize plural forms of knowledge effectively and how to improve this capacity?

Supporting more democratic engagement and education can facilitate transformative change

- **Governments** need to set conditions to allow and facilitate democratising of decision-making and give space to social movements to champion positive change for nature. Governments can create / protect the right to protest, engage in and support horizontal connections and actions that seek to challenge institutional path dependencies, and support open-ended processes and adaptive approaches in transformative governance and learning.
- Better **education** in schools and for adults is needed about human-nature connection with support from **governments** and the **education sector**, drawing upon scientific evidence and other ways of knowing nature — this includes engaging **politicians** and **policymakers** in reflexive learning on how to know nature.
- **Government** should support Rights of Nature initiatives including efforts to engage communities as champions and linked to arts-initiatives.
- **Governments** can support networks to help research institutions to connect with Indigenous and Local Knowledges groups more effectively and appropriately.
- **Governments** should provide a forum for international sharing of transformative case studies. There is both need and opportunity to open forums for public conversation around how to implement TCA findings.
- **Governments** should support the co-creation of landscape recovery schemes and place-based approaches with local communities and non-humans to ensure that they are locally relevant.
- **Governments, researchers and environmental agencies and NGOs** should support the participatory creation of **nature-rich urban areas**.



5. Key recommendations to Defra to inform upcoming Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA27)

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity is the main international forum for countries to discuss and agree measures on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the use of genetic resources. It will meet next in October 2025 in Panama City where amongst other scientific issues, countries will discuss the implications of the TCA for the work of the Convention. This will culminate in agreeing specific actions to be taken, written into a formal 'Decision text' to be adopted at the next 'Conference of Parties' – COP17, taking place in Armenia in October 2026.

In breakout groups, attendees discussed ideas for actions that could be included in that Decision text, including work that could be undertaken by the Secretariat of the Convention, actions that Parties to the Convention could themselves take, and ideas for working with other international organisations. A summary of suggested actions is provided below:

Stronger leadership and coordination across UN conventions, led by the CBD Executive Secretary, to guide implementation and promote futures thinking that moves beyond present trends.

Recognition of plural forms of knowledge – i.e. there are different ways of knowing and valuing nature, so future nature planning should take this into account. Arts, Indigenous Peoples perspectives and practices, worldviews, and citizen-led democratic engagement can contribute to a shift from human dominance over nature to relationships of care and shared agency. Instead of seeing nature as a 'resource', human-nature relations can be understood, in a paradigm shift, relationally (i.e. life is generated through continually unfolding relations in assemblages, in which agencies are distributed between humans, non-humans and inhumans) with such relations continually in flux.

Expand futures methodologies beyond extrapolation of trends, towards more creative approaches that recognize the multiplicity of futures possibilities, especially when recognizing plural ways of knowing and valuing nature. Arts and storytelling can be important here.

Governance changes to be inclusive, adaptive, integrative. Include legal rights for nature, and give voice to youth, Indigenous Peoples and future generations, ensuring inclusive, adaptive, and locally grounded decision-making, as well as non-humans.

Support citizen engagement such as deliberative democracy approaches and including multi-species councils. More-than-human thinking is demonstrated by examples such as 'Embassy of the North Sea', a ten-year movement seeking to achieve rights for the North Sea, recognizing it as a living entity, shifting from relations of domination to care.

Financial and subsidy reforms, including the elimination of harmful subsidies and aligning private sector finance with biodiversity goals, supported by legal and fiduciary frameworks for enhanced accountability and alignment with nature-positive goals. Urgently eliminate all harmful subsidies to incentivise change. Engage finance, insurance and pension sectors.

Capacity building and knowledge sharing, with regional workshops, research on case studies of transformative change and documentation and evaluation of experiences of country implementation processes and outcomes, review of national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) for alignment with transformative change, provision of guidance on transformative change and practical tools, e.g. serious play (e.g. games, arts-led methods), and support for Indigenous-led knowledge Centres.

Education (broadly understood) to reduce inequalities, legislation with stronger environmental laws and multiple, creative approaches to communication are identified as both short- and long-term levers which can help to drive transformation.

There is a strong call for the **inclusion of youth and Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs)** in implementation, as well as recognition of their rights to nature and knowledge systems. Young peoples' right to access nature should be recognized. Promotion of Indigenous Peoples' workshops on transformative change to which governments are invited. Engage with Article 8(j) for Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices.

Finally, the importance of **multilateral cooperation** was emphasized through synergistic action across the Rio Conventions is emphasized. This could be through building on existing decisions (e.g. UNFCCC SB62, CBD COP16) and joint programming across Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD).

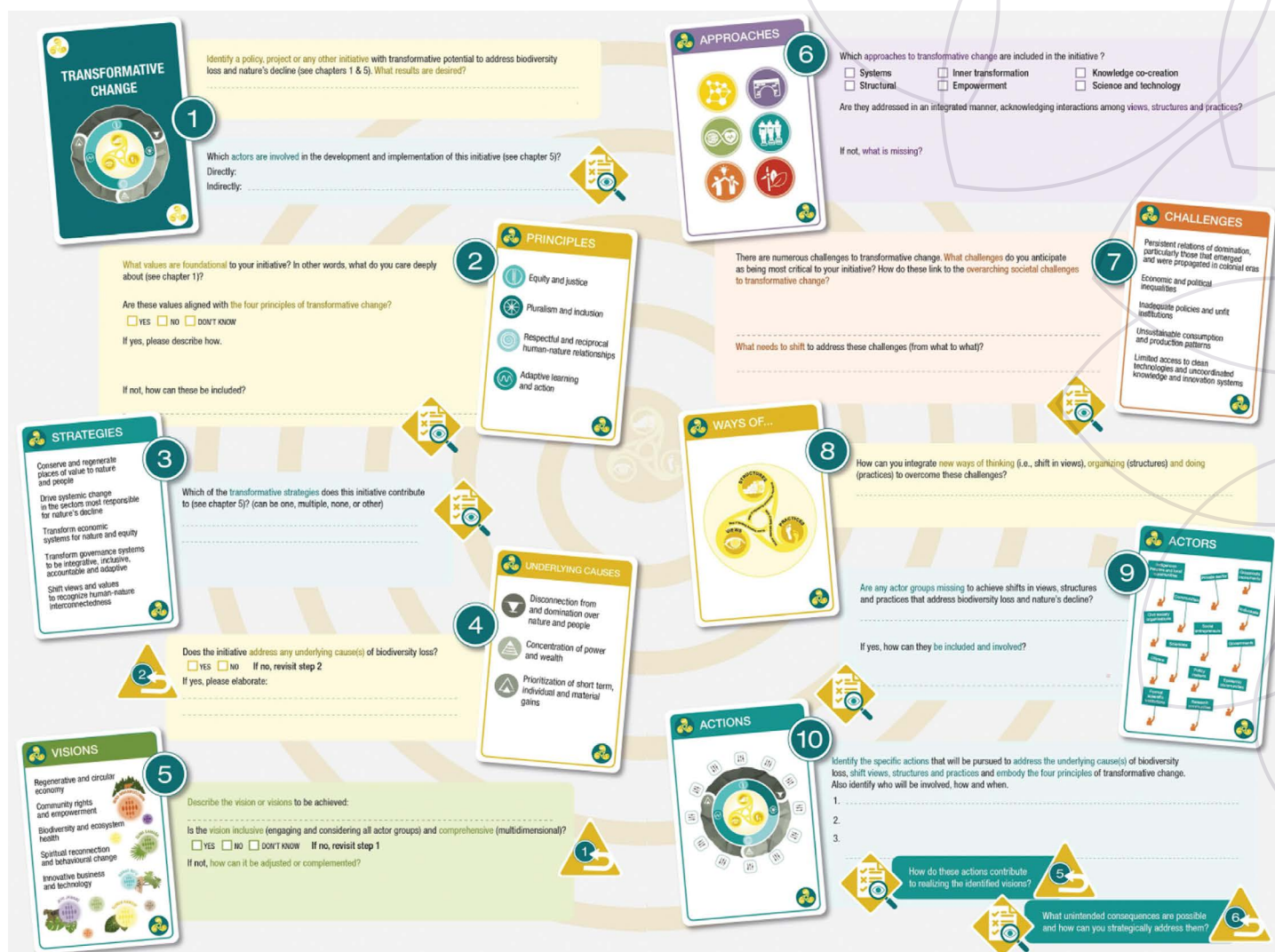


Figure 4: Transformative Change Game (IPBES TCA, 2024).

6. Conclusions and Next Steps

This event provided the opportunity for UK environmental agencies, government representatives, NGOs and researchers to explore the newly agreed inter-governmental TCA. The latter presents exciting opportunities for changing how we think about human-nature relations and to consider how all communities, social movements and organisations concerned with nature and justice might act more effectively on biodiversity losses and the nature crisis. There are challenges in operationalising the TCA; some of the underlying causes need greater visibility and understanding, and because others appear insurmountable, and yet clearly need to be brought within the realm of governmental and public action to bend the biodiversity curve leading to extinctions and degraded ecosystems. This workshop provides some actionable recommendations for governments and other socio-environmental actors and agencies, but the process of understanding the implications of the TCA and identifying ways to operationalize it therefore requires further debate. A follow-on event will therefore be convened in March 2026 and this briefing will be widely shared to support further explorations in this vein.

Based on participatory evaluation of the event, which gave positive feedback, a follow-up event is planned for end Feb/early March, 2026. For further information on past and future events: Please contact: Professor Valerie Nelson, University of Greenwich, v.j.nelson@gre.ac.uk. Summary by Valerie Nelson and Lachlan Kenneally, University of Greenwich. Organizing committee: Valerie Nelson, representatives from Defra, Helen Wheeler, Vera Helene Hausner, Esther Turnhout, Lyla Mehta, Caroline Troy and Hanneke Lam.