



The use of dialogue within IIED's work

What works and why

Bernardo Monzani

Evaluation case study

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Communication

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IIED commissioned a consultant to carry out and write up this evaluation case study. The consultant chose an objective and recognised methodology and independently arrived at his conclusions.

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This report explores how IIED uses dialogue to create change towards a fairer and more sustainable world. What does IIED specifically mean by the term ‘dialogue’ — and how effective are its dialogue-based efforts? This report is a first attempt to generate learning to illuminate current practice and inform future work. It explores the different definitions, functions and features of dialogue and examines the theory of change behind IIED’s dialogue-based initiatives, while findings from two case studies examine their effectiveness. The report concludes with key recommendations: support a new common language or framework to analyse dialogue; create common guidelines for designing dialogues; and invest in systematic learning and capacity building for staff.

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Summary

Dialogues are an integral part of how the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) works and engages with the world. As an umbrella term, dialogue is present in a wide range of IIED's policy and advocacy initiatives across its many areas of organisational engagement, including climate change, natural resources governance, urban settlements, sustainable markets and sustainable development overall. Although an important feature of IIED's work, dialogue has received limited attention until now. This has now started to change, and this report represents a first attempt to generate learning that can illuminate current practice and inform future endeavours. The report explores how IIED is using dialogues within its work to create change towards a fairer and more sustainable world. It aims to shed light on what definitions of dialogues are used at IIED with reference to wider development literature, the extent to which dialogue-based efforts are effective, and how.

Defining dialogue

The approach used for this evaluative review is based on principles of action research and theory-based evaluation. Starting from a set of lines of inquiry, which looked at the definition of IIED's approach to dialogue and its effectiveness, the review was completed in two phases: the first included a broad literature review, and the second focused on five specific initiatives, all within IIED's portfolio, where dialogue was a central component of their work. Based on these five case studies, a metatheory of change was assembled and evidence of effectiveness was gathered using Contribution Analysis (a method to assess causality in real-life interventions).

Perhaps unsurprisingly to those actively engaged in dialogue, there is no single leading or widely referred definition of dialogue. Yet there is broad agreement that dialogue should be driven by a common ethos and feature a set of core elements, including that it should be context specific, long term, continuous and iterative in nature, conducted formally and informally, and multifaceted in terms of levels of engagement and approaches.

The best way to understand IIED's approach to and use of dialogue is therefore as a normative framework. This allows moving beyond the need to have a single

definition, while retaining the aspirational elements implicit in the idea of ethos. This normative framework includes three elements: principles (what defines the ethos, such as transparency or equality), functions (justifications or rationales for using dialogue) and features (specific facets of dialogue, such as inclusion or participation, which can change from one initiative to the next). The principles, functions and features discussed in this report are based on the five case studies.

Functions and features of dialogue

IIED designs, supports and implements dialogue-based initiatives because these are specific to a vision of progress and success. To better understand dialogue, it is therefore important to look at the **functions** that dialogue is supposed to have. Overall, five were found to be common to all initiatives:

- Creating horizontal spaces for information sharing, discussions and networking
- Giving voice to marginalised actors or stakeholder groups
- Increasing understanding of local actors and dynamics
- Identifying bottom-up and alternative solutions to relevant societal challenges, and
- Producing a movement or critical mass towards such solutions.

The list of **features** that make up dialogue can also be long, as well as more subjective. Features are much more closely related to principles and the ethos of dialogue. For this review, a decision was therefore made to focus on only two features: inclusion and participation.

Inclusion has been defined as engaging marginalised and vulnerable groups specifically, and about increasing diversity more generally. All initiatives seek to be inclusive, and many positive examples of inclusion were found. However, the actual level of inclusion depends on the context and the functions of a specific dialogue. On the other hand, participation can be defined in different ways — from information sharing to consulting to allowing stakeholders to co-design and co-decide activities. Overall, IIED's intention, in relation

to participation, is always to foster and build on agency and ownership, and while the level of participation might vary from one initiative to the next, it is clearly an organisational strength.

Importantly, functions and features are related. There is an important distinction between inclusion in processes and inclusion in outcomes. The former is more important for creating horizontal spaces and giving voice to marginalised actors. The latter is important for finding alternative solutions and mobilising support. In general, as dialogues progress and move from informality to formality, and from discussion to action, certain trade-offs come to light, which require adjustments to the levels of inclusion and participation.

Theory of change for dialogue-based initiatives

Understanding the effectiveness of dialogue means looking at what they seek to achieve. In this context, the review identified a set of three core outcomes that are common to all initiatives:

- A new common agenda is created or shaped
- Networks or collaborative platforms are created or strengthened, and
- The capacity of key partners to engage on relevant themes and/or in specific fora is increased.

In general, IIED also seeks changes across three interlinked domains: individual (ie changes in participants' knowledge or awareness), relational (changes in how people work with each other) and social (changes to policies and people's behaviours).

Based on these elements, an overarching theory of change behind IIED's dialogue-based initiatives can be identified. Positive change moves along two axes: first, from evidence generation to capacity building to engagement (by civil society actors and also government officials); and secondly, from individual commitment and the creation of networks, to policy influencing and the promotion of societal demand for change. The pursuit of these changes is then usually done through three main strategies, each broadly aligned with the aforementioned domains of change, which are focused on:

- Research and technical assistance, referring to what IIED does in terms of knowledge-generation
- Relationship and confidence building, where IIED acts as a convener, facilitator and enabler to bring together different people to then engage with each other, and
- Communications and mobilisation, which includes efforts to increase visibility around specific issues or efforts, with the aim of enlisting more supporters.

Examples of effective dialogue

Two case studies were used to measure the effectiveness of dialogues, using a theory-based evaluation approach called Contribution Analysis:

- The influence of the Green Economy Coalition (GEC) on the United Nations Partnership for Action on Green Economy (UN-PAGE) (see Section 5.3).
- The participation of the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) at the thirteenth international conference on Community-Based Adaptation to Climate Change (CBA13) in Ethiopia, 2019 (see Section 5.4).

Dialogue was used in both cases to achieve specific outcomes, including building a community of practice, establishing trust and engaging government representatives. In the case of the CBA initiative, the impact outcome was shifting attention to community-based adaptation, while for the GEC it was influencing UN-PAGE's policies supporting green economy transitions.

Across both cases, the evidence of the contribution that dialogue made to those outcomes is good. In particular, IIED's efforts to create and support communities of practice were certainly successful. These communities are diverse and inclusive, and they have allowed the shaping of a common understanding of the challenges to be addressed. Both initiatives effectively engaged external actors, but following different routes. The GEC, for example, relied on the trust and reputation of IIED and its national partners to invite other stakeholders to join ongoing dialogues. This helped expand the network and caught the attention of UN-PAGE officials, who relied on GEC members for the organisation of UN-PAGE's annual ministerial conference in 2019. The CBA initiative, on the other hand, undertook a long-term process of trust building that was heavily centred on the active participation of community-of-practice members. This created both trust and unique expertise, which was associated with the CBA initiative (as opposed to IIED or other participating agencies) and was a key factor that led GCA representatives to seek out support from the CBA initiative, rather than vice versa.

Nonetheless, there is also some evidence of limitations in how much dialogue has been able to achieve. In particular, there seems to be a tension between the influencing outcomes of both initiatives, which would require more results-focused strategies, and their emphasis on inclusion and participation. These limitations were manifest, for example, in a lack of cohesive messages and in their limited success in mobilising other actors.

Conclusions and recommendations

The more IIED increases efforts to use dialogue to promote transformative change, the more important it becomes to understand how and when such efforts can be most effective. With this in mind, the following recommendations are offered:

- Support the development of a common language or framework to analyse dialogue. IIED should develop a single vocabulary to talk about dialogue.
- Create common guidelines for the design of dialogues. This would help new staff and partners unfamiliar with dialogue, and could be regularly updated.
- Invest in more systematic learning. IIED should continue to review and evaluate dialogue-based initiatives to expand the body of knowledge on their effectiveness.
- Focus on capacity building. IIED should devote more attention to building the capacities of its staff and partners to implement dialogues effectively.

Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| ASM | Artisanal and Small-scale Mining initiative |
| BBNJ | Biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction |
| CBA | Community-Based Adaptation (international conference series) |
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| GEC | Green Economy Coalition |
| GCA | Global Commission on Adaptation |
| GGKP | Green Growth Knowledge Platform |
| IIED | International Institute for Environment and Development |
| LDCs | Least Developed Countries |
| NAPs | National adaptation plans |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| SDFs | Slum dwellers' federations |
| Sida | Swedish International Development Agency |
| UN | United Nations |
| UN-PAGE | UN Partnership for Action on Green Economy |

1

Introduction

Dialogues are an integral part of how the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) works and engages with the world. As an umbrella term, dialogue is present in a wide range of IIED's policy and advocacy initiatives across its many areas of organisational engagement, including climate change, natural resources governance, urban settlements, sustainable markets and sustainable development overall. Although an important feature of IIED's work, dialogue has received limited attention until now.

This has now started to change, and this report represents a first attempt to generate learning that can illuminate current practice and inform future endeavours. The report explores how IIED is using dialogues within its work to create change towards a fairer and more sustainable world. It aims to shed light on what definitions of dialogues are used at IIED — with reference to wider development literature, the extent to which dialogue-based efforts are effective, and how.

A body of knowledge on the nature and effectiveness of dialogues has been forming, based on monitoring and evaluation efforts under several different initiatives. In October 2018, an internal Dialogue Working Group was also created to promote reflection and learning. Additionally, convening dialogues for transformative change is now one of the organisation's four impact pathways under its new five-year strategy.¹ It is in this context that IIED has decided to commission an evaluative review of how it uses dialogue, with the overall aim of understanding what has been working, how, and what can be done to improve its practice in the future.

The review took place in two phases: the first focused on a broad literature review of documents internal and external to IIED, all relevant to how dialogues are

defined and whether they are effective. This phase was completed in February 2019, following a restitution workshop where findings related to the literature review were discussed with IIED staff members.

The second phase started thereafter and focused in particular on understanding IIED's specific approach to dialogues and the conditions in which these are effective. Efforts during this phase looked at a handful of case studies — five initiatives that were deemed reflective of the broad range of IIED's dialogue-based work. They included:

- Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) initiative
- Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) conference series
- The Green Economy Coalition (GEC)
- Participation in negotiations for an international treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), and
- Support IIED has provided to national slum dwellers' federations (SDFs).

The final results of the review were presented at a second restitution workshop held in May 2019. A wide cross-section of IIED staff took part. The results are described in this report.

2

Methodology

The evaluation had three objectives: to better understand how IIED designs, uses and implements dialogues; to identify and understand what has been working and what has not; and to make recommendations for how the organisation can improve its practice in future.

The approach used was based on principles of action research and elements of theory-based evaluation methodologies. The starting point was given by the following lines of inquiry:

- How do the features and functions of IIED's dialogue-based work change?
- How does IIED define its role in specific dialogue-based efforts?
- What are the tools that it most frequently uses? How effective are they?
- What are the assumptions that influence successful dialogues?
- What are the outcomes of IIED's dialogue-based work?
- Did change, where it occurred, happen in line with IIED's expectations? Why or why not?

The review was completed in two phases. First, a broad literature review was completed, which looked at a total of 46 documents from IIED and relevant non-governmental organisations (NGOs), think tanks and donor agencies. This included academic articles and grey literature, gathered using key terms (such as climate change, energy, dialogue, effectiveness). The second phase built on these findings with a more in-depth look at five specific case studies (Table 1).

For each project, information from primary sources was collected (ie interviews with relevant IIED staff, partners and selected external stakeholders), as well as

from additional secondary sources (ie internal project documents, reports by other organisations, news items etc). Overall, 26 people were interviewed and over 20 documents reviewed.

Finally, a theory-based evaluation methodology — Contribution Analysis — was used to complete the analysis in the second phase. Contribution Analysis is “an approach for assessing causal questions and inferring causality in real-life program evaluations” (see Box 1).² Based on a programme's theory of change, a specific observable outcome is first identified. A narrative, also called a contribution story, is then developed to reflect the logic of how the programme contributed to this outcome, according to the theory of change. This narrative is then assessed against all available evidence to support or reject the contribution claim of the programme. The approach works by reducing uncertainty about the contribution of an intervention to a specific outcome, and is ideal to assess impact in social change interventions, as it emphasises not just whether a change occurred, but also how and why.

The review is not without limitations. The choice of five case studies was useful to capture the diversity of IIED's dialogues, but it did not allow for an in-depth exploration of cause and effect. Related to this, the review could not gather the same level of information for all case studies. In particular, IIED's support to SDFs was understudied due to time constraints. More generally, while IIED's body of knowledge about and from using dialogues is increasing, it remains unstructured and suffers from a lack of common terminology. A lengthier exploration of definitional questions is required, and this review should be viewed as a first phase.

Table 1. Overview of the five dialogue-based IIED projects studied

| PROJECT NAME | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) initiative | The ASM initiative enables a wide range of stakeholders to come together and collaborate on empowering miners, improving governance and delivering a safer, more secure working environment. The initiative started in 2014 and is ongoing in Ghana and Tanzania, among other countries. |
| Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) conference series | CBA conferences bring together practitioners, policymakers and donors to share, consolidate and promote the latest developments in CBA best practice, to strengthen existing networks and to enhance the capacity of practitioners, governments and donors to help those most vulnerable to climate change. Conferences have been organised annually since 2005. |
| Participation in negotiations for an international treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) | IIED is working with officials from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to increase their engagement and effectiveness in these negotiations. It does this by providing legal, technical and strategic advice, to equip LDC representatives with the information they need to take forward positions and support strong marine conservation measures. The initiative started in 2016. |
| Green Economy Coalition (GEC) | The GEC brings together more than 50 actors from the environment, development, trade union, consumer and business sectors from the North and South with the aim of accelerating a transition to a new green economy. Started in 2013, it is the world's largest movement for green and fair economies, with hubs in seven countries. |
| Support to national slum dwellers' federations (SDFs) | SDFs are active in over 32 countries, conducting community-led documentation and mapping to influence negotiations between slum residents and governments and to inform their own development initiatives. Started over 30 years ago, this work has generated new knowledge to help poor communities think about their priorities and their own resources and capacities. |

BOX 1. WHAT IS CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS?

Contribution Analysis is “an approach for assessing causal questions and inferring causality in real-life program evaluations”. Having identified a specific observable outcome, the approach requires the development of a narrative, or contribution story (based on an initiative’s theory of change), which is then assessed against all available evidence in an attempt to reduce uncertainty about the contribution of an intervention to that outcome. Contribution Analysis requires six steps:

1. Set out the attribution problem to be addressed
2. Develop a theory of change and risks to it
3. Gather the existing evidence on the theory of change
4. Assemble and assess the contribution story, or performance story, and challenges to it
5. Seek out additional evidence
6. Revise and, where the additional evidence permits, strengthen the contribution story.

Source: BetterEvaluation²

3

Defining dialogue

3.1 Definitions of dialogue within policy and advocacy efforts

The broad nature of this sub-section reflects the breadth of literature and spheres of work under which the term dialogue (or associated terms) is found. The literature reviewed was not exhaustive in covering all entities, sectors or types of programming applying dialogue. However, the sample of documents reviewed has been large and diverse enough to reflect what is available, both within IIED and among external sources.

It is perhaps unsurprising to those actively engaged in dialogue discourse and practice that there is no single leading or widely referred to definition of 'dialogue'. The only consensus revealed is that there is no clear consensus on a definition. An evaluation report published by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) provides similar agreement: "This range of definitions [in a development cooperation context] indicates that there is not yet a consensus on what policy dialogue is. The definition also shifts somewhat depending upon the purpose for which the dialogue is used."³

The concept of what dialogue is, in terms of its defining characteristics (or features), is also extensive. In reviewed literature, dialogue is referred to in many ways including, but not limited to: an action arena, approach, forum, instrument, interaction, mechanism, negotiation, organised deliberation, platform, practice, process, strategic game, tool and a way of working. Dialogue is also represented implicitly as a core element within other processes referred to in the literature, such as multistakeholder processes and platforms, cross-sector partnerships, alternative dispute resolution, company–community grievance mechanisms, social learning and

co-production. An extensive literature review on policy dialogue by the Australian government similarly notes this variance and also states, "Inherent in a definition of policy dialogue are two parts: the process of the dialogue, and the results of the dialogue. Different organisations conceptualise the process and the result of dialogue differently."⁴

While there is no common definition for dialogue, there is broad agreement on some core elements, including that they be context specific, long term, continuous and iterative in nature, conducted formally and informally, and multifaceted in terms of levels of engagement and approaches. Additionally, many sources included the use of complementary processes such as research to build evidence and stakeholder and power analyses as crucial components involved in dialogue. "To ensure transformational [ie institutional] changes [rather than only transactional ones], different dimensions of influence between different actors need to be identified. Further, there needs to be an understanding of the influences of power dynamics to understand each actor's behaviour."⁵ In general, it appears that it is not inherently problematic that there are different working definitions to represent dialogue, if the spirit or intention behind both the term and the practice are recognised and well understood. In this vein, additional common characteristics identified in the literature as important to dialogue were accountability, inclusion, representativeness, transparency and trust.

What this suggests is that while there are a range of definitions, interpretations and applications of dialogue, these are all driven by a common ethos, whereby the buy-in of different stakeholders is necessary for sustainable change. In this context, it is generally understood that different actors or initiatives can apply dialogue in diverse ways, and on different scales, and constructing an all-encompassing and precise definition

for dialogue thus becomes less important and ultimately inefficient. What seems more crucial for stakeholders within a given dialogue process — if we use the term 'process' as one acceptable way to express dialogue — is instead to understand dialogue the same way, so as to manage expectations and prevent tensions related to the purpose of dialogue.

3.2 Definitions and features of dialogue within IIED

Dialogue is a prominent feature within the portfolio of IIED's work, across many sectors and themes. The extent to which IIED's policy and action research programming integrates dialogue reflects the significance of dialogue as a core competency and value addition that IIED brings to collaboration with others. IIED implements many of its dialogue initiatives through partnerships, which is fitting with the ethos of dialogue as an inherently collaborative endeavour.

There are numerous examples of when and how IIED applies dialogue with similar, but not identical, iterations. Descriptions of how IIED uses dialogue largely focus on the 'how' (the process), the steps, the tools applied, the account of happenings (ie event reports, policy briefs, project reports) and the 'what next' (recommendations, actions and outcomes). The documents reviewed were not very explicit about the 'what' of dialogue. But still, the approaches to and purpose of dialogue are often described in detail. Interestingly, there are strong normative terms expressed when referencing dialogue, indicating that for IIED it is fundamentally driven by a set of underlying core values. This is in line with the idea of a common ethos presented above.

As with the external literature, it is challenging to find an overarching definition or key set of definitions for dialogue. Furthermore, the types of dialogue identified by IIED are so numerous that it seems that there are overlaps among them, and that they can be used interchangeably within the same initiative. There are also a range of functions that dialogue can play, often within the same initiative. There are 'dialogues within dialogues'. At times, dialogue is only a part of a wider programme (ie an action-research initiative) while at others, dialogue is the central programme focus.

3.3 Dialogue as a normative framework

Overall, there are no major differences in the way that external actors and IIED talk about dialogue, at least insofar as it is seen as a critical method to engage within a given policy agenda. The richness and diversity of definitions seen in the external literature is also mirrored in IIED's internal documentation. So is the tendency to see dialogue as an ethos — a set of aspirations and expectations about how people and groups should behave in their pursuit of a common good. This is a good starting point, but not enough if the purpose is to assess the effectiveness of dialogues. For this reason, one has to move from the notion of ethos to one that can provide more objective parameters for evaluation.

This review therefore considers IIED's approach to and use of dialogues as a normative framework. This allows moving beyond a single definition while retaining the aspirational elements implicit in the idea of ethos — the principles underpinning dialogue, such as transparency and reciprocity, and the overall vision for engaging in dialogue. The focus on a framework, however, implies the existence of both specific functions and features, which can be defined, compared and assessed.

Looking at dialogue as a normative framework is consistent with how much of the IIED literature references and unpacks this type of work. It acknowledges that dialogue is never a one-off event, but rather an integrated set of complementary and conditional phases of pre-dialogue preparation, dialogue sessions, post-dialogue activities and joint action. The phases may change or evolve in time; they may engage different stakeholders and apply different tools. Yet each initiative shares some common categories. These include features such as inclusion (who is brought in to the discussions and why) and participation (how are participants made to engage with IIED and each other), and functions or objectives that determine the direction of success. This is explored in the following sections.

4

Functions and features of IIED's dialogue

4.1 Functions

Defining dialogue as a normative framework helps to better reflect and capture the complexity of IIED's dialogue-based work. It also opens up new opportunities for analysis. In broad terms, the normative framework that defines dialogues can be said to include three elements: principles, functions and features.

Principles are what define the ethos of dialogue, as discussed in the previous section. **Functions** are the justifications or rationales for holding dialogues and **features** are specific facets of dialogue. Because the focus of this review is effectiveness, the analysis will look at functions and features.

IIED designs, supports and implements dialogue-based initiatives because these are functional to specific objectives or, more broadly stated, to a vision of progress and success. To better understand dialogue, it is therefore important to look at the functions that dialogue is supposed to have. These vary from initiative to initiative, even within the limited sample chosen for this review, as Table 2 shows.

Despite the great variety, some functions are common to all five initiatives. Given their limited number it is even possible to refer to these as the core functions of IIED's dialogue-based work, although an important caveat has to be made for the BBNJ initiative, which differs significantly from the others, as will be discussed later.

These core functions are:

- Creating horizontal (rather than vertical) spaces for information sharing, open discussions and networking.
- Using these horizontal spaces to give marginalised actors or stakeholder groups a voice.
- Increasing the understanding of local actors and dynamics (mainly for IIED, its partners in a dialogue initiative and the main participating stakeholder groups).
- Identifying or highlighting bottom-up and alternative solutions to relevant societal challenges.
- Producing a movement or critical mass towards such solutions (involving participating stakeholder groups but also a broader audience, which might change from initiative to initiative).

Additional functions exist, but these are common only to a sub-set of the initiatives, and extraneous to others. For example, under both the ASM initiative and the GEC, dialogues are supposed to build consensus around possible actions. However, for the CBA initiative, consensus is not a defining function. Conversely, a key function of CBA dialogues is to strengthen a community of practice, a function that is shared also with the GEC, but to a much lesser extent, and that is not part of the BBNJ. Finally, while there is

Table 2. Dialogue functions of the five IIED projects studied

| PROJECT NAME | SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS OF DIALOGUE |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) initiative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the actors, context, needs and opportunities To facilitate discussions among interest groups To find joint and actionable solutions To build consensus around a solution-oriented agenda To increase the level of trust among stakeholders To engage stakeholders around evidence To give voice to the marginalised To create a shared vision |
| Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) conference series | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To shift the balance of attention from internationally led, top-down adaptation initiatives to bottom-up, community-based approaches To build the capabilities of local NGOs and development partners to establish and scale up CBA initiatives To network and share information To influence policy, but only on certain occasions To build a community of practice For participants to increasingly take action |
| Participation in negotiations for an international treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support the LDC group of negotiators during the negotiation process To influence the BBNJ process To amplify the voice and concerns of LDCs |
| Green Economy Coalition (GEC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support the transition to a green economy To bring together people and organisations so that the transition can be discussed and advanced To foster social movement and stimulate societal demand To identify local actors To facilitate group reflection and action To test evidence To link national civil society organisations (CSOs) with policymakers around actionable solutions To find a common understanding To engage wider audiences on relevant issues |
| Support to national slum dwellers' federations (SDFs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create or strengthen relationships (between institutions and SDFs, and among SDFs) To strengthen the network of federations To engage government counterparts To generate data about services To establish a more equal and collaborative relationship between slum dwellers and authorities To show a different way with better solutions to urban slum challenges |

a general understanding that dialogues should have an awareness-raising or communication function, this varies from initiative to initiative.

One of the more interesting findings is that exercising influence does not appear to be a core function of dialogues. Influence, in this case, is intended as a latent function focused on convincing key stakeholders (usually governments) to alter their policies or

behaviours. The GEC and ASM have this function, and the general agreement for the CBA initiative is that dialogues can, and at times maybe should, lead to influence yet not always. Nor is influence its defining function. With the ASM initiative, having influence seems to be secondary to (and dependent on) creating trust. This tends to confirm that having influence is indeed an important function, but not a core one.

Another interesting finding is that, based on functions, IIED's participation in the BBNJ negotiation is an outlier. This initiative supports only a single stakeholder group, the negotiators from LDCs, and has a specific influence goal. It still shares some functions, mainly around giving voice to marginalised actors and understanding dynamics. Given these differences, is IIED's work on the BBNJ a dialogue? Interestingly, informants were split on this, divergences crystallising mostly around the nature of proceedings, and whether a negotiation is a dialogue.

Finally, it is important to note that different participants have different expectations — including about what a dialogue is and even what its functions are. There are for example different understandings of objectives between civil society participants and government representatives in the context of the ASM initiative, but also between the members of the GEC working on global processes and those working on national processes. In this respect, it is important to recognise that dialogues appear to allow for different, sometimes even contradictory, expectations to coexist. At the same time, however, there is also a sense that expectations should become aligned, at a given point, to make for an effective dialogue.

4.2 Features of dialogue

As with functions, there are many features that make up a dialogue. These features can be more subjective, since they are much more closely related to principles and the ethos of dialogue, and are therefore given different values by different stakeholders and participants. As a consequence, for the present review a decision was made to focus on only two features: inclusion and participation.

4.2.1 Inclusion

Inclusion is a key feature of dialogue, both in general and for each of the five case studies. It can be said to represent a defining feature in IIED's normative framework, as well as its vision for success: that is, if an initiative is not inclusive, then it is not a dialogue (or it is an ineffective dialogue).

The most common way to define inclusion is to look at underrepresented, marginalised and, in most cases, vulnerable groups. Inclusion is also always seen in relation to the specific societal challenges an initiative is aiming to address. It is striking to see how much overlap or convergence there is across the five initiatives. For example, all emphasise the importance of involving communities adversely affected by climate change and poverty. In several cases, the review found different initiatives working with the same counterparts: several national SDFs are regular participants at CBA conferences; and both GEC national partners and CBA international partners worked with the Global

Commission on Adaptation (GCA) in the lead-up to the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019.

The one initiative in which inclusion features most prominently is IIED's support to SDFs. Here, 'inclusion' means working with the poorest and most vulnerable communities, and giving them voice and power. So central is inclusion to how SDFs design and organise dialogues that it can be arguably seen as an objective. Indeed, how federations work appears to be in and of itself a generator of inclusion: all SDFs are in fact rooted in community-managed savings groups, comprising mostly of women. As federations feature a greater representation of women, this means that the participation of women in SDFs is also very significant, and that the focus of many of their interventions, for example in sanitation, includes a strong focus on the needs of women. Other interesting examples were also recorded, which could represent particularly positive standards under this feature. These include the work done within the CBA conferences to involve community representatives and within the ASM initiative to involve miners' representatives. Under the CBA initiative, youth conferences have also been organised to ensure that young people working on relevant issues had the chance to take part in the event, at least to some extent.

Importantly, some limitations to inclusion were also found. To begin with, not all activities are equally inclusive. Some, such as the research that is conducted under several initiatives, is not done in an inclusive manner. Inclusion also looks very different depending on the specific level at which an activity is supposed to take place. According to several interviewees, local dialogues appear to be the most inclusive, whereas national and global ones are the least inclusive. Within the ASM initiative, for example, there is a sense that the leadership and learning groups (LLGs), which are formed after the national dialogue has taken place, are less inclusive than the dialogues themselves.

Other challenges included:

- **Reaching the most marginalised**, as the truly excluded tend to be hidden groups. Conversely, this also leads to the dilemma of working directly with communities or with people representing them.
- **Geographic representation**: several interviewees lamented the lack of geographic representation, for example in the case of the CBA initiative, but also in the work by some of the national partners under the GEC (which focus on capital cities).
- **Inclusion of women**: in all initiatives this was recorded as a challenge, with the only exception being IIED's support to SDFs.
- **Language**: many noted that while the use of English is necessary in most initiatives, this represents a barrier for people fluent in other languages. This came

up mostly in the context of the CBA conferences, but also with the ASM initiative (although a conscious decision was made to use Swahili in the Tanzanian dialogues, leading to much more positive results).

Through the lens of inclusion, IIED's participation in the BBNJ negotiations continues to look like an outlier. Here, while the principle remains important, the context dictates a much narrower definition: the official negotiation process is, in fact, extremely hierarchical and very formal, which means that IIED has fewer to no opportunities to increase inclusion. The BBNJ example is nevertheless helpful to shed light on an interesting finding: there appears to be an inversely proportional relationship between inclusion, as a key feature, and specific functions. In other words, the data collected suggests that IIED might face trade-offs and compromises between achieving specific objectives and being inclusive, which would explain why certain initiatives are more inclusive and others less so, and also why even within specific initiatives inclusion might vary from one phase to the next.

In conclusion, while inclusion is a foundational feature of IIED's dialogues overall, the actual practice of inclusion varies across initiatives and also within initiatives. Inclusion might increase or decrease for reasons that have to do with the contexts in which initiatives are implemented, the nature of the initiatives themselves and the role IIED plays. What this analysis also suggests is the need to make a distinction between inclusion in processes and inclusion in outcomes. The former refers to the need to include specific — usually marginalised and vulnerable — voices in facilitated discussions, in order to support the creation of horizontal spaces. The latter refers instead to the need for decisions, as the main outcomes dialogues tend to pursue, to reflect the perspectives, interests and needs of those voices. Looking at the five initiatives, it seems that the former is important in the earlier phases of dialogues, while the latter becomes central to later phases, when dialogues start focusing on action.

4.2.2 Participation

Participation is also a foundational feature for dialogue efforts in all five initiatives. There is a clear relationship between inclusion and participation, in that both are seen as necessary to achieve a more horizontal space — one of the five core functions identified above. However, a definition of participation is less obvious, as this varies significantly from one case to the other. Clearly, participation has less of a normative value than inclusion, and there is, across the five case studies, a significantly greater margin for experimenting with formats and modes of participation. The best example is the CBA conferences, which operate under a mandate of ensuring that processes are as much as possible based on real-life experiences, and a common

understanding that this is the best way to make those dialogues effective.

There are some common elements, however. To begin with, all initiatives try to bring people together in different settings and in different configurations. For example, the GEC organises both national and international events. The ASM initiative has both single stakeholder and multistakeholder meetings and support to SDFs is articulated both in terms of national encounters and international exchanges. Secondly, participation is about how people are made to interact and work with each other, and as such it cuts across different activities. Thirdly, IIED favours and promotes interactive and hands-on methods to foster participation or 'participation as doing'. In this regard, the case of the CBA initiative sets the standard, and over the years CBA conferences have adopted some very innovative and creative techniques to ensure participation (such as the conference marketplace sessions, where participants showcase a tool or approach they have developed).

It is possible to also identify different levels of participation, as well as an intention behind IIED's efforts to push dialogue stakeholders in a specific direction (from less participative to more participative). The best example is the ASM initiative, whose four-phase structure assumes an increase in participation from the preparatory activities (where stakeholders are mostly consulted) to post-dialogue actions (where they are instead asked to co-decide). This ladder of participation can also be seen in other initiatives, including how the CBA conferences are organised, which is based on the work of a steering committee, a programme committee and various thematic-strand leaders. Similarly, IIED's work on the BBNJ process is about accompanying LDC negotiators from limited engagement to taking the lead. In all cases, the direction of change sought by IIED is towards more participation, with the goal being to get key stakeholders in a position to co-design and co-decide actions.

Some challenges were also recorded in relation to participation, however. These include:

- **Capacity of participants:** most interviewees agree that as participants come from very different backgrounds (a consequence of inclusion), they do not all have the same capacity to engage.
- **Resources:** more than inclusion, the practice of participation tends to be tied to the availability of resources (that is, the funds necessary to bring people together and create the settings where people can engage).
- **Consistency:** some interviewees expressed concerns about the consistency of participation. For example, within the CBA initiative, the quality of participation varies from conference to conference. Also, not all experimentation is effective.

- **Mobilisation:** there is a set of challenges related to the participation of others — those external to a dialogue, but still within the process's scope of influence.

In conclusion, participation is very important and a feature where IIED, on the whole, appears to set a high standard. Participation is less correlated with functions, compared to inclusion, to the extent that it is always seen as critical and it can be changed to fit the needs of specific contexts and initiatives.

4.3 Relationship between functions and features

There is clearly a relationship between functions on the one hand and inclusion and participation on the other, which determine the decisions that IIED makes in designing and implementing specific dialogues.

In terms of inclusion, this relationship can best be described by going back to the distinction made between inclusion in processes and inclusion in outcomes. The first is arguably more important to the core functions of creating horizontal spaces, giving a voice to marginalised actors and increasing understanding. As dialogues move towards action — when the functions become finding alternative solutions and producing movement — what becomes more important is the inclusion in outcomes. This is truer still for non-core functions. For example, one could argue that IIED's engagement in the BBNJ process is almost entirely focused on inclusion in outcomes: the initiative has, in fact, no control over the process or who takes part in it, but it is trying to ensure that the outcome from it reflects the interests and needs of some of the most vulnerable communities in the world. At the same time, it is important to stress that processes and outcomes are inherently linked.

Participation is always positively correlated with the performance of both core and non-core functions. It is, in other words, always necessary in order to progress towards success, regardless of how each specific initiative articulates this. However, if one looks at participation in terms of quality (ie level) and quantity (eg mobilisation) separately, a more nuanced relation takes shape. Quantity, or the number of people engaged, is more important for the core function of creating horizontal spaces and of producing critical mass or movement. In contrast, quality is more critical to the other four core functions (eg creating horizontal spaces, etc). Table 3 tries to capture the relationships between the core functions, inclusion, participation and the role that IIED plays.

In conclusion, as dialogues progress, there appears to be a progression from informality to formality, from discussion to action, and as this happens certain

trade-offs come to light, both in terms of inclusion and participation. A dialogue might, in other words, lose some of its defining features and stop being a dialogue altogether. In this sense, one could see a level of continuity between the five different initiatives, and even put them on a single continuum, starting with the emergence of inclusive and participative discourses for all actors and moving towards the targeting of political actors for specific policy changes. In this framework, the CBA initiative would be at one end (as an example of a dialogue focused on the creation of a wide horizontal space for all local actors), while IIED's engagement in the BBNJ negotiations would be at the other (being entirely focused on a single outcome related to international policy).

4.4 Role of IIED

Whether dialogues are designed and implemented in line with the approach described so far is also dependent on IIED itself. In a sense, the five initiatives — along with other dialogue-based efforts — are attempts to translate the normative framework into reality, and the role of IIED is therefore just as important a factor as functions and features.

In line with the bottom-up ethos, IIED sees its role in dialogue-based initiatives as being very specific. In all five initiatives, IIED acts mainly as a convener, at least in the initial stages. Beyond that, it interprets its role largely as a standard-bearer in relation to the principles of the approach and also to its features. In more practical terms, IIED's own perception is that of a silent partner, which performs various functions, but always in support of other actors. There is indeed a general consensus that one of the main strengths of IIED lies with the partners it works with, whose competencies and expertise the organisation supports and also complements.

IIED can also be viewed as an expert, although this was not necessarily expressed as such in interviews or even in the documents. This role emerges from IIED's clear track record and strong competencies on the issues at the centre of the five initiatives, and its awareness of its role as a leading knowledge generator. The decision to embark on a dialogue is often borne out of the fact that IIED believes it can engage on the substance of what will eventually be discussed. This might be seen as a relatively obvious conclusion, but it is important to note because it leads to several assumptions, not all of which are always recognised.

Overall, the role of IIED is highly appreciated. Speaking to partners, or simply reading some of the feedback recorded in documents, it is clear that IIED is seen in very much the same light as described above. In the CBA initiative, for example, partners truly appreciate how IIED balances its convening role with the need to give space for co-decisions to as many partners as

Table 3. Relationships between dialogue core functions, inclusion, participation and role of IIED

| CORE FUNCTIONS | INCLUSION | PARTICIPATION | ROLE OF IIED |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Creation of horizontal (rather than vertical) spaces | Dialogues should include people from all relevant stakeholder groups | Dialogues should aim to consult stakeholder groups and allow them to share information | Convener, facilitator, intermediary (local to local, local to global) |
| To give voice to marginalised actors or stakeholder groups | Dialogues should include underrepresented voices | Dialogues should allow people to interact as peers and share information | Convener, facilitator, enabler, supporter |
| To increase understanding of local actors and dynamics | Dialogues should include the views and information of all relevant stakeholder groups, including underrepresented voices | Dialogues should ensure that participants are consulted, share information and can inform the design of specific activities (eg research) | Expert, facilitator, communicator |
| To identify or highlight bottom-up and alternative solutions to relevant societal challenges | Dialogues should ensure that solutions reflect the needs, interests and concerns of all stakeholder groups, including underrepresented voices | Dialogues should ensure that participants are consulted, co-design solutions, and co-decide how to advance them | Expert, facilitator, supporter |
| To produce a movement or critical mass towards such solutions | Dialogues should ensure that movements act upon the needs, interests and concerns of all stakeholder groups, including underrepresented voices | Dialogues should allow some participants to co-decide and act as leaders | Facilitator, communicator, mobiliser, intermediary (local to global) |

possible. Under the GEC — and similarly with the ASM initiative and the engagement in the BBNJ negotiations — partners also recognised and stressed the value that came from being able to rely on IIED’s expertise and connections.

At the same time, the relationship between IIED and its partners is not always clear. In many cases, IIED selects partners based on their capacities given a project’s content and activities — that is, in terms of research and management skills. Partnerships are also based on previous relationships, and on their contextual status, for example partners’ ability to provide access to specific networks, groups, locations or expertise. An unintentional yet inevitable consequence of this pragmatic process is that it can lead to blind spots in terms of inclusion and participation. For example, some partners in the GEC are think tanks: they are very capable at analysis, but less so at outreach, and this has created challenges in terms of mobilisation. In the context of the CBA conferences, most contributors

(in terms of decision making and resources) are large international NGOs, not small CSOs, which limits inclusion. Also, IIED often assumes that partners have expertise and knowledge of specific contexts, yet this is not necessarily true in all cases, and where expertise is missing, there is a risk to the effectiveness of an entire dialogue process.

In conclusion, IIED’s relationship with and reliance on partners (and networks more broadly) sheds light on the issue of capacity. Assuming, in other words, the existence of different capacity levels among partners, to what extent do initiatives (and dialogue-based efforts) work to transfer skills and competencies from those who have them to those who do not? This remains unclear. There are some examples of training efforts, mainly in IIED’s work within the BBNJ process and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the ASM initiative, but this appears to be a weakness to address.

5

Effectiveness of IIED's dialogues

Whereas the previous sections sought to frame dialogues, this one looks at whether these were effective. This has been challenging on two counts: firstly, the dialogues that IIED organises, much like all social change initiatives, are harder to measure in terms of traditional markers of effectiveness and impact that tend to favour concrete outcomes more than process-based ones. Secondly, there is a tension, specific to dialogues, in speaking about outcomes because to some extent dialogues are not seen as necessarily requiring concrete outcomes in order to be successful. As such, the process can be an end in itself. To overcome these challenges, the review has focused on theories of change, which are better suited to speaking about what works (and what does not) in relation to social change.

5.1 Theories of change

5.1.1 Outcomes

First of all, the review identified common outcomes across all five initiatives. As with the analysis of functions, it was possible to identify a limited number of core outcomes:

- A new common agenda is created or shaped. All initiatives should bring about a change in the discourse, whether it is in relation to adaptation in the case of the CBA initiative, urban planning for SDFs or biodiversity in the high seas within the BBNJ process. Importantly, the agenda in this case refers to the understanding of a problem, and possible solutions to it, that exists among dialogue participants.
 - Networks and/or collaborative platforms are created or strengthened. This is a qualitative outcome related to the relationships that are created, or reinforced, among relevant actors. The best example of this is the community of practice that is central to the efforts of the CBA initiative; much of the work done in support of SDFs and under the GEC can also be seen as pursuing this outcome.
 - The capacity of key partners to engage on relevant themes and/or in specific fora is increased. This outcome is related to the idea of creating champions or, more broadly, increasing the participation of specific actors.
- There are then some additional outcomes, which cannot be defined as core since they are not common to all initiatives, but are nevertheless relevant to most. They are:
- New evidence is introduced. This outcome is often linked to shaping the agenda and it refers to efforts to create and disseminate previously unavailable evidence.
 - Increased understanding. Related to the above, several initiatives aim to increase the understanding of key stakeholder groups about specific issues.
 - Increased engagement of government representatives. Separately from the focus on networks, most initiatives seek to establish relations with government officials, as this is seen as critical to pursuing social change goals.
 - Increased trust. This outcome is linked to the one above, and refers mainly to the relationships

between NGOs and government representatives, and the idea of restoring sustainable collaborations between the two groups.

- Influence over policies. Two of the case study initiatives have a specific outcome related to shaping or influencing policies by governmental actors.

Finally, there is one last outcome, more undefined than the others as it relates to the long-term impact of IIED's work. This outcome focuses on changes in practice and behaviours at societal level — what the GEC defines, in some of its documents, as societal demand for change. This outcome is related to influencing policies, in that the level of change is the same, but it assumes a different pathway, one that is entirely bottom-up and the result of engaging, mobilising and convincing a critical mass of people or actors.

5.1.2 Logic of change

Each of the five initiatives has its own logic for how change will be promoted. In this context, using theories of change is a decision made exclusively for the purposes of this review. For example, only two of the five initiatives have articulated their theories of change in a formal way, whereas the others looked at the logic of change to varying degrees and in different ways. What the review has therefore done is try to review and rebuild the theories of changes of all initiatives in order to compare them, and eventually see if a general metatheory of change could be assembled for IIED's dialogue work. To get to this point, some interpretation was necessary, as well as a level of simplification. Nevertheless, the building blocks for this analysis have remained grounded in the information collected from key informants and documents.

To begin with, it is important and useful to look at how the different initiatives describe the domains where they believe change ought to happen. These vary: the GEC, for example, has been described as working on four different levels: "To foster movement-based change, GEC processes must enable such conversation at micro level, at meso level, at macro level and between all these levels."⁵ The CBA initiative also talks about multiple levels in trying to explain its pathway to change:

At 'village/street/community' where autonomous responses to ongoing changes or unexpected hazards take place every day, with or without the interventions of government, the NGOs or private sector. In depth knowledge of the nature of local responses, and how to facilitate sustainable adaptation, can only come from the lived experience of those communities. At 'local level', where climate impacts shape the context in which local governments and CSOs respond to crises or adjust strategies to manage change, and

*where local businesses may capitalise on or fail to adapt. At national level, where centrally driven programmes, policies and finance are directed towards strategic goals set through a range of processes of varying degrees of transparency and impact. At international level, where the agendas set key enabling factors such as finance, target setting and widespread capacity building.*⁶

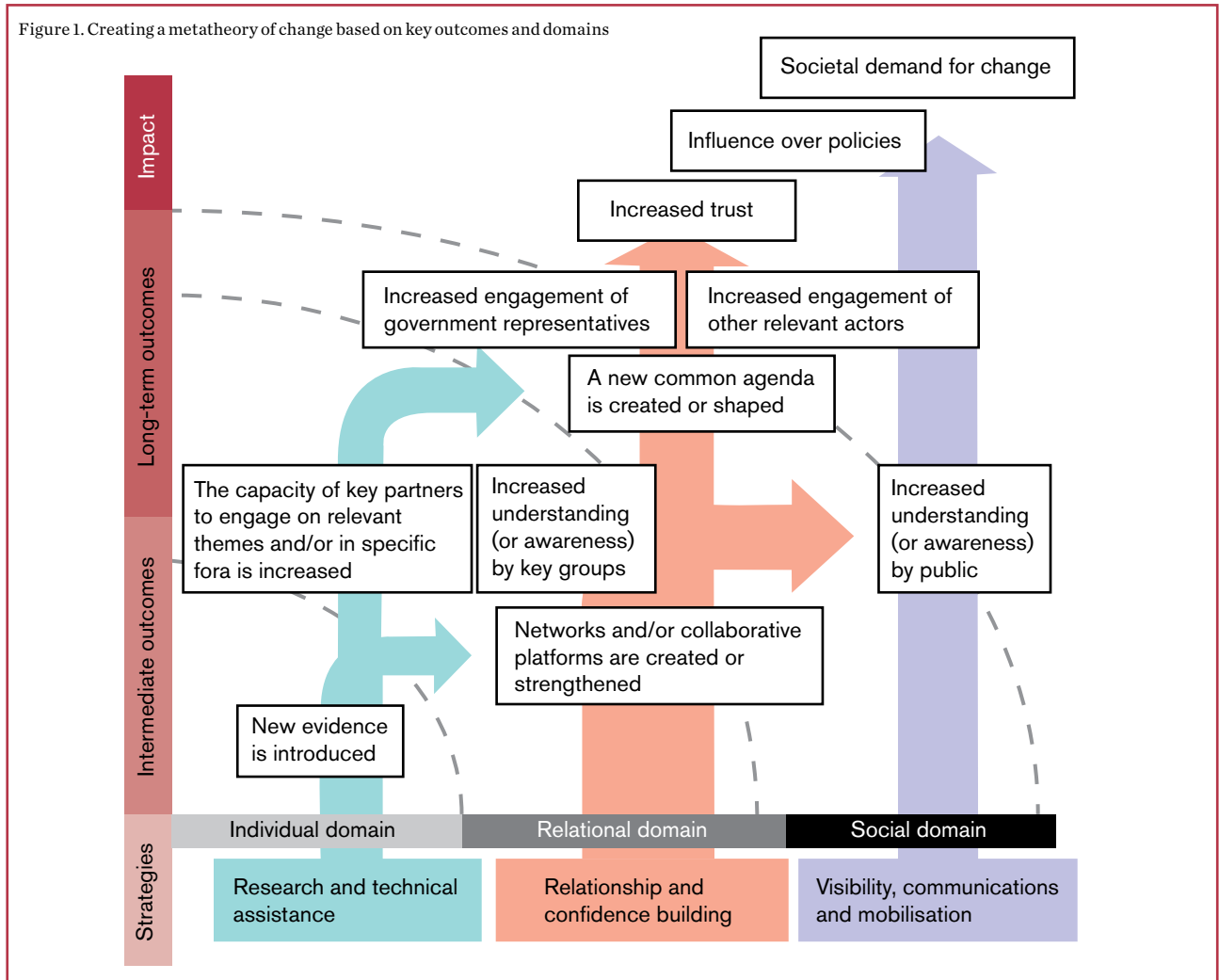
In general, all initiatives see their work as promoting changes across several different but interlinked domains. On the basis of the data collected for the review, three domains of change were identified, common to all initiatives: the individual domain, which refers to changes within participants (eg in their knowledge or awareness); the relational domain, which focuses on changes in how people and institutions relate and work with one another; and the social domain, which focuses on changes related to policies and people's behaviours. Furthermore, there is a correlation between these domains and logical levels of change: individual changes are mainly linked to relational changes; and the latter in turn lead to social changes. To use a concrete example, the creation of a network is in most initiatives a step towards influencing debates and agendas, and, eventually, policies.

With the outcomes and the domains of change clarified, it is possible to build a metatheory of change. This is presented in Figure 1.

The theory of change is structured along horizontal and vertical axes — the former covering the logical levels of change, the latter the domains. All core and common outcomes are included, with the additional outcome of increased engagement of other relevant actors — which did not come up in interviews too often, but appeared to be critical. The diagram is useful to identify three core strategies, common to all initiatives:

- Knowledge generation: this refers to what IIED does in terms of research. This then supports capacity building, network creation and, in the longer term, the shaping of new agendas. One example of this is the research produced in the context of the BBNJ negotiation, a technical output that served to galvanise discussions during the LDC negotiations.⁷
- Relationship and confidence building: these form the central strategy, with IIED acting as a convener, facilitator and enabler to bring together different people and get them to engage with each other. Work under the CBA initiative and the support to learning exchanges among SDFs and the GEC are all examples of this. Building relationships is, however, an incremental process, and a key part of this strategy is to build confidence and trust.
- Visibility, communications and mobilisation: the last strategy covers efforts to increase visibility around specific issues or efforts, with the aim of enlisting

Figure 1. Creating a metatheory of change based on key outcomes and domains



more supporters. In some cases, as in the early stages of the CBA conferences and the GEC, it also covers efforts to mobilise other actors, such as small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Peru. Increasing public support is also a way to gain leverage against more antagonistic forces.

The metatheory of change also provides a framework to organise assumptions. In particular, it is possible to make a distinction between those assumptions that relate to logical levels, and those that relate to domains of change. In relation to logical levels, the main assumptions identified are:

- Key stakeholders have the time and interest to commit to taking part in initiatives
- Dialogue processes have sufficient latitude and flexibility to be relevant to all stakeholders
- Partners have the capacity to engage during and also beyond the life cycle of a given initiative
- Resources exist and are available to support dialogue-based processes at least until they become self-sustaining, and

- IIED and its partners have a strong reputation and can transfer this to multistakeholder processes.

In relation to domains of change, the main assumptions identified are:

- Key stakeholders and partners have an interest in meeting others and engaging in difficult conversations
- Good ideas and solutions are sufficient to draw attention and sway supporters both among specialised communities and the general public
- Specific target groups, mainly government representatives and policymakers, are willing to relinquish power and control over issues or policies
- Principles linked to communities of practice (and dialogue processes) remain reflected in concrete policies, and
- The sociopolitical environment, in selected countries and globally, remains sufficiently open to allow for evidence-based advocacy.

In conclusion, one of the key lessons from IIED's metatheory of change for dialogue-based efforts is

that the two domains of change it pursues are actually related. What IIED's dialogues aim to do, in fact, is shift the dotted line (shown in Figure 1) from left to right, as this is largely the direction of success. Questions still remain, however, for example around the relationship between outcomes and strategies, which should be further explored. The analysis has also not yet focused on additional domains — including the local, sub-national or global — which are important to some initiatives and require specific strategies.

5.2 Evidence of effectiveness and impact

The last question under this review, related to the effectiveness and impact of dialogues, has been addressed using a specific theory-based evaluation methodology: Contribution Analysis (see Box 1). This approach requires a theory of change to be in place, as shown in the previous section, and then focuses on identifying evidence of contribution to change. For this review, Contribution Analysis was not applied in ideal circumstances, which would require a greater level of specificity than was possible. Nevertheless, the method remains useful, as it provides a more granular answer to how and why change happened, and could be used to evaluate similar efforts in the future.

From the five initiatives, two case studies were selected where specific outcomes were identified as a basis for assessing effectiveness using Contribution Analysis: the influence of the GEC on UN-PAGE; and the participation of the GCA at the CBA Conference in 2019 (CBA13).

5.3 Case study: the influence of the GEC on UN-PAGE

5.3.1 The outcome and problem statement

One of the strategies of the GEC is to coordinate with UN-PAGE, which “was launched in 2013 as a response to the call at Rio+20 to support those countries wishing to embark on greener and more inclusive growth trajectories”.⁸ A coordination platform, UN-PAGE currently works in 18 countries, including five where the GEC has national hubs (India, Mongolia, Peru, Senegal and South Africa).

Over the years, GEC members have sought to build relationships with UN-PAGE officials, globally and in specific countries, to “ensure the national green economy processes run by UN-PAGE and others hears the clear, informed, and constructive voice of civil society”.⁹ This engagement was increased in 2019, when the GEC decided to hold its annual meeting

to coincide with the UN-PAGE annual ministerial conference, which was scheduled in January 2019. Consequently, GEC members decided to devote part of the internal meeting “to discussing the themes and outcomes of the UN conference, and ensuring that the voices of real citizens and ordinary voters are heard at the highest levels of the ministerial event — making sure that everyone gets a stake in the green economy”.¹⁰

According to several GEC members, one of the main outcomes from the internal meeting and participation in UN-PAGE's ministerial conference was a greater recognition on the part of government and UN representatives of the importance of inclusion in designing and implementing green economy policies. The question then is, to what extent has the GEC contributed to greater acceptance of inclusion by UN-PAGE?

5.3.2 The causal chain

In line with the metatheory of change and the specific aspects relating to the GEC, the following causal chain has been developed in relation to the outcome, comprising seven separate mechanisms:

1. IIED convenes and supports the establishment of GEC national hubs.
2. National GEC hubs engage stakeholders and mobilise support for specific wedge issues that are framed by a desire for green economy transition.
3. National GEC hubs take action, while building relations with UN-PAGE representatives locally and globally.
4. GEC supports and contributes to analysis of challenges and opportunities for inclusion.
5. GEC and its hubs' partners use evidence and momentum from their work to develop strong common messages to use with government and UN-PAGE officials.
6. UN-PAGE officials recognise the importance of inclusion in green economy policies.
7. Governments design policies for green economy transitions that are inclusive.

5.3.3 Existing evidence in support of IIED's contribution

There is good evidence in support of the causal chain. In relation to mechanisms 1 and 2, it is clear that the GEC has supported the establishment of national hubs, and that IIED in particular had a significant role in this, mobilising financial resources and acting as a catalyst and supporter to national partners. Under the third mechanism, there is also evidence of strong engagement with UN-PAGE officials, at both global and national

levels. One project report, for example, highlights how the South African national partners “are collaborating with UN-PAGE in conducting the South Africa dialogues. They have regular meetings with the UN-PAGE team and other development partners — such as GIZ, AFD, USAID¹¹ — to ensure complementarity of efforts”.¹²

Collaboration in knowledge creation is also an important point for mechanism 4, with the GEC having a strong record of knowledge creation. In this context, several interviewees (internal and external) talked about the paper *Pro-poor, inclusive green growth: experience and a new agenda* published by IIED in May 2016, which was widely read and positively received.¹³ An evaluation report noted that “stakeholders such as PAGE and the Green Growth Knowledge Platform (GGKP), acknowledge the quality of the work being done by the GEC in terms of developing a robust theory on the transition to green economy and the quality in the communication for the messages on green economy being understood”.¹⁴

In relation to mechanism 5, the participation of GEC delegates was strong. For example, during each ministerial conference a media debate is usually organised. At the 2019 event, this session was convened by the GEC together with other partners.¹⁵ And the decision to hold the annual meeting right before the UN-PAGE conference provided an opportunity for GEC partners to define a common agenda and messages. Similarly, some interviewees mentioned that the GEC was involved in preparing background briefings.

For mechanism 6, there is strong evidence supporting IIED’s effectiveness in that the outcome document from the official conference puts “[reinventing] our economies as inclusive green economies” as the first priority and order of business.¹⁶

Finally, for mechanism 7, it was difficult to gather sufficient evidence. This may exist: for example, the UN-PAGE website reports a news item about its contribution to green economy legislation passed in Mongolia and Peru, two countries where GEC national hubs are also operating.¹⁷ However, this review could not confirm the latter’s involvement.

5.3.4 Existing evidence against IIED’s contribution

Evidence has also been identified that casts doubt on IIED’s contribution story. In terms of mechanisms 1 to 4, some interviewees raised concern about the timing of efforts, drawing attention to several delays that were encountered in setting up national hubs. Under mechanism 2, there is also some evidence of partners having limited success in mobilising support for a green economy. As an evaluation report notes, “in South Africa and the Caribbean the dialogues are directed towards Objective 1 [inclusive civil society movements to support

the development and adoption of green economy policies], but in India they are not structured yet in a way to lead to coordinated civil society mobilisation and tangible policy demands”.¹⁴

Under mechanism 3, the role of external actors, networks and forces also has to be acknowledged, with several of them (for example the GGKP) having established their own contacts with UN-PAGE officials. For mechanism 5, the review did not find a reference to specific key messages developed either before or during the annual meeting. The briefing note on inclusion, which the GEC secretariat prepared for the annual meeting, has a section on why inclusion matters and one on policy headlines — yet these are phrased only as questions.¹⁸ For mechanism 6, the main evidence against the contribution story is that inclusion appears to have been on UN-PAGE’s agenda long before the 2019 conference. For this reason, it is difficult to assess whether the conclusion to that event represented a significant change. Finally, for mechanism 7, several interviewees suggested that UN-PAGE might not have a significant influence on national policies, and that the conferences might not be that valuable in pushing forward the green economy agenda.

5.3.5 Conclusion

The evidence collected for this case study validates some of the mechanisms — IIED supported the building of hubs, the consolidation of the GEC and the production of relevant research — all of which contributed to shaping a common discourse. But the strength of the agenda and the mobilisation of other actors, including on the government side, have been difficult to evaluate. Overall, the evidence collected is still too broad to validate the causal chain and confirm IIED’s contribution story as a whole. This said, some challenges have been identified, including the fact that there are many stakeholders to engage, but only a few hubs (which hinders mobilisation), and the coordination of activities between different levels (local, provincial, national, regional). In other words, what does the investment in influencing UN-PAGE conferences do for those efforts rooted at national or sub-national level? This remains unclear, with related implications for impact.

5.4 Case study: the participation of representatives of the GCA at CBA13

5.4.1 The outcome and problem statement

The CBA conferences were launched in 2006 with the aim of bringing community-based adaptation to the fore

of the climate change agenda. At the time, the discourse was dominated by mitigation and even when adaptation was discussed, grassroots initiatives were seldom considered. This was a general problem: international organisations, governments and large NGOs were all unaware of the links between poverty and climate change. The CBA conferences wanted therefore to shift attention to community-based adaptation, starting with civil society, then on to governments and national and international policymakers. Thirteen years later, in 2018, the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) was officially launched, a global endeavour under the responsibility of former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Bill Gates and the-then World Bank chief executive officer Kristalina Georgieva.¹⁹ The GCA “seeks to accelerate adaptation action and support by elevating the political visibility of adaptation and focusing on concrete solutions”,²⁰ and reported on its findings at the UN Climate Summit in September 2019. In the lead up to CBA13 in April 2019, the GCA sent an official letter to IIED requesting to participate in the conference.

This request and the participation of such a high-profile body in the CBA initiative has been seen by many organisers as a milestone, both in terms of the value that CBA conferences have come to have, and of the recognition that has finally been given to community-based adaptation. The question then is, to what extent has IIED, through the CBA conferences, contributed to this key outcome?

5.4.2 The causal chain

In line with the metatheory of change and the specific aspects relating to the CBA initiative, the following causal chain has been developed in relation to the above-described outcome, comprising eight separate mechanisms:

1. IIED and partners lead the organisation of the annual CBA conferences.
2. The conferences enable CBA best practice to be showcased (new evidence is introduced).
3. The conferences increase the understanding of individual participants.
4. The conferences allow relationships to be built between participants and organisations (relational domain).
5. The conferences enable a community of practice to coalesce (networks are created).
6. An agenda is shaped by participants, with messages integrated into communications and outreach material, and used to engage actors outside the community of practice.
7. The CBA agenda gains legitimacy and value, attracting the attention of other actors and forces, including the GCA.

8. CBA is adopted by national and international policymakers.

5.4.3 Existing evidence in support of IIED's contribution

Good evidence has been found to support IIED's contribution story. In relation to mechanisms 1, 2 and 3, informants and documents both confirm a steady level of growth, which is easily measured in terms of number of participants, organisational partnerships and topics discussed. The growth, importantly, is also qualitative, relating both to the type of participants involved (itself an indicator of inclusion) and the formats for discussions (an indicator of participation). Conferences have clearly provided one of the better international showcases of CBA solutions and projects available.

There is also good evidence for mechanisms 4 and 5. A report looking at CBA's community of practice found that “the current [CBA] community does reflect the ‘knowing in action’ that characterises a community of practice. Moreover, the group's activities match six typical functions of a community of practice: serving as filters, amplifiers, conveners, facilitators, community builders, and investors and providers. The network of CBA conference participants thus seems to represent a bona fide community of practice”.²¹

Evidence for mechanism 6 is more difficult to gauge, however. Interviewees confirmed that community-based adaptation has become more prominent over the years, as reflected in the establishment of the GCA itself. At the same time, other larger and more influential forces have contributed to shifting attention to adaptation. This includes the launch of the national adaptation plans (NAPs) process established in the context of Cancun Adaptation Framework (a UN and government initiative).²² At the same time, NGOs have been able to take part in the NAPs process, including IIED through the LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR) project,²³ and this could lend support to IIED's contribution story, though more evidence is needed.

The evidence for mechanism 7 has similar challenges. On the positive side, GCA representatives did send a specific request to IIED, and then participated — Kristalina Georgieva herself took part (via a pre-recorded message), stating: “To safeguard our present and future, we must support communities around the globe as they work to build resilience”.²⁴ No evidence for mechanism 8 could be collected at this time, as this was beyond the scope of the review.

5.4.4 Existing evidence against IIED's contribution

Relevant evidence was also found against the contribution story. For mechanisms 1 to 5, several

interviewees noted that the CBA initiative is only one of several that has tried to push adaptation to the fore of the policy agenda over the last 15 years. Another initiative, for example, is the Adaptation Futures conference,²⁵ which shares many of the aims of CBA, but is larger in terms of participants. Interviewees, who are all adaptation experts, were generally not comfortable in giving too much credit to the CBA events, although they all noted that, in terms of format, CBA conferences are indeed unique (Adaptation Futures events are more academic, whereas CBA ones are practitioner focused).²⁶ For mechanism 6, the limitations have already been discussed. For mechanism 7, the main limitation is with the specificity of GCA's request: it is unclear how much this may have been driven by a general sense of engagement, as opposed to a desire to be at CBA13 specifically. Additionally, and this is important for the purposes of the theory of change, CBA organisers allowed GCA representatives to take part only under certain conditions, to safeguard participation. The fact that GCA representatives agreed to participate even with conditions lends support to the idea that CBA enjoys a specific legitimacy, but it also indicates that the path to influence (ie in relation to mechanism 8) is more nuanced, and that it may include additional steps.

5.4.5 Conclusion

There is evidence to confirm IIED's contribution story and it is a testament to the positive success that a dialogue can have. This is also a really good example of how inclusion and participation are linked to effectiveness, at least in relation to the core functions of creating horizontal spaces and identifying bottom-up solutions. The main challenges are with mechanisms 6 to 8. In this case, there is a clear lack of evidence, although this could be easily gathered. More important is the fact that in the CBA initiative's theory of change there might be an additional outcome, unexplored for now, which relates to how the community of practice should become something more similar to an advocacy group in order to transform the leverage generated by increased legitimacy into actual influence.

5.5 Success factors and challenges

The analysis of the two case studies is useful to identify several success factors, as well as challenges, which are common to all five initiatives. These factors and challenges are important to keep in mind, as they may represent opportunities to evolve the work of the organisation and make it more impactful.

5.5.1 Success factors

The communities of practice or collaborative networks that IIED contributes to represent a first and extremely

important success factor. Dialogue is, in fact, primarily seen as producing relational changes, and communities and networks are the most concrete and obvious indicators for this type of work. Their importance, however, goes beyond this: in the metatheory of change, the creation of communities of practice can, in fact, be seen as a reinforcing feedback loop — that is, an action that reinforces or expands a desired outcome. Communities of practice, once created, allow IIED to reach far more people, partners and actors than the organisation would be capable of reaching by itself. The CBA conferences are a clear example of this loop and the benefits that it can have: with the community of practice now safely in place, IIED can in fact count on dozens of partners across the world to engage peers on the issue of community-based adaptation and galvanise common action.

Linked to the above is a second success factor: dialogues increase resilience. Where dialogue-based efforts are locally owned and based on healthy relationships, they can help participants to respond to key challenges and adapt to new situations. This is already evident in the CBA case study discussed in the previous section. It is also, however, a factor that can be seen in the work of the ASM initiative in Ghana: there, according to several interviewees, a change in government following the completion of the dialogue phase had threatened to derail the initiative (as the mining sector became the focus of negative government attention), but IIED and its partners were able to reconvene and adapt to the new situation.

A last success factor is participation. This was cited as a highlight in all initiatives, and is clearly linked to IIED's bottom-up approach to dialogue. Participation has been very effective at promoting engagement on the part of different stakeholder groups, building a sense of ownership, and facilitating the search for common and practical solutions.

5.5.2 Challenges

If communities of practice represent a reinforcing loop, the nature of engagements with government counterparts creates a balancing feedback loop — that is, an action that counters or undoes a desired outcome. The scenario tends to follow the same script regardless of the context: IIED and its partners build a process that is trusted, use this trust to engage government officials and eventually succeed in creating allies and supporters in key institutions, only to see these individuals move on, to different positions or departments, nullifying years' worth of dialogues and taking IIED back to the starting point. The nature of working with governments is largely the same across contexts, and poses a continuous challenge for effective dialogue-based work, including efforts by national SDFs to work with municipal officials.

A second important challenge is with inclusion. Time and again, interviewees noted how, in spite of IIED's best intentions and efforts, there remains a limit to the type and number of people engaged in dialogues. As already discussed, inclusion, in its truest form, seems to remain out of reach. This is in part because of logistical demands, as initiatives need to progress on account of donor commitments and organisational obligations, and in part because of the inherent difficulty of engaging the truly vulnerable. This would require a completely different approach to how people are brought together. In this sense, there are indicators that the efforts of the national SDFs have been successful in terms of inclusion. They are grassroots movements organised by and for the people they represent, including the poorest and most vulnerable and could therefore serve as a model to explore and replicate.

Finally, the last challenge is in relation to resources and capacities. Interviewees all agreed that resources for dialogues are seldom sufficient to operate at an ideal scale — reaching an appropriate number of people and holding an appropriate number of events, and having the necessary time to complete the process. Even the CBA initiative, which provides financial assistance so that more vulnerable partners can take part, still has to set a fee for all other participants. This fee can be well beyond the means of a grassroots organisation. Linked to this is the challenge of capacities: dialogues require much facilitation, coordination and communication, skills that are often in short supply not just among partners, but also within IIED.

6

Conclusions and recommendations

The more IIED increases efforts to use dialogue to promote transformative change, the more important it becomes to understand how and when such efforts can be most effective. The present review contributed to this by defining key characteristics of dialogues, and by examining whether they are effective. Positively, it has found that while there is no single definition of dialogue, given the diversity and richness of IIED's experiences, this can nevertheless be seen as a normative framework comprising three different elements: the principles that define the dialogue ethos, such as transparency and equality; the functions that describe the objectives or aims of a dialogue; and the features — in particular inclusion and participation — that represent essential aspects of dialogues.

The review was also able to develop a single metatheory of change, which encapsulates all of IIED's dialogue work. As a simplified framework, this does not fully capture the complexity of what IIED tries to do, but it helps to clarify the general pathway of change as bi-dimensional, with several interlocked outcomes on the one hand, and at least three domains of change (individual, relational and social) on the other. The evidence collected to validate the theory of change, which focused on two case studies (the CBA conferences and the GEC), provided a still more granular view of what is working effectively, and what is not, in IIED's use of dialogue.

The following recommendations aim firstly to improve the effectiveness and impact of dialogues, and secondly, to further increase IIED's own understanding of how and why dialogues can lead to transformative change.

- **Support the development of a common language or framework to analyse dialogue.** One of the main hurdles faced during the review was taking stock and then trying to harmonise the many different ways in which dialogue is conceptualised and described within IIED. This diversity can actually be seen across the whole external literature review — it is not, in other words, a problem just for the organisation. But it remains a problem, hindering experience and information sharing. As such, IIED should seek to develop a single vocabulary to talk about dialogue, using this review as a starting point.
- **Create common or shared guidelines for the design of dialogues.** A more practical recommendation, linked to the above, would be to create common guidelines for designing dialogues. As IIED continues to design and implement dialogues, and as these efforts are spearheaded by new staff and partners who might not be as familiar with dialogues as those who have been already involved in relevant initiatives, a set of guidelines would represent a useful tool. This need not be a formal document, but could rather be shaped as an internal, 'living' document, to be regularly updated based on new experiences and lessons learnt. How this review categorises functions, features and outcomes could represent a starting point for the development of such guidelines.
- **Invest in more systematic learning.** Many initiatives centred on the use of dialogue have remained outside the scope of learning exercises, including evaluations. This means that relevant experiences, such as IIED's support to SDFs, have not yet been the subject of reflection — at least not

in relation to dialogue specifically — or contributed to informing how dialogues can be most effective. However, ensuring that evaluations of relevant initiatives are regularly conducted will be one of the most effective ways to continue expanding the body of knowledge on the effectiveness of dialogue.

- **Focus on capacity building.** Finally, IIED has accumulated much practical knowledge about the design and implementation of dialogues. At the same time, there remain critical needs on the part of staff members and partners, for example in relation to facilitation skills. IIED should therefore devote more attention to building capacity for the effective implementation of dialogues. It could also use capacity building as a key indicator of progress, at least in relation to changes in the individual domain.

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This report explores how IIED uses dialogue to create change towards a fairer and more sustainable world. What does IIED specifically mean by the term 'dialogue' — and how effective are its dialogue-based efforts? This report is a first attempt to generate learning to illuminate current practice and inform future work. It explores the different definitions, functions and features of dialogue and examines the theory of change behind IIED's dialogue-based initiatives, while findings from two case studies examine their effectiveness. The report concludes with key recommendations: support a new common language or framework to analyse dialogue; create common guidelines for designing dialogues; and invest in systematic learning and capacity building for staff.

IIED is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED is based in London and works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, with some of the world's most vulnerable people. We work with them to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them — from village councils to international conventions.



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