



periodistas  
x el planeta

## 2024 IPBES Transformative Change Assessment

Last updated Nov 2024

The [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) (IPBES, considered the [IPCC](#) for biodiversity) will launch its Transformative Change Assessment on [18 December 2024](#). Recognising that achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity – part of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) adopted by 196 countries at COP15 in 2022 – and human development goals [will require significant changes in how societies function and develop](#), the thematic assessment will present a conceptual framework for a system-wide, fundamental reorganisation of our world to achieve long-term global sustainability, referred to as ‘[transformative change](#)’. The assessment will take a deep look at the underlying causes of biodiversity loss, what is needed to achieve transformative change, and how to reach the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity.

The assessment has been built from inter- and multi-disciplinary evidence by leading international experts from many countries and will provide policy-relevant findings and options for decision makers. It has been through an [extensive review process](#) that started in 2021, including multiple rounds of external and internal review, involving experts from research, Indigenous groups, civil society and businesses. The process will conclude with a line-by-line negotiation of the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) by IPBES Member States during the [plenary meeting](#), taking place from 10th to 16th December in Windhoek, Namibia.

**In preparation for the release of the IPBES Transformative Change Assessment, and based on the current [report outline](#), this briefing summarises key existing evidence on why transformative change is needed and the leverage points that can be used to move towards transformative change.**

1. We need a transformative response to address the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss

**Evidence is accumulating that transformative change toward a just and sustainable future is needed urgently, as current attempts to reform systems are failing.** [Biodiversity is declining rapidly](#) while [climate change and associated impacts are accelerating](#), with devastating consequences on the planet and human societies. The risk of hitting climate [tipping points](#) – [beyond which major, usually irreversible changes](#) will occur – is particularly dangerous, as this could lead to “[high societal costs](#).” Multiple, synchronised crises are arising more frequently and [cascading into other systems and crises](#), creating even [larger, more complex and interconnected crises](#). For example, nutrient concentrations in water are being increased by human activities, such as fertiliser runoff. When concentrations pass a certain threshold they trigger cascading impacts that lead to [low oxygen levels in water](#), devastating fisheries and marine ecosystems.

Current policies to tackle the causes of biodiversity loss are not fit for purpose, as they do not have a clear vision of [exactly how policies can make change, are not at scale](#), or are [not properly implemented](#). Failing to act will come with a high price tag – it is estimated that initiatives to stop biodiversity loss will [cost twice as much](#) if they are delayed by ten years.

2. Past IPBES reports have identified leverage points for transformative change

Despite efforts to protect biodiversity, **some pervasive root causes of biodiversity loss continue to impede progress** towards achieving the 2050 Vision for Biodiversity. These causes were highlighted in the IPBES [2022 Methodological assessment of the diverse values and valuation of nature](#) (IPBES Values

Assessment) and the [2019 IPBES Global Assessment Report](#), which identified key leverage points to counter them:

**The IPBES Values Assessment noted that transformative change “relies on shifting away from predominant values that currently [over-emphasize short term and individual material gains](#).”** In business and policymaking, [decision making is short-sighted](#) and often focused on [satisfying shareholders](#) instead of supporting long-term sustainability for society at large. This prioritisation has also influenced which solutions to societal challenges have been promoted: solutions that focus on individual action (like [carbon footprint calculators](#)) have been prioritised over systemic solutions that use [deep leverage points](#) to provoke big, paradigmatic changes. Using [deep leverage points to change the intent of the system](#), including the goals, values and world-views that orient a system, may require policymakers and businesses to rethink their priorities or success metrics. Even commonly-used [metrics for measuring economic success](#) reflect the priorities of current systems: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) counts annual economic activity as an indicator of prosperity or success, excluding, for example, the value of nature and its importance for human wellbeing.

**The 2019 IPBES Global Assessment also identified the need to [embrace diverse visions of a “good life”](#) to move towards transformative change.** Creating [narratives and stories about the future](#), which involves [thinking imaginatively](#), can encourage movement towards more just and sustainable societies. Visioning exercises with key stakeholders, like [young people](#), can help “[chart the course for a better future](#).” Narratives need to include [diverse knowledge systems and values](#), particularly those of Indigenous Peoples. [The arts](#) and new forms of media can help shape and communicate these stories, and [holistic sustainability education](#), from both traditional institutions and local and Indigenous sources, can also play an important role in shaping views that have an impact on behaviour.

**The 2019 IPBES Global Assessment highlighted [reducing inequalities as a key leverage point](#) for transformative change.** The [political, social and economic inequities between and within countries](#) are a fundamental barrier to transformative change because those with power and resources invest in maintaining the status quo in order to protect their positions and influence. The [top 1% of the global population held 37.8%](#) of total wealth in 2021, whereas the bottom 50% held just 2%. Those with “[interests vested in the status quo](#)” use their power to oppose transformative change, for example by [funding philanthropies to counter action on climate change](#).

### 3. Past examples of sweeping societal changes – like those provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic – show that transformative change is possible

**Societal norms and world views can evolve, kickstarting transformative change.** The COVID-19 pandemic was [a crisis that exposed](#) the structural weaknesses in our societies, including in [healthcare systems](#) and [supply chains](#). However, it also demonstrated that in the face of an acute crisis, our societies are capable of [transformative change](#). During the pandemic, societies [changed what they consumed](#) – although not always for the better – and changed how they connected, [reducing transport use and transport emissions](#), and [increasing screentime](#). Some policies that were put into place aimed to make long-lasting shifts towards more sustainable lifestyles and economies, like the [NextGenerationEU package](#). At the same time, these large-scale changes came with negative outcomes: [over 7 million lives were lost](#) worldwide, [education was disrupted](#) and [gender inequalities were exacerbated](#).

According to the [outline of the Transformative Change assessment](#), it will provide more case studies on how transformative change has happened in the past, taking into account positive and negative outcomes from these changes and including Indigenous and local knowledge. Previous work by IPBES has shown [the need for multi-sectoral planning and inclusive governance](#), with the aim of making future transformative change more planned than the [flurry of emergency measures](#) introduced in response to COVID-19.

### 4. We must support and work with Indigenous Peoples to uphold justice and equity

**[Sustainability and equity are deeply intertwined](#).** Considering them together, including in research, [contributes to transformative pathways](#). In practice, this means that both [procedures \(e.g. how decisions are made\)](#) and [outcomes \(e.g. who gets access to resources\)](#) should be equitable. Excluding the

principle of justice in some climate change mitigation projects has [caused significant harm to communities](#). Rights-based approaches that uphold that [nature has rights](#) can also be a powerful tool to advance justice for all and shift human relationships with nature.

**Indigenous Peoples are often actively involved in protecting nature**, with [40% of protected land](#) and intact landscapes managed by Indigenous groups. Globally, Indigenous Peoples and local communities invest an estimated [15-23% of the total amount spent on conservation](#). The involvement of such groups in conservation projects has been shown in some cases to be [more effective](#) at producing positive social and ecological outcomes. Furthermore, [processes that create opportunities](#) for the holders of Indigenous and dominant worldviews to come together in non-hierarchical ways can support new ways of thinking and doing conservation.

## 5. Transformative change requires “system-wide reorganisation” of the economy

By definition, transformative change will include changes to the economy, as “[Economic incentives have generally favoured expanding economic activity, and often environmental harm, over conservation or restoration](#),” according to the 2019 IPBES Global Assessment. Current [subsidies that support activities that harm the environment, like fossil fuel extraction](#), sit at least [USD 1.8 trillion](#) per year, and should be [cut or shifted to support biodiversity-positive activities](#). Some reforms have been implemented, such as [New Zealand’s fisheries subsidy](#) which was dedicated to green programs, including reducing overfishing. Tax reforms, both to [crack down on tax avoidance](#) and to [internalise the externalised costs of environmental harms](#) from polluting industries, can raise funds for biodiversity.

Changes in international financial systems are necessary to ensure [funds go, and are available, where they are most needed](#). Current global finance structures have led to [high levels of debt for many low-income countries](#), which now divert significant government revenues to debt servicing on top of debt repayment. In 2021, 59 of the world’s least developed countries [received less money in climate finance](#) than they paid to service debts. The need to pay back creditors forces countries to take [short-term economic development strategies instead of investing in long-term sustainable](#) development.

Alternative ways of assessing economic performance that put [higher value on nature and wellbeing](#), are a way to shift economic goals and therefore priorities in decision-making.

## 6. Further reading

The list below summarises some important reports, commentaries and scientific papers on the topics set to be addressed in the Transformative Change Assessment. It is not a comprehensive review of the scientific literature – think of it as a start. To explore the specific topics further, please refer to the reference lists within these publications.

1. We need a fundamental shift from existing paradigms to overcome root causes of biodiversity loss

### Explainers and reports

- [‘Transformative change’: idea will be key in fight for climate and wildlife](#) (The Conversation, 2024)
- [Temperature overshoot and tipping points](#) (Zero Carbon Analytics, 2023)
- [Summary for policymakers of the methodological assessment of the diverse values and valuation of nature](#) (IPBES, 2022)
- Summary for policymakers of [Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change](#) (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022)
- [Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services](#) (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2019)

### Academic research studies and reviews

- [Pervasive human-driven decline of life on Earth points to the need for transformative change](#) (Science, 2019)
- [Impact of climate change on biodiversity loss: global evidence](#) (Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 2021)

- [Has the Earth's sixth mass extinction already arrived?](#) (Nature, 2011)
- [Transformation in a changing climate: a research agenda](#) (Climate and development, 2017)
- [Transformation beyond conservation: how critical social science can contribute to a radical new agenda in biodiversity conservation](#) (Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 2021)
- [Global polycrisis: the causal mechanisms of crisis entanglement](#) (Global Sustainability, 2024)

2. Transformative change is possible if key leverage points are utilised

#### **Explainers and reports**

- [Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system](#) (The Sustainability Institute, 1999)
- [How climate change could reverse progress in global inequality](#) (Carbon Brief, 2024)
- [World Inequality Report 2022](#) (World Inequality Lab, 2022)
- [A good life for everyone, except the planet?](#) (Yale Environment Review, 2019)
- [Beyond GDP: changing how we measure progress is key to tackling a world in crisis – three leading experts](#) (The Conversation, 2022)

#### **Academic research studies and reviews**

- [The tragedy of the time horizon: Navigating short-termism for long-term sustainability](#) (Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning, 2023)
- [Transformative narratives for climate action](#) (Climatic Change, 2020)
- [Imagination and transformations to sustainable and just futures](#) (Elementa: Science of the Anthropocene, 2020)

3. Reactions to COVID19 pandemic give us insight into what transformative change could look like

#### **Explainers and reports**

- [Towards a sustainable future: transformative change and post-COVID-19 priorities](#) (European Academic Science Advisory Council, 2020)
- [How COVID-19 can drive transformational change in cities](#) (International Science Council, 2020)
- [The Covid-19 Crisis: A catalyst for government transformation?](#) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020)

#### **Academic research studies and reviews**

- [Socioecological System Transformation: Lessons from COVID-19](#) (World, 2021)
- [Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis: Transformative Governance in Switzerland](#) (Journal of Economic and Human Geography, 2020)
- [COVID-19, the Climate, and Transformative Change: Comparing the Social Anatomies of Crises and Their Regulatory Responses](#) (Sustainability, 2020)

4. We must support and work with Indigenous Peoples to uphold justice and equity

#### **Explainers and reports**

- [Indigenous knowledge and values: key for nature conservation](#) (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2021)
- [Five considerations for a just transition for Indigenous communities and ethnic minorities](#) (Stockholm Environment Institute, 2022)
- [Indigenous people are the world's biggest conservationists, but they rarely get credit for it](#) (Vox, 2021)

#### **Academic research studies and reviews**

- [A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation](#) (Nature Sustainability, 2018)
- Chapter 8 [Rethinking and Upholding Justice and Equity in Transformative Biodiversity Governance](#) in Transforming Biodiversity Governance (Cambridge University Press, 2022)
- [Global patterns of adaptation to climate change by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. A systematic review](#) (Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 2021)
- [The role of indigenous knowledge in climate change adaptation in Africa](#) (Environmental Science and Policy, 2022)
- [The sustainability assessment of Indigenous and local knowledge-based climate adaptation responses in agricultural and aquatic food systems](#) (Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 2023)

## 5. Transformative change requires “system-wide reorganisation” of the economy

### Explainers and reports

- [From financing change to changing finance](#) (Club of Rome, 2023)
- [The economics of biodiversity: The Dasgupta review](#) (HM Treasury, UK Government, 2021)
- [A Global Deal to Tackle Harmful Fisheries Subsidies: A look behind the scenes](#) (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2022)
- [Innovative mechanisms for financing biodiversity conservation](#) (Institute for European Environmental Policy, 2017)
- [Tax Law and Climate Change](#) (Centre for Climate Engagement)
- [Climate-vulnerable indebted countries paying billions to rich polluters](#) (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2023)
- [Debt Relief for a Green and Inclusive Recovery Securing: Securing Private-Sector](#)
- [Participation and Creating Policy Space for Sustainable Development](#) (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2021)

### Academic research studies and reviews

- [Enabling transformative economic change in the post-2020 biodiversity agenda](#) (Conservation Letters, 2021)
- [Weaponizing economics: Big Oil, economic consultants, and climate policy delay](#) (Environmental Politics, 2022)
- [The Green Economy: Incremental Change or Transformation?](#) (Environmental Policy and Governance, 2013)
- [Options for reforming agricultural subsidies from health, climate, and economic perspectives](#) (Nature Communications, 2022)