THE POST-2020 METHOD

P2

SETTING UP TRANSFORMATIVE
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

CREDITS

The Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework - EU Support Project aimed to support concrete transformative solutions for the effective implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), leading to the vision of Living in Harmony with Nature by 2050.

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INTRODUCTION

The "Follow-up to the current strategic plan on biodiversity" (also known as "Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework – EU Support") project (CRIS PI/2018/400-031) was an Action aimed at developing effective European Union (EU) environment diplomacy in the field of biodiversity at a global level, hence contributing to the adoption of an ambitious follow-up to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity under the Partnership Instrument Annual Action Programme 2018 with a total budget of EUR 4,500,000, financed by the EU and implemented by Expertise France from 24/09/2018 to 31/12/2021.

Building on its success, the EU decided to fund a second phase of the project: "Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework Adoption and Implementation – EU Support (2022-2024)." It was designed to trigger a quick implementation of key issues on the ground in 10 partner countries with the full involvement of all stakeholders in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

This responded to the necessity to showcase that biodiversity action can only succeed if it involves a deep reform of the way that societies and economies organise their coexistence with Nature. Isolated efforts directed towards single aspects of the policy cycle with no economic and regulatory reform would not suffice to stop and reverse the loss of biodiversity. This was shown during the implementation of the Aichi targets, the previous global plan of action for biodiversity.

The second phase of the project was understood as a pilot to show innovative ways to design and implement effective transformative changes in the target countries and beyond. The goal was to create precedence for these kinds of reforms within the countries, but also to give life to the concept of transformative change.

To do this, the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and the related investment in consultations and synergy-creation activities must be taken into account. It also involves triggering concrete governmental and private actions at all levels, as well as creating the enabling conditions to facilitate and support these actions, especially the regulating environment necessary to promote the actions that are positive to nature.

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The country and stakeholder dialogue method designed and implemented during the intense Inception Phase resulted in innovative and transformative activities both at the national and regional levels. This document describes this method and provides insights into its advantages, challenges and successes. Perhaps it can serve as an inspiration for similar exercises and respond to the need of stepping out of the box in international development cooperation.

A sound logic of intervention

1.1 Defining the desired impact and the context

To **define the impact** of the program or project, base your reflections on its general objective. You can start by listing the outcomes or changes that would contribute to the desired impact. If your program already has a Theory of Change[1] (ToC), it can serve as a starting point. Otherwise, a ToC can be developed with the whole project team.

Within that list, you may also identify the **challenges** that have, in the past, prevented from reaching the outcome. These challenges can be **technical** (expertise, capacity or knowledge needed), or may involve the tension between different interests and **agendas** (environmental, economic and social). Both should be considered to ensure the design of a transformative action.

Sources for the information on challenges can be **national reports**, national reports to UN or other regional organisations, and technical reports of previous or ongoing programs and projects dedicated to the same theme. You can also tap on reports by think tanks and Science-Policy Interface organisations, or any other relevant report from a reliable source in terms of acceptance by decision-makers.

An additional round of **structured interviews** can help overcome any shortcomings in the data available in these pieces of information.

Theory of Change

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- Identify long-term goals
- Map backwards and define the outcomes and outputs
- Identify your basic assumptions about the context
- Identify the activities (that result in outputs) to create your desired change (outcome)
- Develop indicators to measure your outcomes and outputs
- Map the stakeholders to be involved

Impact

Outcomes

Intermediate outcomes

Outputs

Activities

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Sources: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-7-Theory-of-Change.pdf
https://anr.fr/fileadmin/aap/2023/aap-sbep-2023-A_Theory-of-Change.pdf
https://www.theoryofchange.org/

In the case of the Post-2020 project, the impact was defined by the need to rapidly implement the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, now known as The Biodiversity Plan.

This multilateral commitment provided an excellent frame to appeal to national governments' and stakeholders' commitments and provided the base of possible interventions, this will be further developed below.

Based on the targets of The Biodiversity Plan, a list of challenges for each target was prepared and served as a base for the next steps. This list was founded on official national reports to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), other national reports and regulatory documents, national strategies and action plans, multilateral reports, such as IPBES regional and global assessments. It was completed with structured interviews with experts and the EU Delegations in the partner countries.

1.2 Defining transformative change for your intervention

Ideally, the resulting portfolio should contain overarching topics and concrete areas of work, and be of a transformative nature. The definition of what is transformative can be based on relevant literature or just be the result of the challenges identified during Step 1.

For the Post-2020 project, a strategic paper was developed on the adaptation and integration of transformative change as a cornerstone of the project activities. This led to a definition of general principles for all project activities:

Transformative approach	Project's approach
Address **indirect drivers**	The knowledge products and all dialogue formats, as well as the project's awareness raising activities, will address direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity harm to foster transformation.
Open **multiple pathways** to progress	Outputs will identify and foster several paths to achieve the same impact for different sectors, e.g. levels and sectors of government and other stakeholder arenas (private and financial sector, civil society, education and academia, etc.).
Expand the **stakeholders** involved	Reach out and promote convergence and synergies between different stakeholders and their commitments and mobilisation for biodiversity implementation at the international, national and subnational levels, triggering new partnerships and alliances.
Identify and communicate **co-benefits**	Not only trade-offs, but co-benefits between environmental, social, and economic development (incl. health) in coherence with a strong sustainability approach will be documented and communicated to raise the commitment of all involved stakeholders.
Inclusive & transformative processes	The involvement of actors who usually do not work together and the integration of the concerns of all stakeholders for the design and governance of transformative actions will raise the commitment and ownership of all those involved.
Foresee and mitigate **resistance**	Transformative change requires a change in perspective and often produces resistance. Predicting it and providing approaches and potentials, e.g. for financial aspects, in an open dialogue can help mitigate the fear of actors of negative effects in their respective arenas.

Source: https://eklipse.eu/

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1.3   Defining your cross-cutting issues

In addition to the fundamental nature of the transformative approach, every intervention has certain cross-cutting issues that are key to ensure the sustainability of any technical assistance. These can also be based on the challenges listed, but could be focused on enabling a holistic view of the whole policy cycle, the involvement of all state and non-state actors, creating synergies between different (environmental, but also other sector) policy areas, and, in general, ensuring that all aspects that can lead to a higher impact and sustainability of the resulting interventions are taken into account.

For the Post-2020 project, the following cross cutting issues were identified:

- **Resource mobilisation** as an enabling condition in a majority of project activities. Innovative ways to identify funds for implementation of The Biodiversity Plan by all stakeholders (incl. private, financial, philanthropic) and the redirection of biodiversity harmful subsidies.

- Support and empower selected **stakeholder coalitions** by organising strategic consulting and visibility actions aimed at ensuring a fast-tracked implementation of The Biodiversity Plan, and enhancing communication among stakeholders, including the European Union, national stakeholders and governmental officials.

- Develop and use existing knowledge products such as studies, policy briefs and toolboxes to support capacity-building concerning **accountability and transparency** through activities (in particular, targeting national partners and the private sector).

- **Private sector (including the financial sector)** actions have the potential to positively contribute to many priorities, particularly resource mobilisation, mainstreaming or sustainable value chains.

- To seek convergence between biodiversity, climate and other related political goals in its events and publications, the **linkages to climate change** and other environmental policies are included in all knowledge products, technical assistance services and communications activities.

- Integrate **gender**-differentiated biodiversity practices, gender knowledge acquisition and use, as well as gender inequalities. Special attention is paid to **gender and geographical balance** across the project's activities.

- **Human rights**-based approaches, including: a) respecting all human rights for all; b) meaningful and inclusive participation and access to decision-making; c) non-discrimination and equality; d) accountability and rule of law for all and e) transparency and access to information.

- **Good governance** of biodiversity implies integrated, inclusive, transparent, responsive and participatory policy-making. It also involves effectiveness, accountability and respect for the rule of law. Provide support to improve implementation and push for renewed commitments in addressing challenges, and actively engage and involve all stakeholders, including, IPLCs, SNLGs, Women and Youth, among others.

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Mapping and selection of key transformative issues

2.1   Developing a portfolio of areas of work

Start by doing desktop research of **current and upcoming national commitments** that are relevant to your intervention. These can be pieces of regulation, strategies or action plans, both at the national and subnational level. Also identify **commitments by non-state actors**, especially the private and finance sectors. This will let you identify possible openings for change.

These commitments should include **policy instruments** that have an incidence on the topic, even if they come from **other sectors of government** (other ministries or institutions) or **levels of government** (e.g. regional or subnational governments). Multilateral commitments may also be considered depending on the type of intervention and relevance.

Matching your long lists of challenges and commitments, make a **preliminary list of the topics** that show convergence and would fit into your program. For instance, if an intervention is dedicated to the financial aspects of environmental policy, any policy instrument expressing challenges and commitments for a transformation of agriculture towards more sustainability would invite to propose financial instruments to promote and foster agri-food system transformation.

In the case of the Post-2020 project, this led to the topic of the identification and reform of environmentally harmful subsidies in agriculture and other sectors.

This list can be **further refined** using different **criteria**, such as:

- Adherence to the **transformative topics** and **cross-cutting issues** defined in the previous step.

- **Technical capacity** and previous experience that can be offered by the agencies or service providers defining the intervention[2].

- Available **budget**.

- Elements of **policy instruments** that show a **lack of implementation** even though their importance for transformative change is broadly recognized.

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2   This could help avoid being confronted with requests that are within the portfolio offered, but not really feasible due to lack of capacity to offer the necessary technical assistance. However, a certain level of innovation should be accounted for and results of *Step 4 – Identification, collaboration and mobilisation of high-level expertise and strategic partnerships* can also lead to expanding the portfolio beyond the usual areas of work of the implementing agencies involved.

- Topics that are the **subject of initial steps towards concrete actions** on the ground or already being implemented by frontrunners and are replicable, but have not been sufficiently up-scaled or taken on by a critical mass of stakeholders. These can serve as multipliers within their regions or stakeholder groups.

- Elements of the topic that are highly **interlinked with other national or subnational environmental and sectoral policies** and have not been addressed with sufficient coherence.

- Topics that require the **involvement of non-state actors** (e.g. the private and finance sectors) for their full implementation and could benefit if existing coalitions begin extending their outreach to other levels of governance and/or sectors.

- Topics that are a **priority for the donor** (in the case of the Post-2020 project, the European Union, or more specifically the EUDs in partner countries) and where synergies with identified projects and existing or future initiatives can enhance efficiency.

The list should be seen as a **portfolio of potential areas of work**, that will serve as the base of discussions for prioritization and tailoring of concrete technical assistance further on. It should be long enough to provide sufficient opportunities for cooperation, but also short enough not to divert focus from the terms of reference and objectives of the action. The list can be prepared in a table form, including overarching topics or areas of work, possible activities and expected outcomes.

For the next steps, a **presentation** should be prepared, showing the overall objective of the support, the transformative approach and cross-cutting issues defined, and the main points for each area of work, such as identified challenges and commitments. This will serve as a starting point for the **consultation and validation with stakeholders**.

2.2 Consulting and validating with stakeholders

The portfolio of potential interventions should be consulted and validated with relevant stakeholders to **map out potential technical assistance** activities for triggering transformative change in the partner country.

This validation is **best performed in person**, but could also be realised in virtual meetings. Asking for written feedback is not advisable, as the object of the exercise is to co-create more detailed preliminary proposals in dialogue format. The **list of relevant stakeholders** to be consulted depends on the type of intervention and actual counterparts of the project. However, it should consider at least direct and indirect beneficiaries and actors having an influence on its implementation, especially other sectors of government, non-state actor representatives, think tanks and NGO's active in the field, other donors and implementing agencies.

In the case of the Post-2020 project, the stakeholders selected for consultation and validation were the EU Delegations, the National Focal Points for the CBD and the main organisations working on similar or connected activities (such as subnational governments, indigenous or local community organisations, other UN, EU or otherwise funded projects, think tanks, NGO's, regional organisations).

At each **meeting**, the **same structure** was be followed. After a **presentation** of the context and areas of work in the portfolio, the stakeholder provided **immediate feedback** and selected potential areas of work relevant to their national or organisational context.

These prioritised **potential areas of work** can be **further discussed** to clarify additional aspects based on a pre-set list of items, such as concrete needs for support and technical

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assistance, political context, regulatory background, expected outcome, potential activities, internal capacity and availability for in-kind or other forms of contribution to implementation, geographical scope, timeline, synergies with other actions and potential to integrate the technical assistance into other efforts, potential experts and technical partners, relevant actors having an influence on the topic, etc.

The **results** of each meeting can be **documented in a table by area of work**, containing the main points discussed with each partner. Attention should be paid to language and using the terminology developed in the portfolio as much as possible. A maximum amount of prioritised areas of work can be set at the beginning of the meeting to avoid too many options, depending on the available budget and capacity.
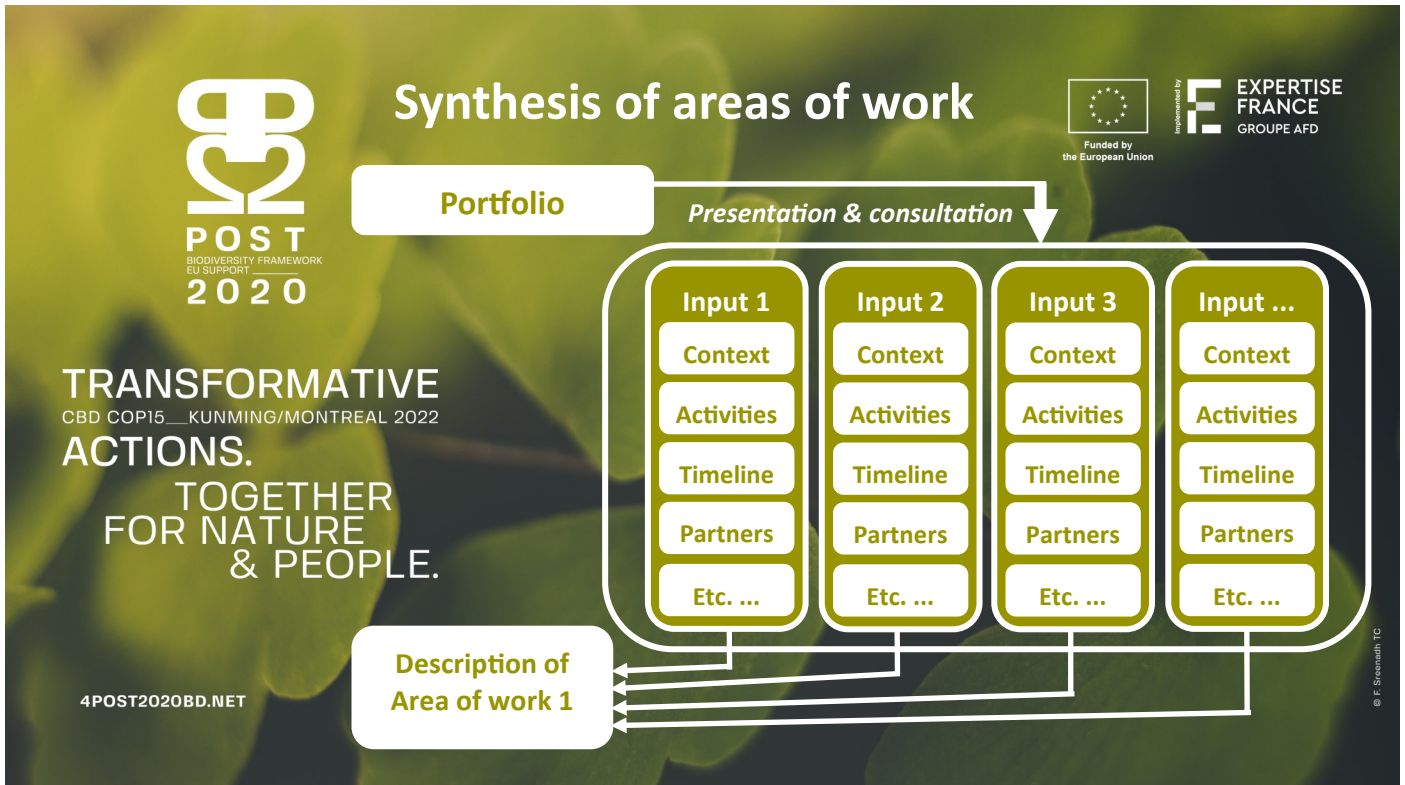
2.3   Synthesis of areas of work

The table resulting of the consultation and validation effort from Step 2.2 can now be subjected to a **bottom-up synthesis** to identify **convergence of topics** and **activities**. Firstly, a blank synthesis table with the same categories as the validation table can be prepared, with no content.

In a second step, a **summarised content** of the categories for one area of work discussed in **one of the meetings** can be **inserted** in the synthesis table, making sure to adhere to the portfolio's terminology, but allowing for certain flexibility to not loose the accuracy of the need.

After that, the **results of the next meeting** can be integrated into the area of work, category by category, by **evaluating if there is a need to adapt, expand or otherwise change the existing category** in the synthesis table.

This should be repeated for all responses for that specific area of work.

The exercise can be repeated to all areas of work that were discussed in the meetings. It is helpful to document the number of times that a certain area of work was mentioned as a help to prioritize, but it is not a strictly necessary step.

As a last step, **each area of work's title** should be **assessed** in terms of its accuracy to describe the result of the synthesis and if necessary adaptations need to be made.

The result of this exercise is a table with a limited number of areas of work and corresponding categories that reflect all the conducted interviews, that can serve to develop and fine-tune a concept note in Step 3.

STEP 3

Tailoring
technical assistance activities

Based on the synthesis table produced at the end of Step 2, a **preliminary concept note** can be drafted for each area of work. Ideally, it should be adapted to the donors' and beneficiaries' requirements, but it should contain at least:

- an introduction and opportunity (based on the political and regulatory framework discussed),
- an overall objective (in line with the program's objective), specific objectives (based on the need expressed and the expected outcomes),
- potential activities,
- contribution by the beneficiary,

- geographical scope, and timeline,
- synergies with other efforts & relevant partners,
- cross-cutting issues,
- dissemination and awareness raising,
- a short description of the experts and logistical needs, and a preliminary budget.

The concept note can be subject of as many **iterations of feedback and adaptation** needed to reach a consensus. It will build the base of a formalisation of the technical assistance as e.g. an annex to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Attention should be paid to granting the necessary level of **flexibility** while keeping the spirit and minimum requirements in terms of **objectives, transformative approach and cross-cutting issues**. Challenges and risks can be documented and be the base for activities or mitigation efforts.

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STEP 4

High-level expertise
and strategic partnerships

Already during the final stages of the concept note and based on the mapping of potential partners in the interviews performed under Step 2, an additional round of meetings can be organised to **mobilise identified organisations and experts** that could bring synergies and sustainability to the technical assistance. This is especially relevant for small budgets and short interventions, as they can highly benefit from either integration into overarching efforts or be designed as preparatory action, expansion or further development of other technical assistances.

A **call for experts or service** providers can benefit from promotion in relevant networks as suggested by partners. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for experts and other services should also consider the transformative approach and cross-cutting issues.

The production of **knowledge products** can be helpful to synthesize the lessons learned form each technical assistance and promote knowledge transfer. They should be synthetic, go beyond the individual case and focus on replicable actions and lessons learned. However, attention should be given to the fact that knowledge products do not necessarily enhance knowledge transfer without their promotion and dissemination.

Therefore and if possible, a **dissemination and awareness raising** component should be designed into technical assistance efforts to mobilise stakeholders, enhance acceptance and ownership of the related interventions and promote knowledge transfer. This should include adequate resources in terms of budget and experts and ideally draw on existing platforms and networks.

CONCLUSION

The Post-2020 project had a very limited budget of between 45 000 and 95 000 Euros per partner country to face the immense challenge of setting up transformative actions to implement The Biodiversity Plan.

However, this resulted in an approach that was needs-based and opportunistic, but determined to keep its transformative character and foster innovation and synergies with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

It is thanks to the commitment and collaborative spirit of numerous National Focal Points, NGO's, experts, other projects and the Post-2020 project team that the project managed to implement activities that hopefully will leave a tangible change for the benefit of the partner countries.

The most important lesson learned during the six years of the Post-2020 project implementation was that the human component is still the most important to trigger true change, and that creating alliances of like-minded individuals working together for the benefit of nature and people is the key to success.

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