Building Forward Better

How to unleash Transformation in Economic Development Cooperation?

Insights from a Dialogue Series

Supported by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety's International Climate Initiative (IKI)

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Context

"A number of global development challenges do not seem to be solved by gradually changing or reforming current ways of production, consumption, transport or other systems. For years, actors in academia, policy and practice have been calling for more action on 'transformational change', meaning a change that is profound enough to shift societies, up to 'the' global one onto fundamentally different development pathways."

This is a quote from the guidance "Transforming our work: Getting ready for transformational projects" that has been developed by several authors under the auspices of GIZ. This guidance inspired a dialogue series that evolved into a collaborative effort of GIZ initiatives and colleagues and took place over four sessions from April to June 2021. It was supported by the GIZ Green Economy Transformation (GET) project, which works on the transition to an inclusive green economy in collaboration with the UN Partnership of Action on Green Economy (PAGE), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and other international organizations. The Green Economy Transformation project is part of the German BMU-funded International Climate Initiative (IKI).

Coming from different departments within GIZ, colleagues Daniel Kehrer (Advisor), Holger Kuhle (Policy Advisor Strategic Knowledge Partnerships) and Gabriele Wagner (Advisor, GET project) initiated the dialogue series and engaged the discussion from different perspectives. Anne Schollmeyer (Advisor) facilitated the online dialogue by providing graphic illustrations of each session. The dialogue series as a collective process was supported by the consultant Rakesh Kasturi, who in his role as Moderator and *Sprint Doctor* guided the participants through a process of systemic thinking. Manuel Kuhm (Junior Policy Advisor) and Daniel Sachadonig (Intern, GET project) supported the editing of this report. The 25 participants joined from a wide range of institutions across the globe, representing government institutions, international organizations, universities, think tanks, and civil society organizations.

This report summarizes essential statements of the discussions, which are underpinned in the annex with slides on definitions and the impact process by using visual recording technique. For a more detailed reading of our debate, the co-created digital whiteboard can be consulted upon request.

The views expressed in this report were shared to a larger extent amongst participants and are not necessarily representative of the position of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

A Call for Transformation

The global sustainability agendas, i.e. the Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), call for no less than 'transforming our world'. In the context of this dialogue series, it is also understood as a call to transform the way humanity defines economy and organizes production and consumption. Economic decisions and actions unfold across multiple areas of society, people's life and nature. It extends from the production to satisfy basic needs over disruptive innovations to long transformations of societal relationships and planetary living conditions.

Transformation refers to the deep conversion of systems, such as towards carbon neutral societies and economies for the common good. The underlying causes and the critical socio-economic consequences of the current pandemic confirm that recent economic paradigms face fundamental limitations. The dialogue participants therefore perceive that for them

- it is not enough to nurture old or new critique of economic conditions and the underlying economic sciences,
- nor is it sufficient to point out alternatives (or new top-down blueprints) for human development within planetary limits,
- but we would like to explore *how* the development of alternatives can be supported by international economic cooperation.

In the discussions, the dialogue series focused on the following three questions:

1. How could a **new economic** (development) **mainstream** look like as a goal and example for economic transformation?
2. How can this or similar localized visions be **facilitated** in international economic development cooperation?
3. How can economic transformation be **operationalized**, especially in the field of economic policy and private sector development in real-life economic development projects?

The sequences of our debate were divided in such a way that in the first session, reasons and expectations for transformations of economies including for inclusive green economy were identified and the motivations of the participants were shared. After introducing design principles for transformative change (so called *"TransformAbilities"*), we focused on exploring how this could translate to economic development in the second and third session. Based on this, a 5-actions-approach for transformative change was developed and again differentiated for economic development interventions in the fourth and final session.

Session 1: What Should Happen and Why?

"Change does not happen because of us. It is happening anyway. We have to learn how to engage it and nudge it."

At the beginning of the dialogue series, the participants expressed some of the following differing expectations about the process and outcome of the dialogue:

- "Awareness of own role & taking space"
- "Understand what transformative change is and how to apply this process to strategy"
- "Drafting criteria/indicators for what economic transformation is about"
- "Find strategies to encourage policy makers to do things differently"
- "Write a policy report trying to inform the policy debate"
- "Co-create new and more agile ways of working in international co-operation"

In the first session, the discussion focused on the question of what a new economic mainstream could look like as a goal for economic transformation. The group engaged in testing the development of economic values and norms that could constitute a paradigm shift and formulating application-oriented criteria for this.

The discussion on the objectives of economic development led to the following essential features:

- A **market economy with private, cooperative, municipal** and bigger enterprises **complemented by global trade serving the common good** (as opposed to an economy that is solely profitability-driven/monetary)
- **Growth up to and sufficiency at optimal size** and with optimal common good balance (planetary boundaries, equality, fairness…)
- Cooperation and **incentive structure based on creating the most use (use value)** of products & services
- Beneficiaries of economic development are those who produce, provide and use products and services rather than detached shareholders
- These direct economic participants further **democratically co-develop purpose** and functioning of their economies rather than leaving markets to self-regulation according to alleged 'natural economic laws'
- The **way we work as practitioners in economic co-operation,** embracing complexity and local ownership, which facilitates result-open local interpretations and narratives of economic transformation that are perceived to be legitimate, useful, meaningful and fair

The participants discussed in depth why we need to talk about transformation now. Below are the statements made by the participants grouped according to the different objectives:

To take the lessons from the current situation seriously

"Without transformation the world cannot tackle the multiple crises."

"Can we achieve transformation without leaving no one behind? Pandemic shows us the importance of striking balance between social and economic aspects. So, we need to think concretely how to achieve it."

To limit negative and unsustainable effects of economies

"Given current trends, the scenario that we miss the target is likely. We need to start thinking in terms of damage limitation."

"What is one change that you wish for in the future because of this transformation? Eradicate poverty "

To repurpose economy

"A people centered economy that refers to the economy origins ("OIKOS") rather than financial return driven purposes."

"The purpose of economy fulfilling needs and enabling a self-determined life"

"Valuing the common good more than private profit."

"More sustainable work to all appreciated socially and financially beyond the marketplace, rather than more "jobs created" to sustain the produce-consume cycle"

"That the success of the economy is measured in terms of human wellbeing"

To reposition economy within societal interests and democratic primary

"To get things clear: there isn't just one economy; it makes a difference whether one is a shop owner or a shareholder of a multinational industry/bank"

"Governments playing a more active role in directing economies towards sustainable outcomes"

"To overcome the finance (market) driven economy"

"An economy that is subject of democratic decision making rather than keeping the economy as a "neutral" domain"

"The condition is to link democratic decision making with economy (about investments/tax-advantages/subsidies/priorities)."

"People have voice, and this is recognized as the legitimate driver of change"

"If interventions are owned and appropriate, people will take these to scale on their own."

"Empowerments of territories to shape and realize their very own development paths"

"A more equalitarian world system based on fair trade and international solidarity"

"Shift from the economy at the center of society, towards room for culture, environment, knowledge and social solidarity equally at the center."

What is the purpose of this transformation?

"May help refocus global efforts towards more just and sustainable future"

"Our current "ways and means" do not work anymore"

"That every person's welfare matters. Opportunities for all."

"Complexity is the reality of our systems. We need to engage this (in ways that linear processes do not)"

"A healthy world where we enjoy living together, rather than a greedy world where we compete for surviving against each other."

"Transformation is not a magic bullet. It is also important to think about how new ideas and technologies can co-exist and be embedded within indigenous societies and values."

„ Justice "

"It means keeping the good things of globalization."

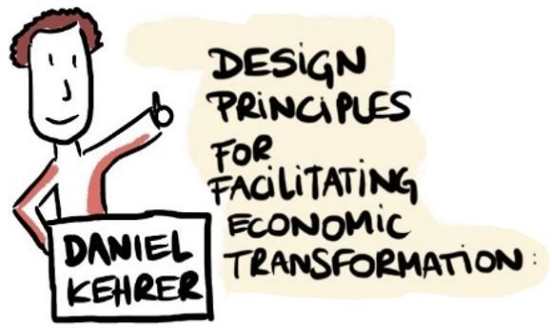
"Identifying leverages to turn sectors/regions into a transformational pathway: where/how to start."

Session 2: Design Principles (TransformAbilities)

"What are the right incentives (economic, mindset, physical, environmental, etc.) for each community, country and region to make a substantial transformation?" and "From where to where? Which system / paradigm shall transform into which fundamentally different system?"

"Linear planning approaches are not fit for purpose when addressing complex system change. By contrast, we require approaches that are iterative and multi stranded, that foster participation and action, that learn, and that track systems emergence."

In the second dialogue session, the peer discussion focused on the question of how the drafted vision or similar localized visions can be facilitated further in international development co-operation. Against this background, the group engaged in drafting essential aspects for transformational designing and implementing of economic development projects, considering the **9 Design Principles.**



The Nine Design Principles

1. Paradigm shift potential (transformative relevance)
2. Mainstreaming & scaling potential (transformative ambition)
3. System resilience (transformative sustainability)
4. Social change
5. Navigating complexity
6. Facilitating capacity
7. Multidimensional societal Interfaces
8. Reciprocity
9. Social justice

The participants discussed some of the following questions to investigate how the **9 Design Principles** could be harness in development projects:

How to support and ensure sustainability and resilience?

These factors must be addressed in order to weaken the resilience and path dependency of the current system and strengthen those of a new system:

- "To privilege those who are creating value for societies, their communities instead of make growing capital returns for "abstract" distant stakeholders"
- "Circular thinking/use, re-use and share"
- "New role models and narratives for kids that grow up"
- „True participation"

How to focus on leveraging reciprocity & social justice?

- "Promote new business models along Inclusive Business, Social Enterprise, Cooperatives."
- "Might be good to consider the role of social economy actors which typically act as change actors promoting sustainability and a resilience element. This argues for their involvement. "
- "Working at grassroots to catalyze 'societal demand' for the changes we seek - it's latent/ submerged (or lower priority), rather than absent."

How to scale transformative initiatives and approaches with "system level & catalytic impact"? How can the path dependency of the current system be changed?

- "The current development financing is entirely linear, and militates against emergent programming. This needs to change if we are to find the tipping points in complex systems".
- "Scaling up is very different to roll-out. It is a system response to changed system dynamics (which means changed system attractors)"
- "If the change has been born from within the system, it will persist. A body never rejects its own organs, but will routinely reject an implant"
- "It cannot be at any one individual level; the change needs to be systemic to enable a scaling up"
- "If interventions are owned and appropriate, people will take these to scale on their own."
- "Scaling needs to take into account new contexts and social dynamics."

- "Transformative change may be first taken up by a "coalition of the willing" club of countries. Then it could be extended to other countries, also subject to possible incentives and sanctions." (see W. Nordhaus on linking trade sanctions to countries not complying with climate change agreements)
- The need of iterative processes between global and local levels because of
    - a "local context irrelevance trap: Scaling also aligns with standardization, which might go against the social change since those solutions are typically specific to local context."
    - Complex systems are emergent, non-linear in change, hard to predict. Wicked problems come with high levels of uncertainty of knowledge and highly diverse and conflicting values.
    - Contexts with the VUCA characteristics (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world or wicked problems, respectively.

How to navigate (within) complexity and what are the ways forward for adaptability (adaptive management)?

- We can define core principles of complex systems in straightforward ways –
    i. field of relations (everything is connected);
    ii. emergence (one thing leads to another);
    iii. unexpected consequences;
    iv. non-linearity; and
    v. the existence of system patterns.
- "Adaptive management is helpful but is not the whole. It only talks of "how we adapt to remain responsive." Our management must also see that system adaptation itself through iterative process is critical."
- „Facilitating multidimensional interfaces": Redefine relations, responsibilities and roles in society at a local, national and global level to shift the power dynamics: government, private sector and civil society.

Session 3: How Should Transformation Happen?

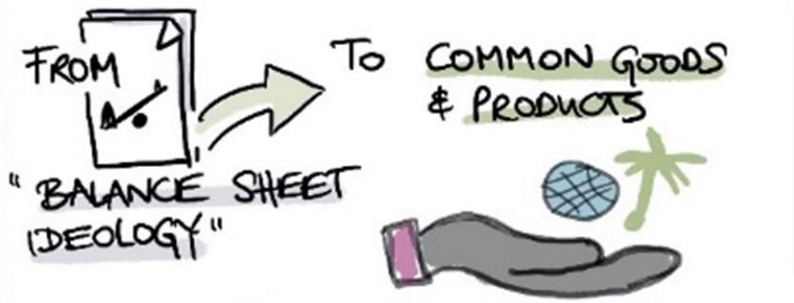
In the third session of the dialogue series, the discussion focused on how to **translate the participants' ideas into designing and implementing economic projects**. We focused on prototyping economic policy and private sector development interventions.

As a **general way forward**, the group proposed to move from innovative experimentation fields up to 'prototypes' that could be adopted by future transformative interventions that aim at transforming economies, production & consumption patterns. The following **three elements for transformative change** were deemed as appropriate and could be taken up in, as well as adapted to, interventions aiming at economic development.

I. Find (local) contextualized answers to the question what economic transformation could contain

For example, the participants proposed to "design and implement proper institutions that foster cooperation", as well as "revive social organizations" (boundary agency). Furthermore, it was suggested to "support 'dashboard' approaches to economic management" in finding contextualized answers to economic transformation.

"Big ideas around wealth accounts and 'dashboard' approaches to economic management are important attempts at structural/systemic change beyond GDP interventions - but they are top down, technocratic and will always be resisted by expedient or profit first actors."



II. Privilege and partner with those who are creating value for societies, their communities (instead of making growing capital returns for "abstract" far away stakeholders)

For example, the participants suggested to focus on actions and initiatives that nurture a change process from profit to benefit. The following citations from the co-created whiteboard provide a more comprehensive snapshot:

"Sustainability should also be encouraged by the Government through integration of norms, laws, regulations and also promoting role models."

"The margins of society are critically important places to engage, for it is here where system dynamics clash most vividly and provide critical insight into wider system dysfunction."

"Improvement programmes would do well therefore to significantly engage voice and volition in these areas, both in order to secure insight and a critical mass for change… For this reason, policy work would do well to explicitly enable public and civic engagement."

III. Focus on transformation of consumption goods and services - new products create new markets

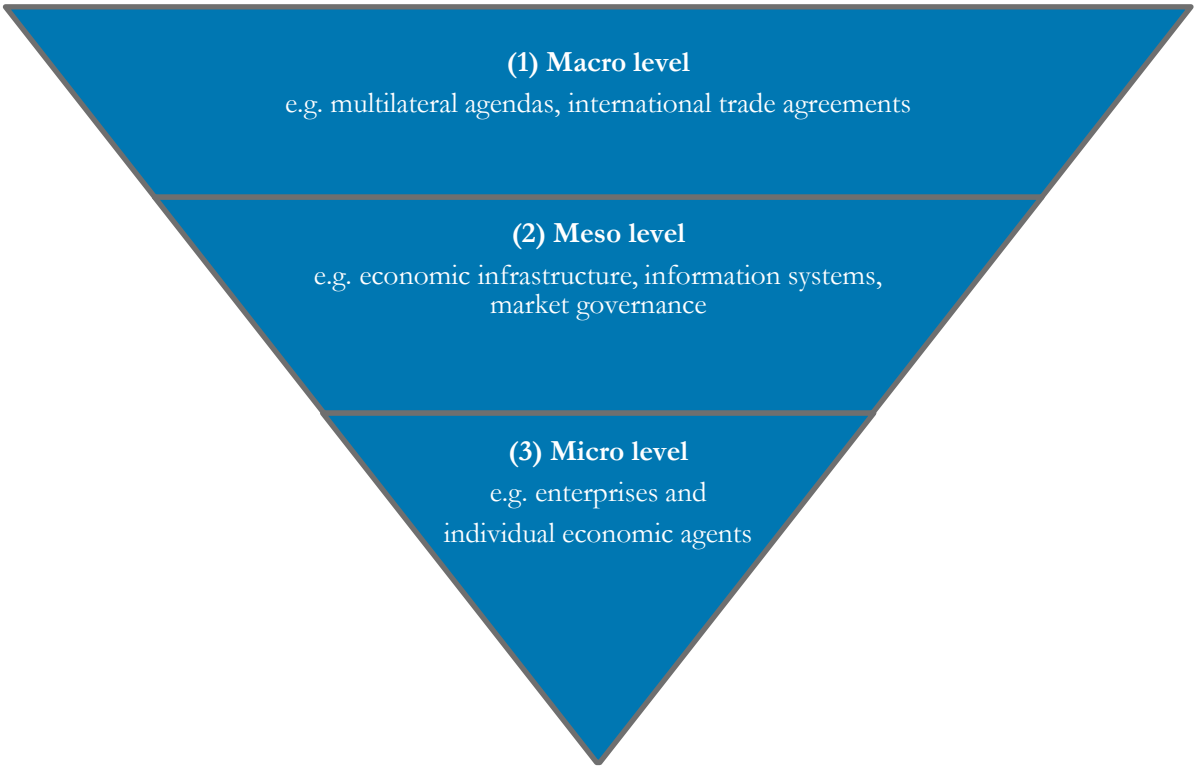
For example, the participants proposed to incentivize "circular thinking" through respective technologies, as well as societal approaches that integrate a "from owning to using"-mindset. More specifically, the participants proposed an intensified taxation of carbon-intensive activities, which was presented as "imperative to send economic agents the appropriate signal".

"Shift from making the economy at the center of society, but create room for culture, environment, knowledge and social solidarity equally at the center."

A multi-level approach to transformation

A multi-level approach, in which the interactions between and the impact of the micro, meso and meso levels are considered, could present a new alternative for conceptualizing and intervening in a global-local nexus. For example, economic interventions could target the improvement of living conditions on the micro level (company/location/community), but conversely need to consider policy coherence on the macro level (e.g. global climate agreements), as well as other, potentially unintended, consequences at the meso level. It is essential that interventions in international development cooperation consider the high interconnectedness of various levels. In the following paragraphs, the participants' suggestions for transformative change at the respective levels are presented.

Figure 1: The global-local nexus



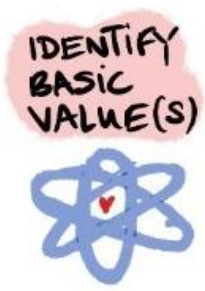
(1) Macro level as global scope with multilateral and national economic paradigms

"Multilateralism is absolutely central as its foundational for the trust that's needed for any aspirational systemic intervention."

For example, the participants suggested to "apply a principle for scoring state-to-state or international trade relationships", as well as an "ethical/fair trade protective tariff" at the macro level. Furthermore, it was highlighted that globally a change in paradigms from a "focus on productivity returns, profits, GDP and investment to an orientation on common good measurements" is required, which would result in replacing "all measurement and evaluation of efficiency corresponding to efficient utilization of capital and resources as means to increase capital". Nationally, governments could create a "public good balance sheet reporting system and oblige companies to audit accordingly". Lastly, the participants recommended to identify "groups of countries as pioneers (common good zones; fair trade zones) and to shift "power to existing multilateral regulatory approaches and common frameworks through blaming & shaming and flexible taxation (those who are in line pay less, the other more)".

(2) Meso level where the global and the national do intersect, with subnational intermediaries

"It's about the provision of infrastructures and services that prioritize promote/privilege a business that doesn't externalize social/ecological impacts, but contribute to the increase of quality, ecological sustainability and social responsibility."



For a common understanding, the meso level is defined as spaces where a shift from interest/power-based policies to evidence-based just decision making could emerge. During the session, the participants provided a range of examples for services/infrastructure serving the common business goods:

- "Equal/Egalitarian product information systems"
- "Cooperative market governance, striving for local/sectoral optimal enterprise sizes (vs. cartels and monopolies causing imbalances in territories and industries)"
- "Companies are rewarded for helping each other."
- "In situation of crisis of services for liquidity balancing, interest-free loans"
- "Overcome exclusivity of access to innovations and technologies and promote/award open source & commons license"

(3) Micro level is the local level where people and enterprises primarily act:

"Overcoming the current win-lose arrangement."

At the micro level a transformation of businesses towards new operational success factors, i.e. stabilization/increase of demand for products and services for the common good and money used as a means to this end, is recommended. The lesson that cooperation with other companies pays off need to be recognized (sharing/joint development of knowledge; resources; share and transfer of manpower, platforms etc.). In case of crisis, a company uses support from insolvency funds; the buying out other companies against their will should not be an option anymore.

The local context was seen as the space to overcome the principle of contra-currency and replace it by the primacy of cooperation through support to "participatory systems inquiry, action dialogues, inclusive policy making, citizen assemblies, and policies that build citizen voice and agency".

For example, the participants suggested to move "from price dumping towards open source, creative commons licenses, as well as from hostile takeovers towards concerted participation

in the process of crisis management". Additionally, the participants recommended a "forensic economy that is embedded within public forums (beyond 'just' legal regulations) to calculate pecuniary damages in personal and commercial litigation". Lastly, participants mentioned to analyze market power in antitrust disputes, fraud detection and biased 'scientific' (counter)expertise to confuse consumers and spread 'alternative' analysis (undermining sciences as a public and transparent good).

"We need to better connect the micro, meso and macro. Historically, we have compartmentalized these into separate spaces because the interventions differ. […] With good monitoring of wider dynamics, we can be much more effective at each level should we choose to continue to intervene by level."

Session 4: Which Actions and Tools Exist?

"An approach to connect micro, meso and macro levels. Grassroots conversations give rise to action and evidence, that is tested at meso level, and distils critical insights for policy making at the macro level. Policy action thus responsive, creates a context change at micro. This is a 3-stage arrangement to create working engagement between levels and is built on enthusiasms at each level."

In the fourth and last dialogue session we focused on how the previous ingredients of transformative economic interventions could further evolve to a more **action-oriented approach**. We started from the assumption that we may be engaged in developing or implementing real interventions and/or we may be involved in shaping the conditions for this to happen.

Following up on our joint reflections, we compiled a set of guiding questions that help you stay on the path towards transformation. With this approach you will better be able to take ideas from the dialogue to your respective work of facilitating change.

Guiding Questions and Ingredients for Action

Do you ask yourself the right transformational questions?

- ☐ **Why** can recent systems / paradigms not sufficiently serve sustainable development in these fields?
- ☐ **From where to where?** Which system / paradigm shall transform into which fundamentally different system?
- ☐ **What's the difference?** To what extent does the desired transformation differ from incremental changes (more of the same) or reforms (restructuring of a system)?
- ☐ **Why** is this more sustainable? (according to as many actors / perspectives and forms as knowledge as possible).
- ☐ **How** to measure success & progress on the common highest goals?
- ☐ **Where** do we stand with recent vs. new emerging system regarding, science & technology, acceptance, policy etc.? Constantly monitor & facilitate: What is the transformative ambition in the country, by different actors, for the intervention and where would be gaps towards new system becoming mainstream?
- ☐ **How wicked** is the challenge, i.e. number and extent of conflicting **values** & extent of uncertainty of **knowledge**?

Do you let ambitions & new mainstream emerge?

- ☐ **What** are existing strong societal / political **narratives**, such as jobs, happiness, independence, that could be linked to the transformative ambition?
- ☐ **How** could a jointly developed powerful **new narrative,** which combines the above values and the transformative vision and conveys the message that a transformed system will deliver better on these values, look like?
- ☐ **Which education and communication for social change messages** and formats, that advance shifting values, norms, beliefs and behavior for as many actor groups as possible, exist?

Do you create partnerships[1] for and of change?

- ☐ You go to places where there is **energy.**
- ☐ You find permanent professional and locally recognized support and resources for shaping the overall process and the **facilitation** of panels, exchange platforms, workshops and so forth.
- ☐ You abandon competitive rationales as much as possible and foster **genuine cooperation**, reciprocity and complementarity.
- ☐ You dare to start **small** despite high ambitions in head and heart.
- ☐ You have **questions** rather than answers.
- ☐ You focus on **creating** partnerships rather than **planning** projects.
- ☐ You focus on **processes** and partnerships rather than on impact promises which are hard to predict.
- ☐ You do not promise a certain amount of **money but** offer exchange and facilitation with flexible financial support whenever ambitions and opportunities arise.
- ☐ You act in flexible, fast, iterative, adaptive, experimenting **'action to knowledge'** cycles.
- ☐ You establish qualitative **measures of success** as a means to sense and navigate complexity and abandon indicators becoming goals in itself.
- ☐ You let transformative rationales and **ambitions** emerge and grow jointly.
- ☐ You secure mutual triple-loop **learning** and capacity development on all sides (commissioning parties, partners, change agency and so forth).

Do you enable new narratives & social change of values, norms, beliefs and behaviors?

- ☐ You find individual and organizational **change agents** in different societal dimensions and levels and support them to catalyze bottom-up and top-down change.
- ☐ You find early adopters and bridge the gap towards followers in order to catalyze **exponential diffusion** of innovation phase.
- ☐ You support fundamental, system-changing **decisions.**
- ☐ You facilitate redefinition and new allocation of **public and private finance**.

[1] Here a partnership implies a joint definition of objective and the respective planning of actions.

Do you work on the resilience of new mainstream?

- ☐ You find most important **factors** that maintain resilience of recent system and could be redefined for increasing resilience and path dependency of new system jointly with others. For example:
  - Social change & education (see above)
  - Social contract, social justice, social security, jobs
  - Legal norms & framework
  - Institutions, organizations, panels, networks
  - Financing instruments, subsidies, taxes
  - Research & development incentives
  - Technology & infrastructure dependence
- ☐ You **prioritize** and work on **advancing / redefining** these factors for decreasing resilience of recent system and increasing resilience of new one.
- ☐ You work on **social justice**, by…
  - Jointly defining relevant forms of justice and different groups of actors & generations involved.
  - Establishing feedback mechanisms on perceived justice.
  - Supporting societal deliberation and transition behaviors, communication on justice, new skills, employment opportunities, socio-economic security and solidarity mechanisms (like unconditional basic income, cash transfers, payments for ecosystem services), tax and subsidy instruments that reflect true prices and performance on common good / sustainability and so forth.

Closing Remarks and Outlook

„We should outline main pillars of this vision and we, from our organizations and geographic locations, could develop local conversations on that pillars, while feeding back the results to the core group."

The fourth session of the dialogue series "Building Back Better: How to Unleash Transformation in Economic Development Cooperation?" concluded with actionable suggestions by the participants on the continuation of the group's visionary thinking and knowledge exchange.

The participants shared a consensus that transformation needs to happen through local initiatives in collaboration with regional partners and national, as well as international, stakeholders. Thus, translating the suggestions into actionable interventions tailored to local realities could become a main priority for the group's work in the future. The results of supporting transformation in concrete settings could subsequently inform a wider knowledge sharing network, also open to others, as well as regular publications in form of implementation guidelines (to be detailed).

As a first step in this direction, GIZ will facilitate the process through the following upcoming highlights:

a) GIZ will continue collaborating on the topic of economic transformation with interested stakeholders in various ways, for example by advising partner countries on structural reforms towards an inclusive green economy and green recovery, as well as by expanding partnerships with national and international organizations.

b) GIZ proposes to kickstart a platform for sharing knowledge from the field of work of the dialogue series participants. The group could be considered as a place for expanding the network of stakeholders beyond the current organizations. Ultimately, the success of such a group depends on the interest and contributions of its members.

c) GIZ proposes to initiate a closed discussion group as a new space this group to pursue joint opportunities, share ideas, and collaborate on the topic "Transformation & Economic Development & International Cooperation" (working title) at the Green

Growth Knowledge Platform (GGKP) Green Forum. Green Forum is a new global platform for sharing and discussing within a global community of professionals interested in sustainable economic transformation.

d) GIZ will bring the topic and interest into its formal network, the Partners for Inclusive Green Economy (PIGE).

The upcoming highlights, as well as the past dialogue series, are supported by the GIZ Green Economy Transformation project working in six partner countries (Peru, Argentina, Uruguay, Costa Rica, South Africa and Indonesia) on the transition to an inclusive green economy in collaboration with the UN Partnership of Action on Green Economy (PAGE) and other international organizations. The Green Economy Transformation project is part of the International Climate Initiative (IKI). The project will come to an end in 2021 but will continue its work in the green economy nexus through a follow-up project in 2022. Additionally, the results of the process will inform policy discussions and publications in collaboration with the Global Solutions Initiative.

Conclusively, we would like to thank all participants for their interest, engagement and visionary thinking in the process of this dialogue series. We are excited for our next rounds of exchange and cannot await further creative plenary discussion with all of you.

Should you have any questions on the process behind or the content in this report, please feel free to contact us via E-Mail using the following information:

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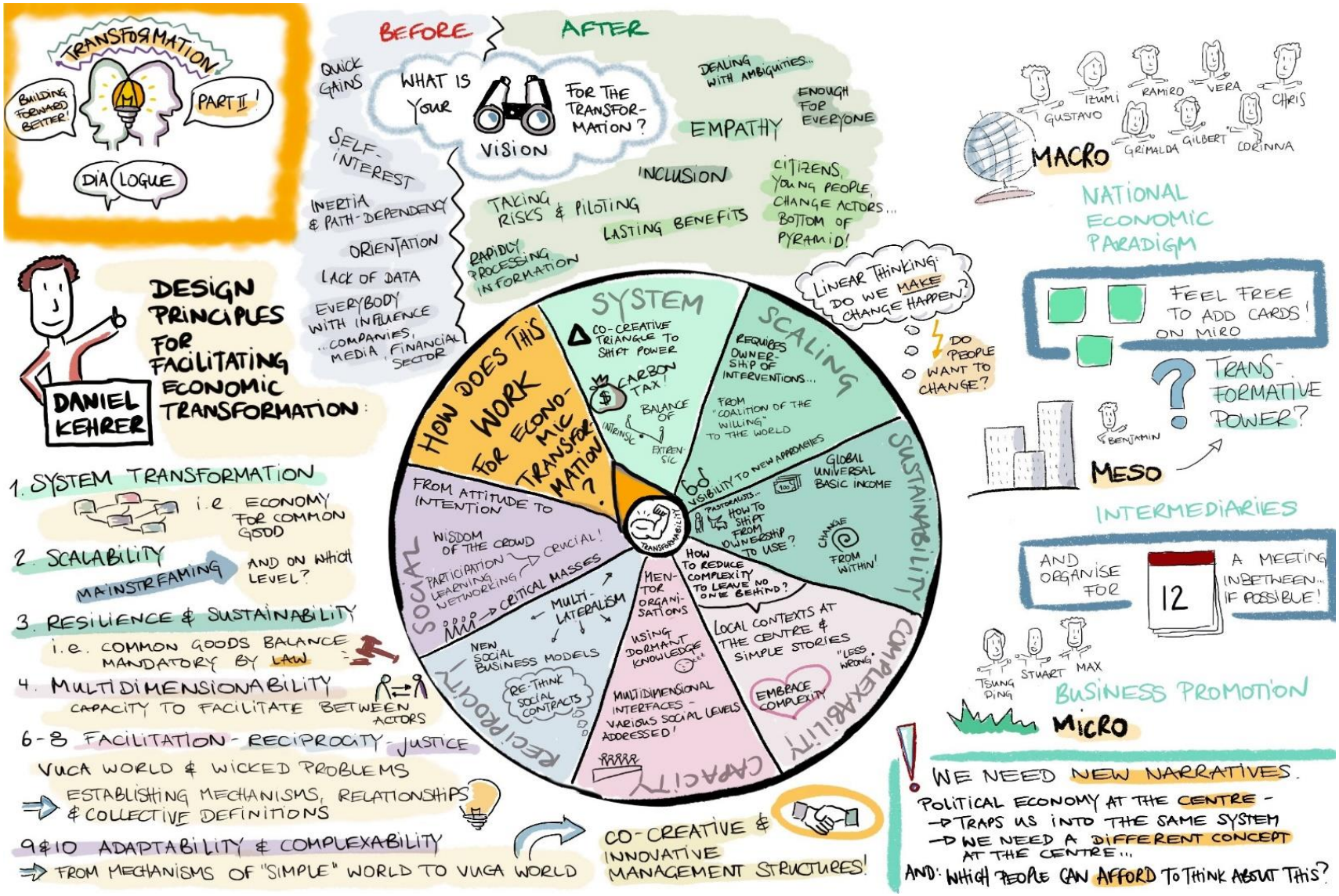
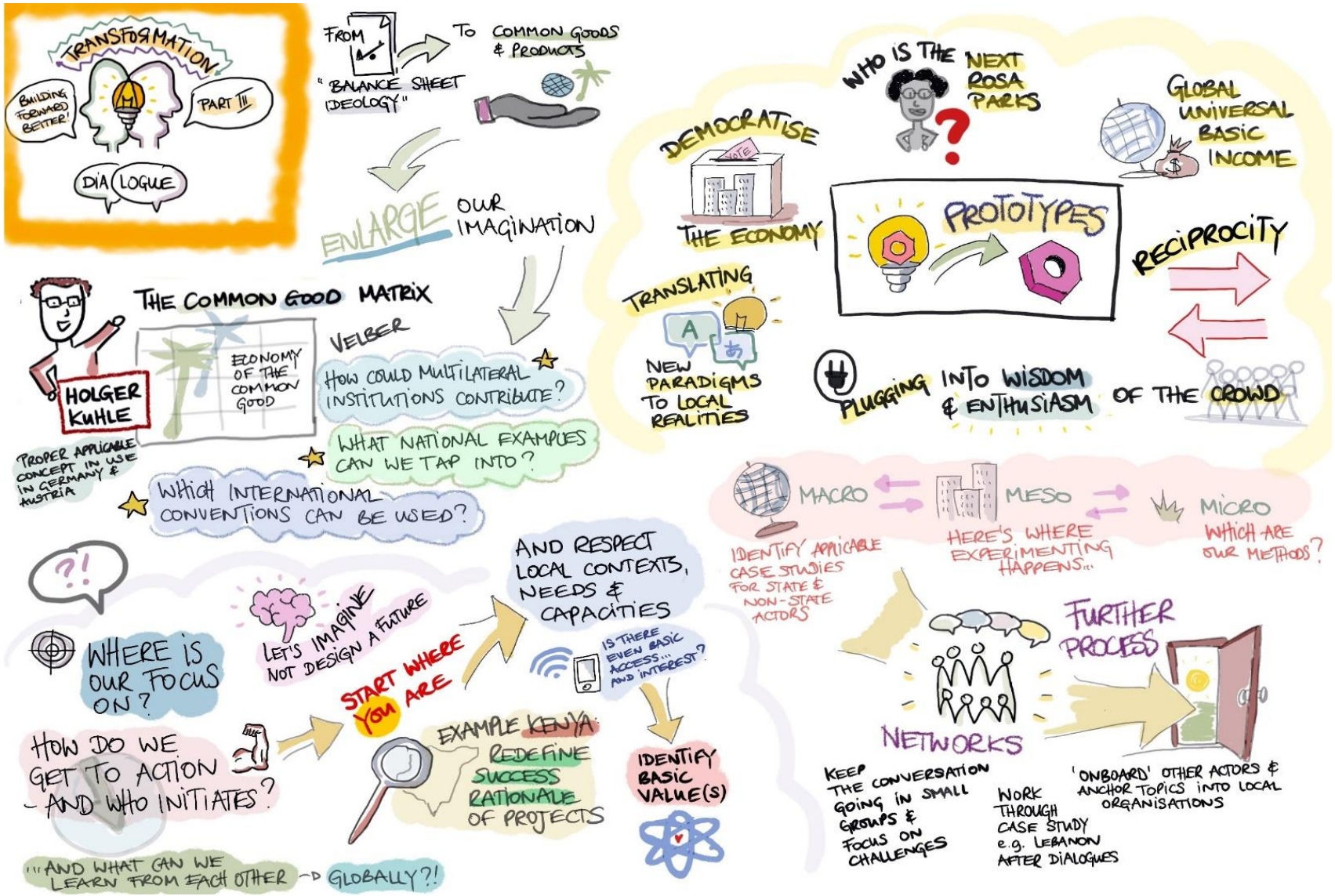
Annex 1: Visual Recordings - Session 1: What should happen and why?

Session 2: Design Principles (TransformAbilities)



Session 3: How should transformation happen?



Session 4: Which actions and tools exist?

Annex 2: List of Participants

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