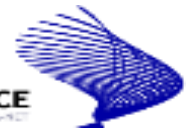


Transformation as Praxis: Exploring Socially Just and Transdisciplinary Pathways to Sustainability in Marginal Environments (TAPESTRY)

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Patches of transformation

‘Seeds’ or ecological bright spots (Bennett et al. 2016) that improve environmental conditions, improve human wellbeing and reimagine nature/ society relations

- Focus on bottom up transformation in marginal environments characterized by climate uncertainty
- Uncertainty as an ‘opportunity’ for transformation
- Particular site(s) where relations of power and knowledge are reconfigured / alternative practices of development emerging
- Each patch is unique; some fade, others grow or merge to form a tapestry

KUTCH

In Kutch, herders have been marginalised and their livelihoods are under threat, and changes in weather are making livelihoods even more precarious.

Here, camel herders are working to get local breeds recognised – including the unique swimming camels who graze on mangroves. They are working to open up markets for food products that use camel milk, and challenge negative perceptions of pastoralism.



Pastoralist with a Kharai (swimming) camel, Kutch



Fishing boat, Mumbai

MUMBAI

In Mumbai, we are working with fishing communities and people who live close to the mangroves that grow along the coast, threatened by commercial and infrastructure development.

Fishing communities in the city are adapting their tools and techniques to respond to pollution and environmental change, and forming new alliances based on mangrove restoration, sustainable water and waste management.

SUNDARBANS

In the Sundarbans, a delta region across the border of India and Bangladesh, people living on islands are vulnerable to storms and salinity from seawater floods.

They are exploring new farming methods, using dykes for fish farming and growing vegetables in specialised nets.



Salinity-resistant paddy varieties, Sundarbans, India



Crab fishery, Sundarbans, Bangladesh

Partners

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Welthungerhilfe

Transformation as praxis

- Praxis: reflexive process involving critique of existing social arrangements and search for alternatives
- Focus on agency and bottom up change
- Transformative alliances and transgressive learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2016)
- Scaling up and out: synergies and tensions





Photo credit: Ranit Chaterjee



Methodological approach

- Working with locally-based partners; long durée perspective
- Ethnography and in-depth fieldwork; photovoice
- Archival research
- GIS and Remote Sensing data analysis
- Participatory mapping
- Bringing in local perspectives in framing our research and focus



How is the project transformative?

- Addressing epistemic, environmental, social and gender **justice**, focusing on **root causes of vulnerability** arising from climate-related uncertainties, industrialisation, urban expansion and neoliberal forces
- Research as part of change - **transdisciplinary methods of engagement, sharing and learning**, sensitivity to politics of knowledge (such as negative perceptions of pastoralism)
- Forging alternative livelihoods through **co-productive alliances** while being sensitive to **risks / dark sides** of transformation (Blythe et al., 2017)



Photo: Ranit Chaterjee

Preliminary findings

- **From extreme to normal - historicising marginal environments and reframing local landscapes** e.g. colonial ideas about 'extreme' environments; 'wastelands' pastoralist areas in Kutch
- **Validating indigenous ecological knowledges**, e.g. around camel-mangrove relations.
- Distinct **gendered** and **intergenerational** perspectives on livelihoods.
- Opening up **spaces** for **mobilisation** and **collective agency** (pastoralist and fisher networks, transboundary co-operation in the Sundarbans)

Reflections and challenges

- How do you **see** and **capture** transformation as it unfolds, and **who** sees change as transformative? (local people, researchers?)
- Ethical challenges associated with co-productive alliances – the need to unpack **trade-offs** and **power differentials** within communities and alliances
- The fundamental effects of the **Covid19 crisis** – **devastating impacts**, but also **strengthened solidarity**

Reflections and challenges cont'd

- **Temporality** and **scale** key
- Transformation as **bottom-up driven, grounded changes** and how these link with larger political economy drivers and dominant discourses
- Not merely processes of **making/addition**, but also of **subtraction/unmaking**

