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

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Patches of transformation

• 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

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

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**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.

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**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.

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**Partners**

- Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK
- Norwegian University of Life Sciences
- Indian Institute of Technology (IIT Bombay)
- Kyoto University, Japan
- Norwegian Institute for Water Research (NIVA)
- Sahjeevan, Gujarat
- International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), Bangladesh
- Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE)
- Indian Institute of Public Health, Bhubaneswar (IIPHBB)
- All-India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI)
- Bombay 61
- Conservation Action Trust (CAT)
- Caritas-India
- Caritas-Bangladesh
- University of Oslo, Norway
- University of Sussex, UK
- Hunninghalda Foundation, India
- Mangrove Cell, Maharashtra
- 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
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)
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**