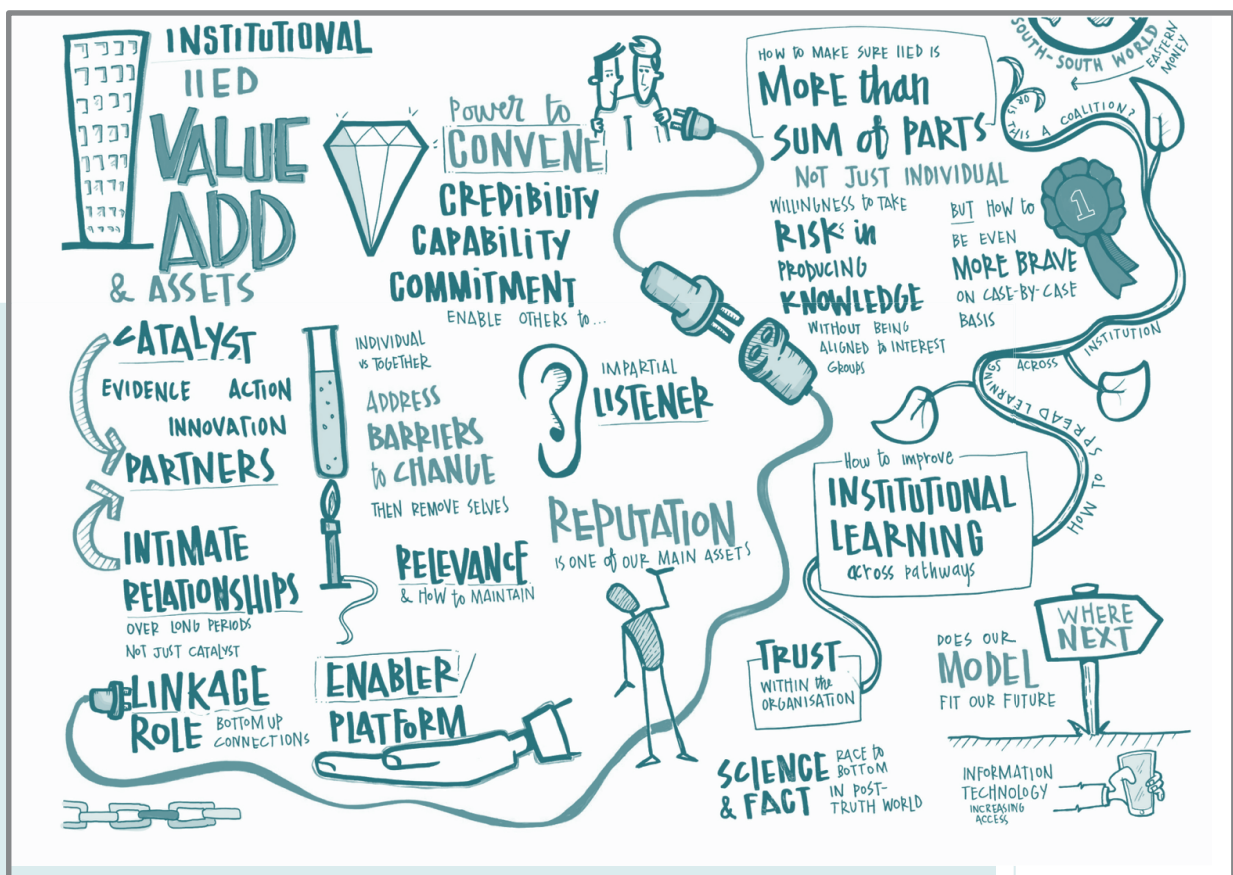


# IIED External Review 2012-2016

## Final Report

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017



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All errors in this report remain the responsibility of the authors.

Cover Illustration: Stuart Samuels (<http://thevalueweb.org/portfolio/stuart-samuels/>)

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# Abbreviations

ASM	Artisanal and Small Scale Mining
BoT	Board of Trustees
CPOM	Causal Process Observation Matrix
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
ER	External Review
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FAO	UN Food and Agricultural Organisation
GWI	Global Water Initiative
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PA	Protected Area
SDI	Shack Dwellers International
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SAPA	Social Assessment of Protected Areas
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMT	Strategy and Management Team
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
TAMD	Tracking Adaptation and Measuring Development
ToC	Theory of Change
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

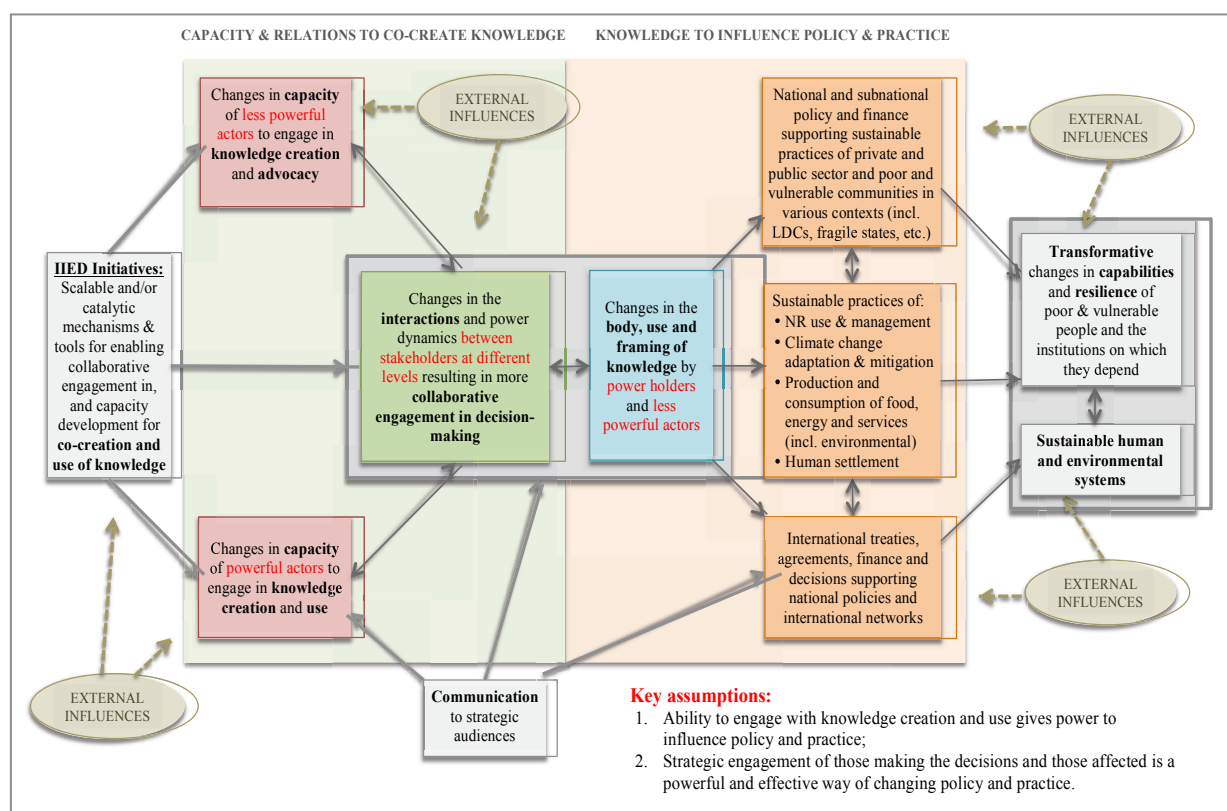
# Executive Summary

## Introduction and Objectives

This report presents the findings of a five-year External Review (ER) of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). This Review was mandated under a Joint Framework Agreement between IIED and its institutional funders (DFID, Danida, Sida and Irish Aid). This ER examined IIED's effectiveness and contributions to policy-level change and higher-level impacts during the past five years and addressed the organisation's strategic role and direction in a changing environment. The Review was conducted through a collaborative method of inquiry and reflection, fed by a mix of primary research and desk-based review.

The ER team worked closely with the IIED Steering Committee to frame the Review by constructing a Theory of Change for evaluating IIED's portfolio.

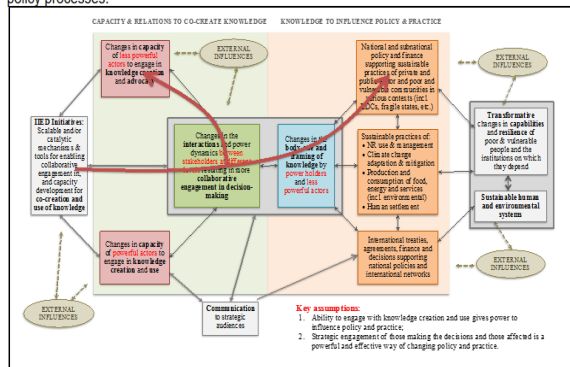
### External Review Evaluative Theory of Change



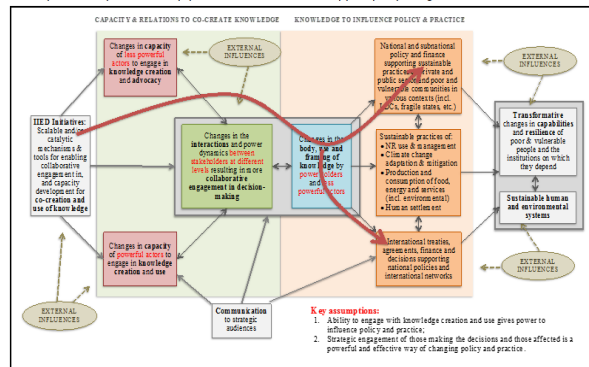
Source: Authors

The team then identified with IIED colleagues the most typical ‘ways of working’ – translated into ‘impact pathways’ by which it seeks to realise this theory (see below). These were categorised as: (1) Multi-stakeholder dialogue; (2) Research to policy; (3) Targeting policymakers; and (4) Empowering the powerless. These pathways are presented in larger scale in Annex A.

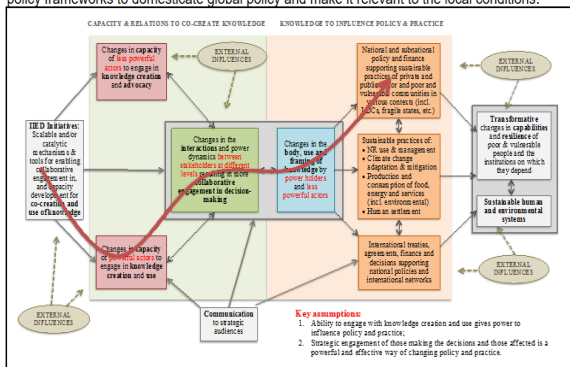
**Category 1. Multi-stakeholder Dialogue:** Convening networks and facilitating dialogues to share local knowledge, build capacity of less powerful actors, and influence policy makers in policy processes.



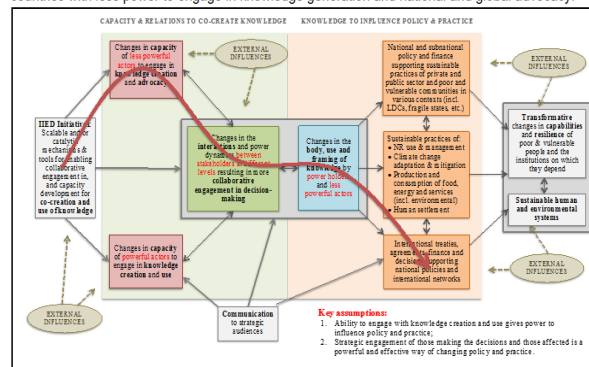
**Category 2. Research to Policy:** Building on existing bodies of work and engaging local actors in direct partnerships to develop practical solutions that support pro-poor governance.



**Category 3. Targeting Policymakers:** Reframing the knowledge of decision-makers and develop policy frameworks to domesticate global policy and make it relevant to the local conditions.



**Category 4. Empowering the Powerless:** Building capacity and enabling the voice of people/ countries with less power to engage in knowledge generation and national and global advocacy.



Source: Authors

## Findings: IIED’s effectiveness and contributions

The ER confirmed that IIED has shown consistently an ability to identify scalable and/or catalytic initiatives. IIED has identified and designed interventions in a way that is agenda-setting and proactive rather than reactive. IIED has demonstrated credibility as an ‘in-demand’ actor for agenda-setting. People come to IIED and ask for support and inputs. This has been enabled by strong partnerships, an ability to build cross-sector synergies and prolonged engagement (given sufficient funding).

IIED sees partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogue as a key route to policy change contributing to sustainable development. The ER found that IIED has successfully introduced tools and processes for engaging stakeholders that fit with existing governance structures but build bridges and open up space for participation and voice. The Review found further that IIED has effectively produced and used scientific knowledge to reframe problems and guide dialogue, resulting in changes in awareness and discourse.

IIED envisages capacity building as integral to its support to partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogue. The ER found that, although not always a specific objective in its work, IIED generally has succeeded in strengthening key stakeholders' capacities to engage in the creation and use of scientific knowledge through its collaborative processes. Capacity strengthening in IIED's work typically centres on 'guided interaction' around evidence-to-action. On occasion this has been supported by capacity building in the 'co-creation' of knowledge.

The ER found that during the Review period IIED has strategically supported and linked local, national and/or global policy processes, leading to tangible outcomes in terms of policy, governance and finance for supporting sustainable development. The effectiveness of this policy support was strengthened by IIED's 'independent'<sup>1</sup> positionality and resource flexibility, particularly in not being tied down by large 'path-dependent' contracts. Furthermore, IIED's process support has proven most effective when it is sustained through prolonged engagement.

The ER found less documented evidence, however, of these IIED-influenced policies and practices contributing to impact-level transformations in capabilities and systems. In many instances, changed conditions of policy and practice had not (yet) gained sufficient momentum and/or scale to reach the 'tipping point' where the transformative change was likely to happen. Indeed, IIED's high level of ambition appears to extend the timeframe to achieving – and measuring -- impacts on lives and systems.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The ER confirms that during the five-year period under review IIED has remained an active and effective organisation. Beneath this headline, the ER found that IIED has continued to build on its tried-and-tested 'process-based' intervention model, eschewing the 'expert-led' model of many policy think tanks. Through this approach, IIED engages knowledge, actors and spaces, building relationships and capacity as a driver of policy change and in anticipation of beneficial impacts at the interface of environment and development. At the same time, IIED is an organisation in the midst of change, confirmed and detailed through reflective discussions with IIED staff during the ER process. These discussions addressed risks and opportunities linked to a changing funding environment, the growing capacity of Southern organisations and a shift in development discourse and research marked by the Paris climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This provided the backdrop for the formative or forward-looking elements of the ER, which considered strategic options for IIED's future. The ER provides some recommendations on three future challenges for IIED:

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<sup>1</sup> We define 'independent' here in the following way: IIED is a value-based organisation that seeks to act as an independent voice for the poor.

## ***(1) Improving and sustaining IIED's intervention model***

As an effective 'boundary organisation'<sup>2</sup>, IIED continues to contribute significantly to the interface between applied research, inclusive dialogue and policy change at different levels, resulting in change on the ground. IIED has a number of proven ways of working which this ER had drawn out and mapped as impact pathways. A number of challenges to IIED's intervention model were surfaced through collaborative reflection. The ER recommends that IIED management and research teams should consider the following:

- **Review progress in mainstreaming gender-sensitive research and policy advocacy across the teams.** A strategic decision has been made by IIED management to invest in gender training across the organisation. This needs to be monitored, including assessing how effectively teams have integrated gender into their intervention design and implementation. Moreover, gender impact indicators, analysis methods and interpretive frameworks need to be developed for IIED's future outcome and impact assessments.
- **Review IIED's mix of interventions in light of a changing environment.** IIED's mixed portfolio of interventions is a great strength but requires strategic review in light of a shifting financial, institutional and development landscape. The four impact pathways, presented above and in Annex A, are not fixed constructs, but should prove useful for reflection, strategic cross-organisation thinking and communication to partners and other stakeholders.
- **Integrate policy research with communication for social change and innovation.** There has been an encouraging growth in size and capacity of communications work in IIED. The ER surfaced and confirmed the crucial role of effective communications in IIED's intervention model, in its internal cross-organisational strategic positioning and in projecting externally its institutional profile and brand. The ER team recommends that IIED should redouble its efforts to build on its achievements in strategic communications during the Review period.
- **Review IIED's use of research in its boundary role.** IIED's strength and reputation as a boundary organisation provide it with an important comparative value and opportunity to renew its knowledge brokering role between and within North and South. An essential aspect of this, for instance, would be to redouble its emphasis on setting and promoting quality standards and guidelines for rigorous and inclusive applied research. Another important aspect would be to focus on strategic partnerships that would enable Southern partners to become better at research policy and advocacy - or 'positive disruptive change' - within their own contexts as well as globally.

## ***(2) Addressing 'higher level' strategic challenges and opportunities***

Above and beyond making IIED's ways of working more effective in its changing environment, there is a higher-level debate required around the institute's strategic direction,

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<sup>2</sup> 'Boundary organizations' were first proposed by Guston (2001) as a means of stabilizing the boundary between scientists and decision makers, through distinct organizations that lie between these groups, are accountable to both, and that serve distinct and potentially conflicting sets of goals of each. We use the term 'boundary organisation' to indicate that IIED crosses the boundaries of different levels, disciplines and institutions influencing, creating and using knowledge for sustainable development.

given the risks and opportunities it faces. The ER recommends that IIED management should consider the following:

- **Review and resolve trade-offs between grassroots impact and global/regional policy influence.** The ER elicited an apparent tension in donor expectations between their recognition of IIED's grassroots added value and their desire to see a higher profile for IIED in global platforms and in UK debates. This raises the question of where does its strategic contribution best lie and whether it can resolve these apparently divergent ambitions. There is a good case for engaging donors in a strategic discussion around this tension. For IIED's institutional funders and partners it will be important to understand fully the implications of emphasising one over the other.
- **Review and resolve trade-offs between short-term incubator initiatives and long-term impact pathways.** A related strategic dilemma surfaced during the ER discussions. This centred on the relative added value of supporting many diverse incubator initiatives ('letting many flowers bloom') versus investing in fewer but more focussed and synergetic longer-term engagements. The latter strategy in particular would require more proactive linking and networking across different silos of work within IIED. This trade-off needs to be debated and resolved as IIED (re)defines its 'unique selling point' (USP).

### ***(3) Bringing research and strategy together through impact assessment and learning***

Finally, the ER surfaced a tension between IIED's proof of contribution at outcome level and its high ambition in influencing impact level change. The ER recommends that IIED management should consider the following:

- **Strengthen impact-level learning.** IIED's recent direction of travel has been strongly influenced by the SDGs and the elevation of sustainability to a higher level of global commitment and collaboration. This puts IIED and its partners' shared agenda of environment and development centre stage. Within IIED, there is an operational focus on reporting outcome level changes in policy and practice while having ambitions at a much higher level of transformational change in local-to-global systems. Becoming better at impact-oriented M&E of its own portfolio will help IIED strengthen itself as a learning organisation, while strategically moving it to a more central role in the global SDGs impact learning agenda.
- **Move impact M&E to the centre of a learning organisation.** There is an underpinning opportunity for higher level impact assessment to strengthen IIED as a learning organisation in which M&E has a more central role, working with impact pathways as dynamic Theories of Change to test, reflect and share within and across teams. This shift might also prompt a more systemic approach to cross-group sharing and synergy within an organisation that strives to be both effective and more than a sum of its parts.

# 1 Introduction and objectives

This report presents the findings of a five-year External Review (ER) of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). This Review is mandated under a Joint Framework Agreement between IIED and its institutional funders (DFID, Danida, Sida and Irish Aid). Under the terms of IIED's grant, this involves an assessment of progress achieved in addressing the principal issues raised in the previous ER (in 2011)<sup>3</sup> and in implementing its 5-year strategy (2014-2019). This ER coincides with the mid-point of this strategy period. The objectives of the ER are to:

1. Assess the **effectiveness** of IIED's work in its four outcome areas and the **contributions** of this work to global sustainable development goals;
2. Assess the **added value** and **relevance** of IIED's work from the different perspectives of staff, partners and donors, in relation to the opportunities and challenges that emerge from the Post-2015 agenda and new global shifts and trends;
3. Facilitate critical debate and reflections on **IIED's future role** and **strategic redirections** for the remainder of its strategy (2016-2019);
4. Identify **key areas** that need **improvement** (or areas that might be dropped) as part of IIED's future direction.

This ER differs in focus and substance from the 2011 ER. It was decided that this Review should focus on IIED's impact and effectiveness rather than the operational aspects which had been more substantially covered by the 2011 ER. Nonetheless we do make reference to the previous ER when discussing relevant observed changes in impact and effectiveness.

The context in which this ER takes place is quite dynamic, with important implications for IIED's future role. Donor priorities and concerns variously compete and converge with risks and opportunities linked to climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the same time, new partnership and funding mechanisms are emerging, alongside significant shifts in the international and regional political climates, power balances and public opinion. Taken together, these contextual dynamics profoundly challenge IIED's 'ways of working'.

This report is structured as follows: **Section 2** summarizes the ER process and methodology, including the evaluative Theory of Change (ToC). **Section 3** presents the ER findings. **Section 4** looks forward, considering IIED's ways of working in light of a changing environment. **Section 5** concludes with a set of strategic recommendations. Annex A illustrates the four impact pathways considered by this Review. Annex B presents Causal Process Observation Matrices for each in-depth case reviewed.

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<sup>3</sup> Kabraji, A, M Leach and b Romijn (2012). "External Review of IIED 2011 (Final Report)", unpublished report, 5<sup>th</sup> March.

## 2 External Review Approach and Methodology

### 2.1. Process approach

The design and process of the ER has been intentionally ‘utilization-focused’. Based on the findings from its enquiries and reflections, the ER formulates recommendations. These encourage IIED to review its future role, direction and partnerships and in a number of areas as part of a broader review of its remaining strategy period (2016-2019).

The team identified two important users: the institutional donors, and IIED Board of Trustees, staff and leadership management. The donor partners commissioned the ER and will use the findings to determine their future institutional support. IIED colleagues will build on the ER reflections and recommendations to determine the Institute’s future role and strategic redirections, and make improvements to its ways of working.

#### A utilization-focused approach

A “utilization-focused” approach implies a careful design and facilitation of each part of the evaluation, taking into consideration how it will affect the use or uptake of findings and influence learning.<sup>4</sup> This requires a few fundamental steps to: (a) determine the organisational readiness and frame the evaluation together with the key users based on an assessment of context; (b) identify appropriate ways that can help create shared understanding of the evaluation methods, processes and outcomes and its potential controversies or limitations among these users; and (c) synthesize and present the findings in ways that enable meta-reflection and use.

Source: Authors

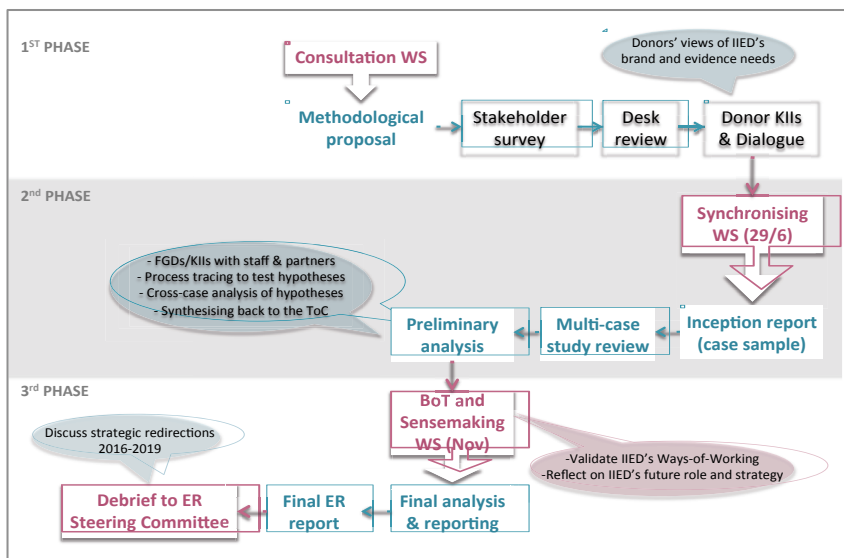
The utilization focus was realised through engaging these two users in a collaborative process of inquiry and reflection, which involved collective and individual consultations with donors and leadership, periodic interactions with an IIED Strategy and Management Team (SMT) and more frequent interactions with the IIED MEAL manager in the Strategy and Learning Group (SLG). A three-phase process was outlined and agreed for this (see Figure 2.1):

- The **inception and synchronising phase** (from March until July 2016). This consisted of a desk review, a stakeholder survey, consultations, and a synchronising workshop. The purpose was to obtain a good overview of all of IIED’s work and achievements, synchronise internal and External Reviews and expectations, and prepare the sampling and methodology for the second phase.
- The second **in-depth inquiry phase** (from July until October 2016). This involved document review and interviews with IIED staff and partners to collect evidence and trace contribution to change as part of a multi-case study.

<sup>4</sup> See Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) Checklist by Michael Quinn Patton (2013) on Better Evaluation ([http://betterevaluation.org/en/resource/guide/UFE\\_checklist](http://betterevaluation.org/en/resource/guide/UFE_checklist)).

- The third **analysis and reporting phase** (from October 2016 until February 2017). This consisted of a participatory sensemaking workshop, in-depth cross-case analysis, and a synthesising and reporting of findings.

**Figure 2.1. External Review: A three-phase process**



Source: Authors

## 2.2. Methodological approach

The ER team adopted a **realist evaluation approach**. This approach is typically applied to 'whole system change' evaluations not suited for experimental or statistical approaches. This is particularly relevant for the work of IIED that seeks to influence policy processes and in turn influence systemic or transformative changes.

### A realist evaluation methodology

Realist evaluation seeks to generate findings about 'how change happens' (in contrast with traditional counterfactual approaches that rather look at 'if change happened'). It examines the marginal but perhaps significant or even essential contributions an intervention has made. It asserts that the same intervention may have a different effect in different contexts with different protagonists. It seeks to assess causality by identifying the conditions and mechanisms that can *explain* change in their contexts. It examines as many evidence streams as possible to arrive at valid conclusions about causes and contributions.<sup>5</sup> To analyse causality, it typically uses methods such as contribution analysis and process tracing.<sup>6</sup>

Source: Authors

<sup>5</sup> See Forss, K., Marra, M., & Schwartz, R. (2011). *Evaluating the Complex: Attribution, Contribution, and Beyond*. Transaction Publishers.

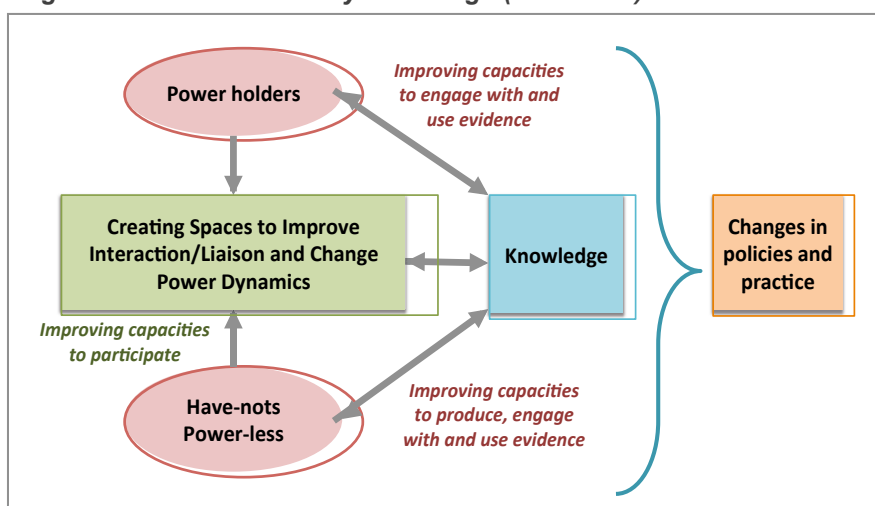
<sup>6</sup> Realist evaluation is method-neutral: it doesn't prescribe specific methods for either data collection or analysis. Methods are chosen in relation to the evaluation questions and causal claims to be investigated. In whole-systems change programmes, this often involves contribution analysis and process tracing.

IIED's diverse portfolio of initiatives aims at systemic change in many different sectors and parts of the world. It does not allow for comparison across large samples sufficient to enable statistical distribution and/or counterfactual analysis. Yet there are some clear 'ways of working' (discussed below) that reflect the Institute's identity, mission and assumptions about how sustainable change happens. This permits comparison of how these different initiatives manage to realise IIED's mission in different contexts.

## Theory of Change (ToC)

The ER team worked collaboratively with the IIED SMT to frame the Review by constructing a ToC for evaluating IIED's portfolio. The team then identified with IIED colleagues the most typical 'ways of working' – translated into 'impact pathways' (see Annex A) -- by which it seeks to realise this theory. This drew on a desk review of IIED's results framework, strategy documents, results reports and case studies produced during the Review period. In particular, it built on IIED's own *meta*-Theory of Change (see Figure 2.2). This identifies four inter-linked outcome areas of influence: co-creating knowledge, building bridges, building capacities and contributing to changes in policies and practice.<sup>7</sup>

**Fig 2.2. IIED's meta-Theory of Change (meta-ToC)**

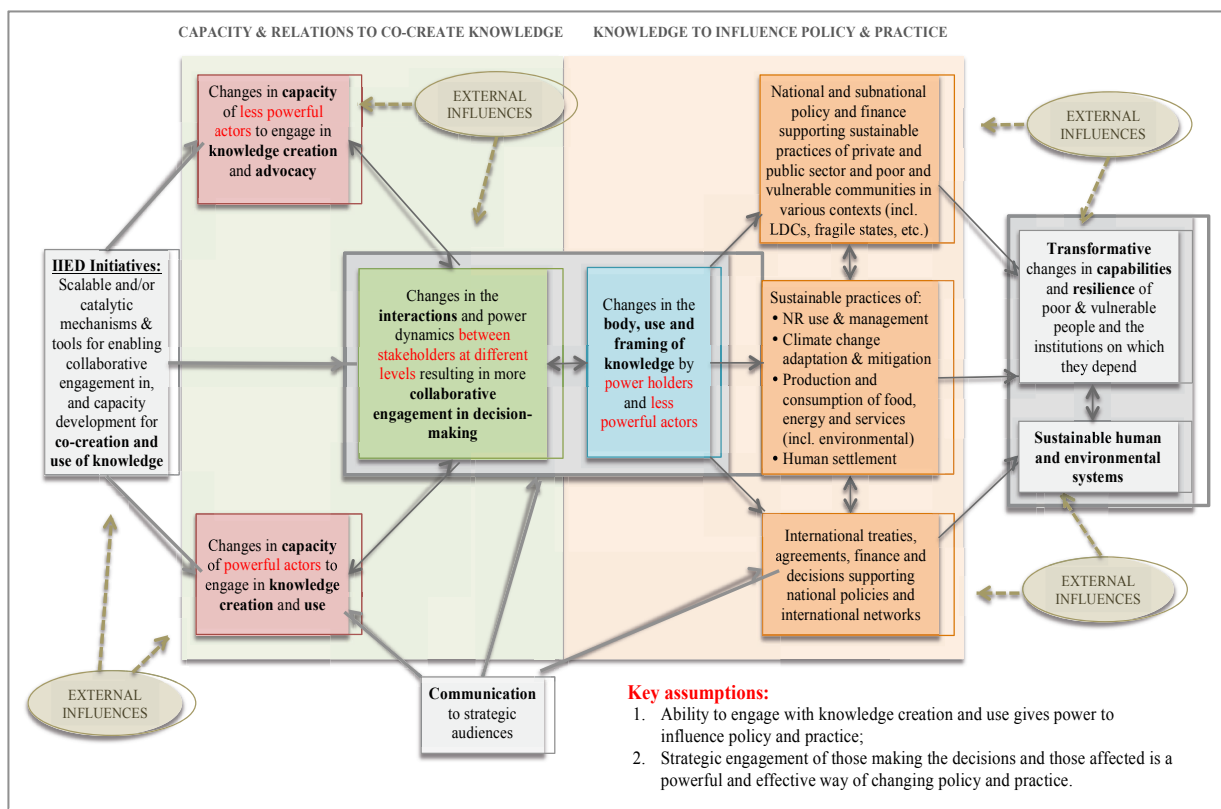


Source: IIED Donor Dialogue 2015 Presentation on Accountability and Reporting

The ER team adapted this *meta*-ToC into an evaluative model (see Figure 2.3). This is read 'backwards': from impact-level changes in transformative capabilities and systems (right-hand side of the diagram) to changes in global, national and local policy and practice via different mixes of bridge building, knowledge creation and capacity building (middle of the diagram) to the IIED initiatives that sought to realise these (left-hand side of the diagram).

<sup>7</sup> In the course of 2015, IIED reviewed its change dimensions and intended contributions as outlined in its Results Framework to better understand and articulate the causal logic. The process led by a Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Working Group resulted in its now meta-ToC.

**Figure 2.3. External Review Evaluative ToC**



Source: Authors

Underpinning this evaluative ToC is IIED's assumption that changes in the body, use and framing of knowledge are needed to inform and help shape the policies and practices at the different levels (from the local to the global). To this end, IIED believes, strategic engagement of key stakeholders in knowledge generation is essential. For this engagement to be effective it requires interactive changes in power dynamics and in the capacities of both powerless and powerful actors. Significantly, IIED does not take the classic route of most policy think tanks that seeks to affect policy change by studying policy options and providing expert advice to policy-makers.<sup>8</sup> IIED believes that policy change is not a rational and linear process. Instead it emerges from many different angles of influence and different types of knowledge creation and use, in which practical and experience-based knowledge creation is as valuable as scientific research. In short, creating space for voice and participation and tackling the policy environment is as much an essential part of IIED's strategy as is conducting policy research and providing expert advice.

An important element that needed to be made visible in the diagram to enable realist inquiry was the range of contextual factors and influences (either positive or negative) that might affect outcomes in different ways. Last, the diagram makes visible the strategic importance of communication as an essential enabler of the intermediate outcomes and thus a core aspect of IIED's strategy

<sup>8</sup> Hopley, M, N Kanji and G McGranahan (2004). "Ways of Working for Sustainable Development: IIED's Experience", Discussion Document, June, London: IIED, p. 6.

The ER team then mapped the ER research questions (see Table 2.1) against this evaluative ToC. The table includes first a summative inquiry into IIED's performance and value in the past five years. To this it adds a formative set of questions addressing its future role and value. These questions were agreed with the SMT and fine-tuned through the consultations and donor dialogue<sup>9</sup> in the inception and synchronizing phase (see Figure 2.1). The methods to inquire the questions are listed in the right-hand column and detailed below.

**Table 2.1. External Review research questions**

<i>Summative</i>	<i>Formative</i>	<i>Methods</i>
<b>Co-creating knowledge</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality and accessibility of IIED's research products according to stakeholders?</li> <li>• Improvements since the last Review 2011?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIED's future role in sustainable development research?</li> <li>• Key thematic areas to respond to newly emerging trends and shifting donor priorities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature &amp; desk review</li> <li>• Stakeholder survey</li> <li>• Key informant interviews with donors and IIED leadership</li> <li>• Board meeting and donor dialogue</li> <li>• Participatory sense-making</li> </ul>
<b>Building bridges</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths and weaknesses of IIED's approaches (incl. innovative) to bridge building?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIED's future role in building bridges and required improvement of its support to stakeholder interactions?</li> <li>• Role of IIED's communication strategy post-2015?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature &amp; desk review</li> <li>• Stakeholder survey</li> <li>• Multi-case study review</li> <li>• Participatory sense-making</li> </ul>
<b>Building capacities</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness of IIED's partnership approach in terms of capacity-building?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIED's future role in capacity-building and improvement of its partnership approach?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature &amp; desk review</li> <li>• Multi-case study review</li> <li>• Participatory sense-making</li> </ul>
<b>Influencing policies and practice</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effectiveness of IIED's work in terms of influencing policies and practice?</li> <li>• To what extent has IIED realised its ToC?</li> <li>• Did assumptions in the ToC hold true?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIED's future role vis-à-vis Southern partners in influencing policies and practice?</li> <li>• Future alignment of IIED's assets for greater impact?</li> <li>• How can IIED's strategy, structures and operations respond to shifting funding priorities and mechanisms?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution analysis</li> <li>• Participatory sense-making</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> The donors at the donor dialogue stressed the importance of (among others): (a) collecting evidence of IIED's effectiveness in 'building capacities' in terms of strengthening people's ability to engage with knowledge creation; and (b) helping IIED to identify an appropriate response to emerging trends and donor priorities without losing its independence.

## Data collection and analysis

The primary research element of the ER sequenced a stakeholder survey with, an in-depth multi-case study review, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with selected donors, board members and members of IIED leadership.

The **stakeholder survey** was implemented through an online questionnaire sent to the 'population universe' of IIED partners and stakeholders (n = 2891). These included donor agencies, central government, NGOs, private sector, think tanks and universities. Responses were received from 205 of these partners/stakeholders, just over one-half of which represented NGO or University partners. Respondents were asked to score the quality and effectiveness of IIED's research against five categories: methodological rigour, gender analysis integration, research partner engagement, community inclusion in the research process, and innovativeness of IIED's research products. They were asked additionally to assess the effectiveness of the three other dimensions of IIED's ToC: building bridges between partners, building partner research capacities, and influencing policy and practice.

The **multi-case study review** involved a comparative analysis of IIED's contribution to change in the four key outcome areas of the ToC (capacity, interactions, knowledge, and policy and practice). The Review identified a total of 46 'cases' (i.e. distinct and coherent pieces of work)<sup>10</sup> constituting IIED's portfolio of work during the past five years. These cases were clustered into six broad impact pathway categories<sup>11</sup>. Four of these pathways represented IIED's most typical ways of implementing its ToC. These four pathways are presented in Annex A. From these 46 cases, nine (later merged into eight) were sampled proportionally from these four impact pathways. This sample also captured the work of the four research groups (Shaping Sustainable Markets, Climate Change, Human Settlements and Natural Resources) and their different levels of intervention (local to global). Each sampled case was reviewed for observed changes, context-related conditions, causes and contributions. Case evidence was gathered from subject-related documents and from semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with IIED colleagues and key stakeholders. These stakeholders were identified through referral ('snowballing'). Within-case analysis was conducted using a simplified form of process tracing.<sup>12</sup> This involved systematic crosschecking and mapping of evidence gathered against each outcome area in the evaluative ToC. This evidence was organised using a Causal Process Observation Matrix format and rubrics. These matrices are presented in Annex B.<sup>13</sup>

Once the matrices were finalised, a cross-case contribution analysis was conducted. This involved the analysis of the patterns in the evidence on conditions, changes, causes and contributions across the eight cases. Preliminary findings from this analysis were then used as the basis for facilitating a collective sensemaking process with IIED staff and leadership and selected partners. This involved a critical reflection on IIED's ways of working in relation

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<sup>10</sup> These were identified from the IIED documentation made available to the ER desk review (in particular the results reports from this period).

<sup>11</sup> This clustering was done in a first-phase-ending synchronising workshop held with staff and management in London on 29 June 2016 (see figure 2.1).

<sup>12</sup> For more information on process tracing, see for instance Beach, D. and R. Pedersen (2013). *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*, University of Michigan Press.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the IIED Working Paper on Boundaries of Outcome Areas (July 2015).

to changes in the environment and on possible strategic routes to respond and adapt (see Objective 3 in Section 1). Group-based diagnostic tools and facilitation methods<sup>14</sup> from The Value Web<sup>15</sup> were employed for this in a one-day sensemaking workshop (see Figure 2.1) that took place on 24 November 2016. During this workshop, groups were asked to consider the utility and strategic value of IIED's ways of working in light of an assessment of changing context. This encompassed risks and opportunities in the aid landscape and in regional and global political shifts. Using the results from the workshop as an additional layer of evidence, the team then turned to the final analysis and write up of the Review report.

## Methodological limitations

The Review methodology was characterised by a number of methodological limitations. In respect of the stakeholder survey, time and resource constraints were reflected in design limitations. This was a self-selecting survey, with respondents invited to participate through an emailed invitation and follow-up prompt. Respondents were given a short time to respond. The survey elicited a 7 per cent (205 responses) response rate from a total of 2,891 requests. While this was a reasonably healthy response, it was not built on a probability-based sampling protocol so was open to selection bias. The results of the survey therefore were only used as indicative evidence.

In respect of the within-case and cross-case analysis, given time and resource constraints, conducting on-the-ground research with partners and 'primary beneficiaries' in a representative sample of countries and cases was not feasible.<sup>16</sup> The team relied instead on face-to-face or telephone/skype interviews with IIED staff and partners. In some cases, interviewing options were further constrained by sensitivities linked to IIED's *modus operandi* of being a 'behind the scenes' partner. This meant that it was not always considered appropriate to talk to partners about their positionality as 'secondary beneficiaries'<sup>17</sup> of IIED capacity building and support. Hence while in all eight cases the ER team was able to reconstruct the impact pathways and probe IIED contribution through triangulated interviews with a relatively high degree of confidence, it varied in strength depending on who and how many people the team were able to speak to. This variation in the strength of evidence for each case was scored on a four-point scale, as footnoted in Table 2.2.

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<sup>14</sup> These tools are presented in the Sensemaking Workshop Report, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. <http://thevalueweb.org>.

<sup>16</sup> Here, 'primary beneficiaries' are the citizens who benefitted through impact level improvements in capabilities or systems.

<sup>17</sup> Here, 'secondary beneficiaries' are defined as those partners who benefitted from IIED capacity building and process support.

**Table 2.2. Cross-case analysis: Strength of evidence table**

Impact pathway categories	Case	Strength of Evidence <sup>18</sup>
1. Multi-stakeholder dialogue	Ghana artisanal and small scale mining (Shaping Sustainable Markets research group)	Weaker
	Urban poor empowerment and resilience (Human Settlements research group)	Stronger
2. Research to policy	The Hilsa fishery conservation trust fund (Shaping Sustainable Markets research group)	Stronger
	The Social Assessment of Protected Areas (SAPA) initiative (Natural Resources research group)	Stronger
3. Targeting policy makers	Tracking Adaptation and Measuring Development (TAMD) (Climate Change research group)	Stronger
	Global Water Initiative (GWI) West Africa (Natural Resources research group)	Weaker
4. Empowering the powerless	LDC UNFCCC Paris negotiations (Climate Change research group)	Weaker
	Biocultural Heritage Territories and Networks (Natural Resources research group)	Stronger

A further limitation of the cross-case analysis was the relatively small sample size of eight cases out of a total of 46. We note a methodological trade-off here between breadth of coverage and depth of inquiry. This trade-off becomes more acute when time and resources are limited. Our decision to limit our cross-case analysis was influenced by the comparative advantage of the method. Causal analysis in system evaluations draws on the strength and granularity of the explanatory evidence. This requires in-depth research and substantial cross-checking of different sources, methods and perspectives. Our lack of access to primary beneficiaries further supported the rationale for limiting the sample and putting more effort into consulting all available resources.

Last, our case sampling was also limited to initiatives that were assessed by IIED colleagues as ‘typical’ of each given impact pathway. With more time and resources, we would have included in the sample more atypical, or outlying initiatives for each pathway in order to strengthen the cross-case comparative analysis.

<sup>18</sup> Weakest: Documented reporting only; Weaker: Documented reporting + triangulated interviews with IIED team members; Stronger: Documented reporting + triangulated interviews with IIED team members + partners/secondary beneficiaries; Strongest: Documented reporting + triangulated interviews with IIED team members + partners/secondary beneficiaries + primary beneficiaries.

## 3 Findings: IIED's effectiveness and contributions

This section responds to the first objective of the ER, which is: *to assess the effectiveness of IIED's work in its four main outcome areas and the contributions of this work to global sustainable development goals*. In doing so, it presents the key findings of the summative part of the ER that inquired into IIED's performance and value in the past 5 years (see Table 2.1). For this we work our way from left to right through the evaluative ToC. In this way, we consider contribution to impact level change through influence on policy and practice via different impact pathways. These reflect IIED's distinct ways of working. Under each subheading we draw on case study material to illustrate our findings. A full set of summary case matrices are presented in Annex B.

### 3.1. IIED's capacity to identify scalable and/or catalytic initiatives and partnerships

The ER confirmed that IIED has shown consistently an ability to identify scalable and/or catalytic initiatives. IIED has identified and designed interventions in a way that is agenda-setting and proactive rather than reactive. IIED has demonstrated credibility as an 'in-demand' actor for agenda-setting. People come to IIED and ask for support and inputs. This has been enabled by strong partnerships, an ability to build cross-sector synergies and prolonged engagement (given sufficient funding).

In-depth cross-case analysis across all four impact pathways confirmed and illustrated the way in which IIED initiatives backed scalable and/or catalytic initiatives and partnerships.

- The **Urban Poor Empowerment and Resilience initiative** (Category 1 – Multi-stakeholder Dialogue) aims to strengthen urban governance and capacity to build resilience and adapt to climate risks, strategically linked to the policy mechanism of the Green Climate Fund (GCF). This was enabled by IIED's long-term engagement with urban governance and a strong relationship with partner Shack Dwellers International (SDI), linked to its capacity to identify and act on cross-sector synergy with climate change institutions. Nonetheless, as alluded to below, the institutional mechanism of the GCF is not set up for innovative funding modalities, so the time frame towards policy change remains long and the process somewhat tortuous.
- The **Hilsa Fishery Conservation Trust Fund in Bangladesh initiative** (Category 2 – From Research to Policy) identified an entry point to supporting a sustainable conservation management model in Bangladesh. IIED put in place the strong coalition and partnership needed to maximise the likelihood that the Trust Fund would be implemented. This included sufficient commitment and secured funding, a core group of local researchers engaging with the government department, and a strong partner (WorldFish) that could take the Trust Fund 'to the next level' and add a stronger poverty and equity focus to it. Bridges were built and relationships developed within the boundaries of a project with a limited timeframe and budget.

Crucially, this approach built on existing ambitions and capacities and took into account a range of stakeholder interests.

- The **Tracking Adaptation and Measuring Development (TAMD) initiative** (Category 3 – Targeting Policy Makers) identified an entry point to catalyse governments to access climate funding, optimise adaptation and development outcomes and strengthen governance. IIED targeted successful partnerships for the programme, such as with the Africa Climate Resilience Alliance, subsequently scaling the outcome by inspiring others to apply the TAMD approach. These have helped demonstrate to governments how TAMD could be useful, and have also shown other governments not yet involved what they could learn from participation. IIED and partners anticipate that these partnerships will continue to progress in selected pilot countries and develop and expand in others.

## 3.2. IIED's contribution to bridge building and knowledge co-creation, backed by capacity building

The ER considered evidence for IIED's contribution to three interlinked outcomes. Under IIED's intervention model these outcomes combine in different ways to influence the higher-level outcome of changing policy and practices. We discuss our findings for each of these outcomes below.

### **Supporting evidence-fuelled multi-stakeholder engagement**

IIED's commitment to a partnership approach to supporting change is longstanding. IIED's stated mission is *"to build a fairer, more sustainable world, using evidence, action and influence in partnership with others"*. The nature of IIED partnerships varies widely. Partnerships can be shorter-term and more project-focussed or longer-term and more institutionally-focussed. They can be more formal or more informal. They can be organisation-wide or built on personal relationships. A recent draft Partnerships Policy situates IIED's approach to partnership within a broader relationship-building approach as follows:

*"IIED uses the term 'partner' to describe an organisation, an institution, a government agency, or a private sector body with which IIED works to pursue the above principles... Not all relationships with other organisations or individuals that IIED engages in and values are partnerships. For example, some of our key audiences, donors and funders, and members of project consortiums under contract for specific purposes – are extremely important for IIED, but might not be defined as partners. Other critical relationships for us include broad coalitions and alliances where members enter with their own objectives and agendas that may not manifest all the core principles of institutional partnerships".<sup>19</sup>*

Crucially, as the evaluative ToC shows (see Figure 2.3), IIED sees partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogue as a key route to policy change contributing to sustainable

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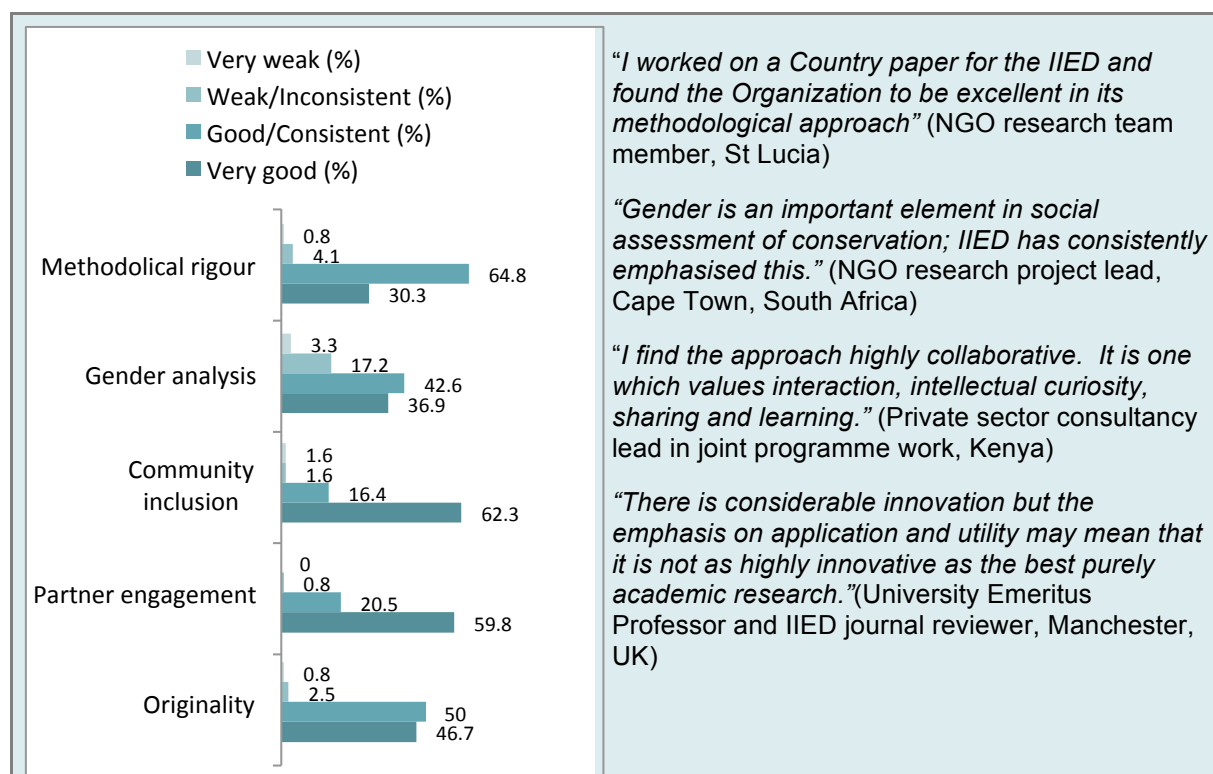
<sup>19</sup> 2014 Draft Partnerships Policy paper, cited in an unpublished IIED Nepal partnerships paper.

development. By bringing actors together with multiple perspectives and context-specific knowledge, “ways are found to use spaces and capacities to optimise collective impact in influencing policy and practice.”<sup>20</sup>

The ER found that IIED has successfully introduced tools and processes for engaging stakeholders that fit with existing governance structures but build bridges and open up space for participation and voice (an essential outcome in the ToC). The Review found further that IIED has effectively produced and used scientific knowledge to reframe problems and guide dialogue, resulting in changes in awareness and discourse.

The stakeholder survey looked specifically at the quality of research and research partnerships involving IIED (see Table 3.1). It elicited widespread positive feedback on the methodological rigour and originality of IIED’s research. On the latter quality, some respondents prioritised application and utility over originality. Respondents also scored positively the ‘process’ elements of IIED-supported research, namely partner engagement and community inclusion in the research process. Respondents were less unanimous in their assessment of the quality of gender analysis included in IIED-supported research. The Review team note that the issue of consistency of gender analysis in IIED’s research and advocacy has been picked up by management and is reflected in a recent management decision to invest in gender capacity building for IIED staff. We return to this in Section 5.

**Table 3.1. Stakeholder survey findings on quality and effectiveness of IIED’s research**



Source: Authors

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

In-depth cross-case analysis across all four impact pathways confirmed and illustrated the way in which IIED initiatives combined bridge building with knowledge co-creation.

- The **Global Water Initiative (GWI) in West Africa** (Category 3 – Targeting Policy Makers) supports the development of appropriate policies and structures for governance of dam-fed irrigation and land tenure systems in order to enhance equitable access and benefit sharing, and reduce conflict. An IIED-supported policy proposal for benefit sharing through an investment fund at the new Kandaji dam in Niger, for instance, achieved positive outcomes. The proposal built on numerous co-created studies and (local and national) workshops that generated concrete policy inputs, including a draft law/decreree and funding rules. Local expertise was built through the studies and local ownership created through the workshops among civil society and local authorities. Notably, the local governor acted as a champion for mobilising social capital to further the proposal and update these inputs. This policy influence was enabled by in-built incentives: because benefit-sharing was included in the official government procedures and in the plans of technical and financial partners, it was always likely that the issue and therefore also the proposal would remain on the table. Challenges remain however. Significantly, the proposal on benefit-sharing has a long time-horizon, as the dam will not begin producing electricity until 2023. Meanwhile the Ministry of Energy has other pressing issues and economic interests, and so has expressed reservations. This is compounded by policy inconsistencies between local and national level, where the draft law on Electricity in Niger presently does not include provisions for benefit-sharing.
- The **Biocultural Heritage Territories and Networks initiative** (Category 4 – Enabling the Powerless) involves developing a model for integrating biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation rooted in indigenous rights and traditions. This initiative further seeks to amplify people's collective action and voice through developing international networks that create space for participation at scale, connect local to global activism and advocacy, and enable systemic learning. Peru's Potato Park, for instance, has secured both international recognition and national support. IIED's support has been instrumental in developing the scientific framework and methodology, which helped gain international visibility and recognition. IIED's support to international exchange/learning workshops and networks (for instance biocultural heritage territories and community seed banks) then offered opportunities for farmer-to-farmer learning and for building collective power and voice. So far 5-6 communities in different countries have established landscapes/territories by applying the model. The purpose over time is to expand the territories within and across countries. One of IIED's partners reflected: *"IIED's most important contribution is making the link with global politics, thus working on the intersection between local and global processes, and addressing processes of power in this space."* IIED and partners report growing international recognition of the networks as important vehicles for implementing international agreements and treaties, such as the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. This has in turn created opportunities to further indigenous and mountainous community rights, for instance through legal

international community-to-community seed exchange under the FAO's multilateral system. The success of this bridge-building approach is challenged by the gulf that exists and that must be bridged between local communities and international actors. Bridge building requires continued investment in generating robust evidence to support this model of biocultural diversity and community empowerment.

### ***Building capacity to engage in knowledge creation and use for advocacy***

IIED's approach to capacity building appears to be driven by its primary focus on evidence-fuelled multi-stakeholder dialogue. Hence rather than designing capacity building as a discrete set of activities with its own end point, IIED envisages capacity building as integral to its support to partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogue. This may mean that IIED is not choosing a relatively weak research partner, for instance, for the express purpose of capacity building. Instead, partners are chosen who will be positioned to contribute to institutional initiatives that contribute to policy change. If this requires capacity building along the way, then IIED recognises capacity building as an instrumental need. Furthermore, capacity building is not typically a 'one-way street' in which IIED builds the capacity of partner X or Y. Instead, it results from the interaction of actors with a shared set of values or vision but with different capacities, with IIED providing technical inputs as required. In its draft 2014 Partnership Paper, for instance, IIED includes the objective that *"learning and capacity is improved for all involved (in partnerships and dialogue)."* Similarly, a 2012 review of IIED's partnership approach emphasised the reciprocity of the capacity strengthening in IIED's partnerships:

*"IIED's partnerships expand its capacity by extending its reach and influence in a wider range of geographic, policy and thematic spaces than it could manage on its own: they literally make its research and advocacy possible. They enrich its understanding of development issues and needs by widening the range of experiences, perspectives and expertise on which it can draw. They make it possible for IIED and its research to remain innovative, cutting edge and relevant (especially to marginalized people)."*<sup>21</sup>

The ER found that although not always a specific objective in its work, IIED generally has succeeded in strengthening key stakeholders' capacities to engage in the creation and use of scientific knowledge through its collaborative processes. Capacity strengthening in IIED's work typically centres on 'guided interaction' around evidence-to-action. On occasion this has been supported by capacity building in the 'co-creation' of knowledge.

The ER stakeholder survey elicited mostly positive responses emphasising IIED's supportive role in capacity building in relation to research partnerships. The following response was typical:

*"On the ground my team is leading the activities with the input of IIED. Seeing that we are not specialised in this field we couldn't do so without a clear explanation from IIED" (NGO project manager and lead partner, Mali)*

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<sup>21</sup> Green Park Consultants (2012). "Review of IIED's Relations with its Partners", unpublished paper, February, p.7

However, IIED's tendency to favour instrumental capacity building over a self-standing capacity building model/focus can create tensions. IIED staff have reflected on the tensions inherent in building capabilities, meeting donor requirements and ensuring the highest quality of work in a partnership approach. Also the ER stakeholder survey elicited a small number of reflections on these tensions around capacity building from a partner perspective. Hence some respondents qualified their feedback by referring to the challenges posed by professional distance between think tank applied researchers and local people. Others referred to the constraints on sustained capacity building imposed by project structures that are driven by prioritised deadlines and deliverables, emphasising how long-term partnerships that transcend project cycles work more effectively:

*"IIED professionals are very good researchers. As such they are not able to work with partners as equals. This makes difficult to work with IIED researchers as equals, if you are from a 3rd world country. There are some exceptions however"* (NGO research lead and lead partner, Bolivia)

*"It varies greatly across the institute. Sometimes the structure of a project makes it very difficult. Good examples (of capacity building) are the long-term partnerships, e.g. Human Settlements."* (Private sector research lead and lead partner, London)

In-depth, cross-case analysis across all four impact pathways confirmed and illustrated the way in which IIED initiatives backed policy processes involving a range of stakeholders, with capacity building resulting in different ways.

- The **Social Assessment of Protected Areas (SAPA) initiative** (Category 2 – Research to Policy) supported the development and roll-out of a scalable, standardised and objective approach by which to qualify and quantify the social impacts of protected areas (PAs). Capacity building around the generation and use of knowledge is at the heart of the SAPA methodology being trialled at local PA level by IIED's partners. Participatory approaches and principles bring stakeholders – including previously marginalised actors -- together around the generation and evaluation of knowledge in support of sustainable PA impacts. IIED has proved itself credible and useful as a facilitator, building capacity by linking methodological development with policy/practice processes. It appears that there was a shared incentive amongst PA managers and local communities in the trialled PAs to build their own capacity to understand and collectively resolve PA-related poverty and sustainability issues. Consequently, there was a strong demand for tools and approaches that could help support that process of reflection and action. Challenges remain: More recent additional emphasis by the SAPA team on tackling governance and equity issues in PAs is likely to prove more challenging to capacity building efforts. The team is looking to integrate governance and equitable management with distributional impacts in a single methodology. To date, participatory decision making around distributional impacts has not seriously challenged existing authority and governance arrangements.
- The **LDC UNFCCC Paris Negotiations** (Category 4 – Enabling the Powerless) initiative involved support to the 48-member Least Developed Countries (LDC) group

running up to and during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris negotiations. This materialised through the implementation of a 5-point strategy (capacity building, research and evidence, bridge building, communication and outreach, and negotiation support) that was developed collaboratively with the LDC group. A significant driving force behind its support to the LDC group was IIED team's work to build the capacity of the group and its members through support to climate negotiation process. As a result of technical support, many of these LDC negotiators started becoming coordinators, contributing to the evidence base on LDC positions and contributing in turn to the capacity building for other negotiators. An IIED colleague reported that *"one negotiator's initial position was 'I don't know anything and I'm here to learn' and now he's one of the capacity builders!"*

### 3.3. IIED's contribution to changing policies and practices

Working forwards from these outcome areas, the ER considered IIED's contribution to the higher-level outcome of linking and sustaining multi-level policy processes.

The ER found that during the Review period IIED has strategically supported and linked local, national and/or global policy processes, leading to tangible outcomes in terms of policy, governance and finance for supporting sustainable development. The effectiveness of this policy support was strengthened by IIED's 'independent'<sup>22</sup> positionality and resource flexibility, particularly in not being tied down by large 'path-dependent' contracts. Furthermore, IIED's process support has proven most effective when it is sustained through prolonged engagement.

The stakeholder survey elicited mostly positive responses emphasising IIED's strategic influence on policy processes. The following quotes are illustrative of the majority of responses:

*"(IIED has built) good and strategic partnerships for example with the pastoral parliamentary group in Kenya has supported development of more progressive dryland policies"* (Central government project manager and junior partner, Kenya)

*"The contribution of IIED has been instrumental in influencing certain changes in policies especially in biodiversity mainstreaming in different sectors."* (Ministerial advisor and user of IIED research, Seychelles)

In-depth cross-case analysis confirmed that across all four impact pathways IIED consistently exhibited a process-based influence on policy and practice.

- In the case of the **Ghana Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM) initiative** (Category 1 - Multi-stakeholder Dialogue), for instance, an IIED-convened global

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<sup>22</sup> We define 'independent' here in the following way: IIED is a value-based organisation that seeks to act as an independent voice for the poor.

stakeholder forum steered action towards a multi-country national dialogue programme, with Ghana the first national dialogue process to be started. With strong leadership from the CEO of the Ghana Minerals Commission and an ongoing advocacy role adopted by an IIED-prompted multi-stakeholder Learning and Leadership Group, there is now a clear policy advocacy process and direction. Most recently an opportunity has emerged for the Learning and Leadership Group to coordinate key policy consultations around redefining/delineating 'artisanal' from 'small scale' mining.

The Ghana ASM initiative was enabled by a policy process that was guided by a clear and funded direction of travel from global to country-level dialogues. IIED's independent status and credible track record supported its convening and enabling role. A proactive and strong Ghanaian leadership has sustained the impetus and direction of the Learning and Leadership Group. Significant challenges to this policy process remain, however, and there remain no certainties that targeted policy changes, such as those linked to ASM regulation and livelihoods support, will come to fruition. National-level challenges continue in the policy context, with December 2016 national election result raising the likelihood of changing policy and executive appointments and policy emphasis. Challenges to sustaining IIED support to policy advocacy at the national level are also linked to project budget uncertainty and small size. A lack of on-the-ground prolonged process support from a national partner means that IIED's support mode risks slipping into a 'parachuting in' approach.

- The **Urban Poor Empowerment and Resilience initiative** (Category 1- Multi-stakeholder Dialogue) aims to strengthen urban governance and capacity to build resilience and adapt to climate risks. IIED identified climate financing as a strategic way to link global dialogue with long-term and successful institutional support to an innovative 'co-production' urban governance model that brings together local authorities with low income urban citizens associations. This is taking the IIED group into the role of supporting advocacy at policy level for extending global Green Climate Fund (GCF) entitlements to these local co-production institutions. The co-production model would present a radical new avenue of funding for the GCF, with global advocacy required by IIED colleagues to open minds to this. This is enabled by IIED's institutional presence in global fora, and adroitness to operate between levels (global, national and local). Furthermore, IIED's sustained and embedded engagement with the urban governance partners Shack Dwellers International (SDI), allied to prior work by the HSG and drylands climate change teams, increased the knowledge and evidence base to support advocacy on innovative financing.

Challenges to achieving policy change at this global level are primarily linked to the scale of its ambition. IIED's support to the SDI urban governance advocacy has resulted in observable changes in policy-in-practice at the level of local decision making over a decade or longer. This new strategic initiative to link urban governance to global green finance is even more ambitious. IIED colleagues describe this ambition as *"typical of IIED... we are trying to influence some very big changes"*. As with impact level ambition (see discussion below), achieving policy

change in this case can be described as a creative tension between wanting to demonstrate attributable specific results and wanting to influence/contribute (with direct attribution very difficult) big complex policy and practice processes: *“issues that we would like to influence because we think this is more important (than achievable and attributable changes)”* (David Dodman, pers. com).

### 3.4. IIED’s contribution to impact level change

In this final sub-section we consider the evidence of IIED’s contribution to impact level changes in the capabilities and resilience of poor and vulnerable people and the institutions on which they depend, and in the human and environmental systems in which they operate.

As presented above, the ER found that IIED effectively engages with policy processes through ways of working that support partnerships and scientific reframing of problems, backed by capacity building. There was less documented evidence, however, of these IIED-influenced policies and practices contributing to impact-level transformations in capabilities and systems. In many instances, changed conditions of policy and practice had not (yet) gained sufficient momentum and/or scale to reach the ‘tipping point’ where the transformative change is likely to happen. Indeed, IIED’s high level of ambition appears to extend the timeframe to achieving – and measuring -- impact on lives and systems.

In-depth cross-case analysis confirmed that across all four impact pathways there was a relationship between high ambition and impact achievement:

- The **Biocultural Heritage Territories and Networks initiative** (Category 4 – Enabling the Powerless) is illustrative of this finding. The initiative involves developing a model<sup>23</sup> for integrating biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation rooted in indigenous rights and traditions. This initiative further seeks to amplify people’s collective action and voice through developing international networks that create space for participation at scale, connect local to global activism and advocacy, and enable systemic learning. At impact level, there is clear evidence of practice and policy impact particularly in the Potato Park in Peru, and emerging evidence of local improvements in environmental and livelihood systems and capabilities in other locations. However, it is too early for robust evidence of observable impact-level changes in practices and impacts on resilience to emerge at scale. Indeed, the ambition of the initiative is directly linked to a sustainability challenge: it is precisely because results are recognised as more long-term and difficult to measure that donors are less keen to fund this kind of work. This means that getting donor support on the one hand, and expanding mobilising communities and the BCHTs within the countries as well as globally to reach sufficient scale on the other, becomes the main challenge.
- The **Hilsa Fishery Conservation Trust Fund in Bangladesh** (Category 2 – Research to Policy) is illustrative of an attributable shift in policy processes that has

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<sup>23</sup> Developing a model for BCHTs is part of the capacity building work to scale up the successful Potato Park model in Peru (see Annex B).

not yet evidentially resulted in impact level change. The initiative supports the development of a unique fisheries conservation management model that is more likely to be financially, socio-economically, environmentally and politically sustainable. The time and conditions were right for this process, with sufficient political will and funding available. There is evidence that IIED's involvement was significant in contributing to observed outcome changes in policies, knowledge and building bridges. Most significant was IIED's role in sensitizing (or "opening the eyes" of) stakeholders to the real challenges. All key players are now focused on solving these challenges. There has also been a shift in public discourse in favour of conservation, indicated by a wider and more progressive coverage of conservation by the national media. IIED's effectiveness in influencing the process was enabled by its 'positionality'. Senior IIED researcher Essam Mohammed describes IIED's positioning as *"a hybrid outfit between rigorous scientific research and pragmatism."* He also pinpoints *"genuine partnership"* at the centre of this and other processes: *"We are only 55 professional colleagues so we work in partnership, nurture new partnerships and aspire to do applied scientific research."* One observable outcome of this partnership approach was secured continuation of the initiative by a strong and locally-based partner that works on poverty and inequality in fisheries, combined with an ongoing commitment of IIED to support policy change and research. Given the very strong 'path to impact' on environment and communities, there is a good prospect of achieving the impact targeted within Bangladesh. IIED also has ambitions for a wider regional impact. To this end, IIED is working with partners in Myanmar and India to scope options for developing a regional programme for the Bay of Bengal and specifically to develop a similar Trust Fund for Myanmar. However, this expected path to impact must be held up to critical scrutiny informed by ongoing political economy challenges. In particular, while the focus of the Government of Bangladesh has been largely on national environmental-economic benefits, with the Trust Fund appealing to this, it remains unclear to what extent these will also benefit local fishing communities and other market players.

## 4 Reflections: IIED's added value and future roles in a changing environment

This section responds to the second and third objectives of the ER, which are: - *to assess the added value of IIED's work from the different perspectives of staff, partners and donors in relation to the opportunities and challenges emerging from the Post-2015 agenda and new global shifts and trends*; and - *to facilitate critical debate and reflections on IIED's future role and strategic redirections*. The section summarises the key points corresponding the formative part of the ER (see Table 2.1) that were raised in the various interactive sessions organised as part of the ER process<sup>24</sup> together with the outputs of recent internal organisational reflections.

### 4.1. IIED's added value

From the perspective of both the institutional donors and the partners, IIED's greatest added value appears to lie in two interlinked processes: (i) its ability to support evidence to action at different scales to effect meaningful local change for marginalised groups; and (ii) its ability to bring local learning into higher-level policy, linking local to global policy processes. Through these processes, IIED has gained great credibility among partners and donors as a 'boundary organisation.'<sup>25</sup> From the case studies, IIED appears consistently progressive in influencing discourse, knowledge and processes of policymaking and governance and making these more evidence-based and inclusive.

This also strongly came out of the discussions around IIED's added value in the ER sense-making workshop in November 2016. IIED staff and partners in this workshop considered IIED's greatest added value in the roles of 'convenor' or 'bridge-builder', 'catalyst', 'enabler', and 'door opener'-'innovator-for-the-poor'. As a 'catalyst', IIED seeks to trigger changes or processes that help overcome barriers to transformative change and thus reach for the tipping point. IIED wants to be good at this, but is often constrained by resources and partner conditions. As a 'convenor' or 'bridge-builder', IIED seeks alignment with what is already there. At times this can be limiting for its ability to undertake its catalyst role and reach for the tipping point. As an 'enabler', IIED provides platforms for partners to interact with international and national policy and decision makers. Strategic partnerships are built on long-term relationships of trust and ongoing (often informal) engagement. As a 'door opener' and 'innovator-for-the-poor', IIED aspires to trigger changes in interactions and power relations that open up doors for the less powerful to engage in decision-making. It links local community processes to national and international policy processes, creates space for

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<sup>24</sup> Including three events in 2016: a Donor Dialogue in June, a BoT feedback discussion in November, and the ER sense-making workshop in November.

<sup>25</sup> 'Boundary organizations' were first proposed by Guston (2001) as a means of stabilizing the boundary between scientists and decision makers, through distinct organizations that lie between these groups, are accountable to both, and that serve distinct and potentially conflicting sets of goals of each. We use the term 'boundary organisation' to indicate that IIED crosses the boundaries of different levels, disciplines and institutions influencing, creating and using knowledge for sustainable development.

participation and voice for the least powerful at international debates, and supports south-south learning.

Interviews with members of the Board of Trustees unanimously confirmed this added value. BoT members pointed out that IIED researchers don't *"fly in as the holders of knowledge... (like the)... typical think-tank 'experts' who bring the latest models governments are expected to adopt without further questioning"*. Instead they come to help stakeholders to unpack existing knowledge and reflect on its orthodoxy by asking critical questions that enable them to look at the issues from different vantage points and search for answers fitting the context. One BoT member observed that as a *"do- and link-tank on top of a think-tank"*, IIED basically helps put in place the *"observational infrastructure"* for collaborative learning and knowledge generation and utilisation.

According to the participants in the sense-making workshop, IIED's strength and reputation in performing these roles draws on *credibility, capability and commitment*. Commitment refers to the long-term engagements with partners built on values of equity, rights and empowerment. Credibility implies trust and knowledge. Capability is about competencies (including for instance political consciousness) and collaborative processes, but also about resource capacity (such as time, money and human capital) to deploy these competencies and processes at scale. Together, this gives IIED the legitimacy to connect different spaces and manage controversies, and rise to the challenges of the global shifts and trends. As IIED leadership puts it:

*"IIED's strengths and unique attributes in addressing this moment of change include: our range of networks which stretch from membership organisations of the poor to international networks such as the Least Developed Countries UNFCCC negotiating group; our deep experience of local social and political realities, visible in work streams such as the drylands work on delivering financial support for resilient communities; the range of sustainability issues where IIED can deploy deep expertise which cover a range of the 'new agenda' SDGs (urban, fisheries, terrestrial ecosystems, energy etc.)."*<sup>26</sup>

## 4.2. Landscape shifts challenging IIED's ways of working

A number of 'landscape shifts' were raised during the course of the ER. These present both risks and opportunities that require strategic reflection and action. A major shift concerns future funding for IIED's work, due to the growing competition for funds, reduced availability of frame funding, shifting priority areas for funding and increasing demands for accessing and managing public donor funds. This is not new. It was previously raised in a 2013 Rapid Organisation Assessment report as a primary driver of change for IIED.<sup>27</sup> The growing capacity of southern actors was identified as a trend that created competition but also a clear opportunity for IIED to work more effectively in supporting positive disruption in the global South. A third major shift concerned research concerned changing development discourse

<sup>26</sup> Crossroads, paper prepared by IIED leadership for the BoT meeting in June 2016.

<sup>27</sup> See Hailey, J (2013). "Rapid Organisation Assessment Briefing Paper", London, Cass Business School, City University.

and research priorities that IIED was well placed to respond to. We elaborate on these three shifts below.

## Shifts in funding

IIED has been supported strongly and consistently by its UK and European framework donors. Public funding in the UK, however, will likely decrease and/or shift in composition with the present changes in UK government leadership and Brexit. The persistent and concerted pressure to rethink the UK government's 0.7% Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) commitment will not vanish in the process of separation and negotiation with the EU. In addition, a shift in donor funding is increasingly favouring bigger management companies and consortia. National and European institutions are challenged by migration and security concerns linked to the Middle East crisis and terrorist attacks on European cities. International cooperation and governance are increasingly being met with scepticism.

These shifts in funding fundamentally challenge IIED's roles and ways of working. Adapting to the new conditions might require IIED to take more of a brokering and co-partnering role, align its operations with donors' new commissioning funding model, and thus define its work more explicitly in terms of donors' and consortiums' contractual prescriptions and VFM considerations. The latter may threaten IIED's independent 'bridge-building', 'enabling' and 'door-opening' roles that are at the heart of its relationships with the partners and communities in the countries where it works. Looking for new donors and diversifying from the traditional public funders might open up new opportunities for co-partnerships that build on these roles rather than undermining them.

At the same time, there is an increasing engagement by private finance and private sector commitment to sustainable development. This involves various private actors, from progressive social enterprises through impact investors to philanthropist foundations. *"Development is increasingly happening in spaces which are completely disconnected from public development agencies and actors."*<sup>28</sup> This creates new opportunities for IIED to redefine its position and roles vis-à-vis these new funders and decision-makers. This was recognised and discussed at the Donor Dialogue and the BoT meeting in June 2016, and at the BoT meeting and the ER sense-making workshop in November 2016.

## Growing capacity of Southern actors

A second major shift relates to the potential 'crowding out' of IIED's somewhat niche position as 'catalyst' and 'door opener/innovator-for-the-poor'. The 2013 Rapid Organisation Assessment report<sup>29</sup> attributes this shift to the trend of more collaborative ways of working with Southern partners. NGOs and Think Tanks are increasingly expected to partner and co-create together with organisations in the South. Local partners consequently are more likely

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<sup>28</sup> Crossroads, paper prepared by IIED leadership for the BoT meeting in June 2016

<sup>29</sup> Hailey, J (2013), op cit.

to become competitors as they gain capacity and ambition through these collaborations and thus grow to the level they can provide greater VFM.

At the same time, IIED colleagues recognise that this shift also provides an opportunity to strengthen partnerships and networks. Indeed, IIED's niche position as boundary organisation relies on southern organisations with the capacity to lead on change processes that are more than just generating research. This provides the opportunity for IIED to scale up what one recent IIED report terms its support for "positive disruptive change".<sup>30</sup> This would involve scaling-up its 'enabling' and 'door opening' roles to facilitate South-South exchange and learning, while expanding and deepening its role of 'bridge-builder' across continents (South-North, South-South and perhaps even North-North). To the partners, IIED's added value is really its ability to help scientifically reframe their experiences and issues and bringing these to national and global policy makers in a way that opens up space for dialogue. IIED has developed a strong international reputation as a boundary think tank, which makes it uniquely well positioned to expand its bridge-building role in this way to support and serve South-to-South knowledge creation and learning. This would imply *"more comparative work, which connects actors in different countries and regions and enables them to learn from each other and to collaborate."*<sup>31</sup>

### Shifts in development discourse and research

A third important shift is marked by the Paris agreement and the SDGs. These have made sustainability and inclusiveness a common aim for international collaboration and created a truly global framework for sustainable development and climate action. This intersection of development and environment is the intellectual territory where IIED has worked for over 40 years: *"IIED exists to promote an integration of environmental and development concerns."*<sup>32</sup> This marks a major breakthrough for IIED but at the same time also a major challenge. Since there are numerous players who now are working on sustainable development, IIED can redefine its focus and position, and determine its 'unique selling proposition' (USP), building on the roles and reputation it has acquired in the past 40 years, yet redirecting and redefining these towards new horizons.

The Paris Agreement and the SDGs give legitimacy to IIED's roles and types of work but also spurs it *"to be more ambitious in exploring how to address the reality of growing unsustainability and inequality over the coming decades."* Challenges for instance arise for countries when it comes to implementation of their national commitments: *"a number of countries are assessing the implications of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement for their future strategies and budget allocations, which is leading to major new research opportunities."* Particularly the least developed and more fragile countries are challenged to find ways to deal with growing uncertainty and inequality and work to realise the SDG commitment to 'leave-no-one-behind' under conditions of institutional insufficiency and

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<sup>30</sup> Ward, H. (2016). "Getting good at disruption in an uncertain world; How could IIED better support Southern Cross?", London, IIED, unpublished report, December

<sup>31</sup> Board Theme Paper November 2016.

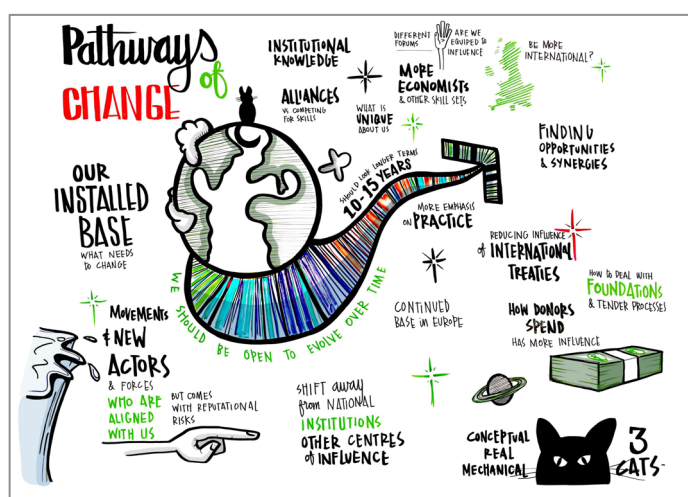
<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

instability. IIED is well positioned to be a source for collaboratively investigating and framing solutions to these complex challenges in different country contexts.<sup>33</sup>

The 2013 Rapid Organisation Assessment report<sup>34</sup> also mentions a shift towards more solutions-oriented research that requires a systemic lens and more complexity-sensitive methodologies. This shift came up regularly during the ER interviews around the case studies. IIED staff appear confident to be able to proactively identify appropriate areas of solutions-focused or applied research and develop the appropriate methodologies. This is illustrated by IIED's initiative to take a leading role in supporting climate change policy processes in fragile contexts and strategically to link policy challenges related to the mounting refugee and migration issues to those of sustainable urban development and governance.

### 4.3. Implications for IIED's ways of working

As discussed in Section 2 above, during June's synchronising workshop, IIED participants mapped IIED's work onto the evaluative ToC (see Figure 2.3) and mapped four distinct categories or impact pathways onto the ToC that are most typical for IIED's portfolio (see Figure 2.4). These pathways illustrated four consistent 'ways of working', cutting across research areas and thus constituting one of the most important attributes of IIED as an institution, beyond its simple role as curator of multiple projects. In November's sense-making workshop, IIED staff and partners discussed the risks posed by landscape shifts for each of these four key pathways, and how IIED could best mitigate the risks and/or respond to opportunities.



Participants considered that the **Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue Pathway** has been relatively successful in the global South. They saw the pathway remaining highly relevant in the coming 10-15 years, in particular with regards to realising the SDGs and addressing the problems of Climate Change. IIED's task would be to generate sufficient and credible evidence on local realities and solutions to the complex issues of sustainable development that countries in the South face, in particular those least developed and most fragile. According to participants, IIED's multi-stakeholder dialogue impact pathway aimed to support the protagonists of change to engage with this evidence, and thus countered a

<sup>33</sup> Discussions during the sense-making workshop on how best to position IIED with respect to the SDGs did, however, surface a major qualification to this otherwise positive outlook. This concerned the loss of primacy of the political elites both in the developed and developing countries. The SDGs are perceived in some contexts as the expression of a neo-liberal elite discourse and value framing. Hence IIED's support as 'bridge-builder' and 'door opener' in these contexts might be considered negatively by some as an expression of this elite discourse.

<sup>34</sup> Hailey, J (2013), op cit.

culture of ignorance, denial or fragmentation. But more than this, different ways of debating these issues were needed that could counter the rise of ‘post-truth’ politics<sup>35</sup>. IIED’s multi-stakeholder dialogue approach had not been developed or tried out for this purpose, and certainly not in the context of IIED’s home base and backyard (the UK and European mainland). Although IIED was an international institution, it might be important for it to get better at engaging with sustainable development issues on its doorstep and in its backyard, while also defining more clearly its niche globally as distinct from what others do. Participants reported that in the UK and by extension Europe, IIED wasn’t connected to the right forums and places for this. So if IIED were to go down this route, it might need to get better at analysing UK-specific and global political and economic trends, build new alliances within and outside the UK. IIED would also need to be prepared to address unfamiliar issues needing grassroots evidence and engage people with differing worldviews (including notably pro-Brexit groups in the UK who *“have been ‘left behind’ by rapid economic change and feel cut adrift from the mainstream consensus”*<sup>36</sup> ).

The **Targeting Policymakers Pathway** was judged by workshop participants to be at risk given the shrinking influence of public policy discussed above. The relationships and partnerships that IIED has cultivated over the years are precarious since the policymakers themselves are losing their primacy among categories of decision-makers. Furthermore, participants pointed out that the policymakers that IIED sometimes pursued relationships with as part of worthy initiatives were sometimes of dubious reputation, with attendant reputational risks for IIED. These two risks raise the question of whether and how IIED could expand its constituency of decision-makers to move beyond traditional policy elites to include new social movements, private-sector actors, and others, all while safeguarding IIED’s reputation. Participants broadly agreed that the SDGs as a framework did offer opportunities to define policy-making more broadly and to target or reach out to new actors (including private sector) with whom IIED had not worked (or not much) before.

The **Research to Policy Pathway** was characterised by workshop participants as at risk of being undermined by cheaper alternatives to the rigour and quality of research that IIED’s reputation was built on. IIED produces knowledge that can be expensive and time consuming given that: it is co-created with others; seeks to strengthen the research and advocacy capacity of these ‘others’; and requires careful thought to design the processes that can build bridges and open up doors. Co-creation of knowledge requires greater attention to safeguarding quality in order to uphold IIED’s reputation and influence on policy. Meanwhile cheaper shortcuts to knowledge are available on the global market that serve the purpose of those in power who sponsor the research. Furthermore, as research capacity in the global South grows, the credibility of a Northern organisation claiming to advocate on behalf of actors in the South will become increasingly tenuous, particularly if the gap between Northern and Southern debates narrows. Instead supporting Southern initiatives for building powerful alternative narratives using good evidence and sophisticated tactics to

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<sup>35</sup> The term “post-truth” was used by the participants in the sense-making workshop. Wikipedia defines “post truth” as *“a political culture in which debate is framed largely by appeals to emotion disconnected from the details of policy, and by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored. Post-truth differs from traditional contesting and falsifying of truth by rendering it of ‘secondary’ importance.”* (cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-truth\\_politics#cite\\_note-HuffCoinage-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-truth_politics#cite_note-HuffCoinage-1)).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities>.

influence Northern and multi-national corporate policy and practice might provide a more viable route to go down for IIED's research to policy pathway. One participant commented: *"We could be looking for highly effective ways of working from the south that could be 'hugely relevant' for northern audiences, thus validating our continued presence in Europe."* Another participant observed that IIED could also become a 360° scanner, for instance, that picks up highly effective models for sustainable development practice and policy applicable elsewhere.

Finally, workshop participants identified the **Empowering the Powerless Pathway** as at possible risk due to the increasing difficulty of finding funding for this sort of work from existing donors. Yet this pathway was considered core to IIED's mission of empowering the marginalised and linking their voice and realities to policy processes. The continuing challenge was that giving voice to the powerless involves bridging large distances to national and international policy processes. Getting donor support and mobilising communities at scale was essential to this. However, since results are more long-term and difficult to measure, while donors bend to what is more likely to produce measurable results in reasonably short times, finding sufficient funding for this kind of work was getting more difficult. Additionally, IIED sometimes faces reputational risks associated with promoting the rights of marginalised groups without jeopardising relationships with governments with unethical policies. To address these risks, participants in the sense-making workshop concluded, more synergistic action was needed across the different research groups, echoing the findings and continuing challenge from the IIED 2011 External Review<sup>37</sup>: *"We need to look for more opportunities to cross-fertilize across the research groups"*. This would imply building evidence for cross-case comparison and learning on this impact pathway – thus across contexts and research groups– and engaging progressive donors in this learning process. One participant, talking in reference to the Biocultural Heritage Territories and Networks initiative, emphasised the need for a stronger focus on building and scaling out strong initiatives and networks at national level to provide the basis for linking to international level while generating more evidence of effectiveness for donor reporting.

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<sup>37</sup> Kabraji et al (2012), op cit, p.26

## 5 Conclusions and recommendations

This External Review has examined IIED's effectiveness and contributions to policy-level change and higher-level impacts during a five-year period and addressed the organisation's strategic role and direction in a changing environment. The ER has been conducted through a collaborative method of inquiry and reflection, fed by a mix of primary research and desk-based review.

The ER confirms that during the five-year period under review IIED has remained an active and effective organisation. This finding suggests a continuation from the conclusions of the 2013 Rapid Organisation Assessment report, for instance. This described a 'success story' indicated by the organisation's growth and change:

*IIED has grown in terms of income, staff numbers and profile. It has moved to new offices, has introduced a new organisational structure and invested in new systems. It works with a wider range of partners than previously. A recent reputational audit highlighted the way it is seen by peers as a credible, reputable institution that helps shape policy and plays a pivotal role in shaping the debate around environmental issues between both north and south.*<sup>38</sup>

Beneath this headline, the ER found that IIED has built this 'success story' on a tried-and-tested intervention model implemented through identifiable 'ways of working' or impact pathways. The ER team, through collaborative reflection with IIED staff, identified and sampled cases from four distinct impact pathways, based on a mapping of IIED's (in some cases ongoing) work during the past five years onto the ER Theory of Change.

Critically, these impact pathways are process-based. They engage knowledge, actors and spaces, building relationships and capacity as a driver of policy change and in anticipation of beneficial impacts at the interface of environment and development. This means that IIED has deliberately chosen not to take the route of many policy think tanks – a route that builds on the assumption that policy change can best be realised by “*identifying and studying policy options, and providing advice to ‘policy-makers’, who then decide which policies to implement*” – which is the expert-led model.<sup>39</sup> In short, creating space for voice and participation and tackling the policy environment is as much an essential part of IIED's strategy as is conducting policy research and providing expert advice.

At the same time, IIED is an organisation in the midst of change, confirmed and detailed through reflective discussions with IIED staff during the ER process. These concern challenges and opportunities that in some cases were flagged by the previous ER and that are all recognised by IIED management and reflected in a number of key strategic documents. This provides the backdrop for the formative or forward-looking elements of the ER, considering strategic options for IIED's future.

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<sup>38</sup> Hailey, J (2013), op cit, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Hobley et al (2004), op cit p.6.

In this concluding section, building on the summative findings and formative reflections of this ER, we provide some recommendations on three future challenges for IIED: (1) Improving and sustaining its intervention model; (2) Addressing higher level strategic challenges and opportunities; and (3) Bringing research and strategy together through impact assessment and learning.

## 5.1 Improving and sustaining IIED's intervention model

As an effective boundary organisation, IIED continues to contribute significantly to the interface between applied research, inclusive dialogue and policy change at different levels, resulting in change on the ground. IIED has a number of proven ways of working which this ER had drawn out and mapped as impact pathways. Key challenges to IIED's intervention model were surfaced through collaborative reflection. They relate to mainstreaming gender, considering IIED's mix of interventions, integrating policy research with communications, and reviewing IIED's use of research. The recommendations below recognise and build on challenges raised by the previous (2011) ER,<sup>40</sup> which therefore still remain relevant. The ER recommends that IIED management and research teams should consider the following:

### ***Review progress in mainstreaming gender-sensitive research and policy advocacy across the teams***

In the specific case of gender-sensitive concepts and methods, the ER elicited a somewhat mixed picture regarding the consistency of gender-sensitive research and process support across research team activities. The 2011 ER had recommended gender strengthening. A strategic decision has been made by IIED management to invest in gender training across the organisation. This needs to be monitored, including assessing how effectively teams have integrated gender into their intervention design and implementation. Moreover, gender impact indicators, analysis methods and interpretive frameworks need to be developed for IIED's future impact assessments.

As an illustrative insight on good practice, the ER team noted the positive and deliberative evolution of gender mainstreaming in the Ghana ASM initiative. In the early stages of the initiative, gender analysis frameworks and tools were not clearly designed into the primary research that informed national multi-stakeholder dialogue. Site visits did nonetheless expose stakeholders to gendered dimensions of ASM and this was reflected in challenges to gendered positions and norms through the subsequent dialogue. The IIED team is now looking to update its gender guidelines based on lessons from Ghana and with a view to the upcoming multi-stakeholder process in Tanzania. 'Mini dialogue' thematic activities will be designed, one of which is focussed on gender in mining and in ASM. This will involve women miners' associations and individual women miner 'champions'. In Tanzania, there will be stronger gender analysis in the primary research that will feed this mini dialogue. IIED has hired a local researcher with the right mix of social and gender analytical skills. The IIED team are now looking to promote a similar process as part of the post-dialogue activity in Ghana, and at the time of writing was discussing this with the Learning and Leadership Group chair. Across both countries, it is expected that these mini dialogues will inform

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<sup>40</sup> Kabraji et al (2012), op cit, Section 4.1

concrete programmes to improve gendered outcomes in ASM. Meanwhile, at the global level, the IIED team was at the time of writing finalising an agreement with a partner to hold a global workshop bringing together women miners, women's associations and gender-focussed organisations. The intention is that this dialogue will be followed up by capacity building that responds directly to the dialogue outcomes.

### ***Review IIED's mix of interventions in light of a changing environment.***

IIED's mixed portfolio of interventions is a great strength. Discussions between IIED colleagues during the ER-facilitated sensemaking workshop, and interviews with board members and other stakeholders, reflected on the utility and relevance of IIED's mix of 'impact pathways' in a changing environment. These pathways, presented in Annex A, are not fixed constructs, but proved useful for reflection, strategic thinking and communication to partners and other stakeholders. These generated some interesting working hypotheses for further discussion:

- The 'multi-stakeholder dialogue' pathway to the contexts and debates in and surrounding the UK to sustainable development issues related to migration and growing inequality;
- The 'targeting policymakers' pathway to include and mobilise non-state actors –e.g. progressive movements and private sector actors;
- The 'research to policy' pathway to support the development of strong Southern narratives and tactics for global advocacy; and
- The 'empowering the powerless' pathway to generate more cross-fertilization across different research themes and contexts.

The impact pathways are a useful potential tool for ensuring effective and sustained contribution of IIED's intervention model for sustainable development that leaves no-one behind. This can also help IIED to think of ways of scaling beyond merely 'replication', instead linking different initiatives in different contexts under the same strategic umbrella or type of impact pathway.

### ***Integrate policy research with communications for social change and innovation.***

During the Review period, there has been an encouraging growth in size and capacity of the communications work in IIED. The communications team has consolidated its in-house approach and capacity to do strategic communications. It has produced some 250 different product templates, consolidated down to about 24 products. This guidance is now getting traction with research groups. There is now more time to work with groups for strategic development, stakeholder development, and how this looks in terms of intervention design. There is more in-house communications skills building and more collaboration with the MEAL team on 'what works' in terms of communications.

The ER team recommends that IIED should redouble its efforts to build on its achievements in strategic communications work during the Review period. The ER surfaced the crucial role of effective communications in IIED's intervention model, in its internal cross-organisational strategic positioning and in projecting externally its institutional profile and brand.

In respect of IIED's intervention model, IIED communication team colleagues and BoT members clearly articulated the integral role of communications in an effective intervention model. The binary view of 'research on one side and communications on the other' needs to be continually challenged, with understanding built amongst IIED staff of this strategic role. Communication is something you plan from the beginning and is integral to the process of evidence-to-action that underpins much of IIED's work. Communication can no longer be seen simply as 'end of pipe' dissemination or claiming media space.

Communications colleagues did not underplay the challenge that remains. Research teams "get caught in the churn" and struggle to keep time free to think strategically. Encouragingly, however, its value emerged strongly in at least two of the cases sampled and reviewed by the ER team. Notably, communications emerged as a crucial means to shifting attitudes and behaviours as a strategic element in IIED's supporting role to promoting the LDC group agenda during and after the UNFCCC Paris talks. This intervention was backed by a tailored communications strategy.<sup>41</sup> A similar strategy was developed for integrating communications into IIED's 2016 urban strategic positioning in the lead-up to Habitat III.<sup>42</sup>

*"With respect to the 'Road to Paris' we were trying to drive the process to make it a more strategic communications approach as part of an institutional commitment to big messages (fair deal, leave no one behind etc). In the Paris space we were supporting 10-15 different projects with different emphases but with underpinning headline objectives."*<sup>43</sup>

### **Review IIED's use of research in its boundary role**

The 2011 ER included a significant focus on the quality of IIED research, and to a much lesser extent on research impact.<sup>44</sup> In this ER, we focused more on impact and added value (or utility). IIED's strength and reputation as a boundary organisation provide it with an important comparative value and opportunity to renew its knowledge brokering between and within North and South.

An essential aspect of this, for instance, would be to redouble its emphasis on setting and promoting quality standards and guidelines for rigorous and inclusive applied research. This would ensure that (at a minimum) its processes and decisions have no negative-disruptive impact on Southern stakeholders' ability to influence and engage with knowledge utilisation for sustainable development policy and practice.<sup>45</sup> IIED can legitimately retain its direct coaching and capacity-building support to partners in different contexts by applying appropriate standards and guidelines for rigorous research that is principally empowering and transformative.

Another important aspect would be to focus on strategic partnerships that would enable Southern partners to become better at research policy and advocacy within their own

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<sup>41</sup> IIED, nd. "The Road to Paris", London, IIED, unpublished.

<sup>42</sup> IIED, nd. "The Year of Urban 2016", IIED, unpublished.

<sup>43</sup> Liz Carlile, pers. comm.

<sup>44</sup> Kabraji et al (2012), op cit, Section 4.2.

<sup>45</sup> "Negative disruptions" for instance could be caused by shifts in IIED's priorities and ways of working as a consequence of dramatic changes in funding politics towards more short-term project-based and extractive research initiatives that disempower Southern actors.

contexts as well as globally. A recent IIED study on disruptive change suggests that IIED's position, reputation and capabilities as a boundary organisation allow it to support Southern actors who pursue positive-disruptive change and innovation: *"Whether IIED engages in this space with an explicit jumping-off point of insights from its 'disruptive change initiative' to date or not, there are significant opportunities for it to build on its existing competencies and capabilities to engage effectively in these spaces."*<sup>46</sup> This implies investing in strategic partnerships based on longer-term visions and shared values and principles, and building the institutional capacity to support the development of strategic partner networks that can generate greater ripples of positive-disruptive change.

## 5.2 Addressing 'higher level' strategic challenges and opportunities

Above and beyond making IIED's ways of working more effective in its changing environment, there is a higher-level debate required around the institute's strategic direction, given the challenges it faces. These are recognised by IIED management and reflected in a number of key strategic documents, as summarised in Section 4. Building on this organisational understanding of the need for change, the ER team facilitated a collaborative discussion around the 'higher level' challenges and opportunities for the institute. The ER recommends that IIED management should consider the following:

### ***Review and resolve trade-offs between grassroots impact and global/regional policy influence***

The ER elicited an apparent tension in donor expectations between their recognition of IIED's grassroots added value and their desire to see a higher profile for IIED in global platforms and in UK debates. This raises the question of where does strategic contribution best lie and whether it can resolve these apparently divergent ambitions.

There is a good case for engaging donors in the strategic discussion around this tension. Notably, IIED's Business Plan and June 2016 strategic update focus on three strategic directions/broad ambitions, two of which link "support to local partnerships" with "bringing local realities and innovation into national and global policy influence" –thus leveraging grassroots impact to influence national and global policy in the North and the South. IIED's most recent Strategy Update paper goes further in flagging the strategic importance of 'implementation' of agreed global commitments at national level: *"We believe IIED's ways of working, and understanding of how change happens, provide a strong and credible basis from which we can make significant contributions to this process."* Investing in both however requires securing sufficient resources. For IIED's institutional funders and partners it will be important to understand fully the implications of emphasising one over the other. A well-facilitated debate might be needed with old as well potentially new funders and stakeholders in the coming year.

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<sup>46</sup> Ward, H. (2016), op cit., p. 6.

### ***Review and resolve trade-offs between short-term incubator initiatives and long-term impact pathways***

A related strategic dilemma surfaced during the ER discussions. This centres on the relative value-added of supporting many diverse incubator initiatives ('letting many flowers bloom') versus investing in fewer but more focussed and synergetic longer-term engagements. The latter strategy in particular would require more proactive linking and networking across different silos of work within IIED.

This discussion was held with an accompanying awareness of impact and sustainability concerns, linked to constraints – notably piecemeal budgets -- on prolonged engagement in promising areas. A related contextual challenge was the importance of finding available local partners with the right skills to effectively facilitate policy and advocacy processes –an essential condition for grassroots impact to influence national and global policy.

Regarding long-term approaches, the ER picked up on excellent examples of the returns to sustained investment in partners, networks and processes. It also highlighted the risks of embarking on ambitious process-based initiatives with insufficient resources and local capacity. Turning to an incubator approach, this was discussed in more theoretical terms as a potential future direction for an organisation with limited budgets but strong institutional embeddedness. There is an opportunity in the course of this year to build on the momentum of conversation prompted by the ER and extend its facilitated debate in order to resolve this trade-off. This will help redefine IIED's unique value proposition (USP).

## **5.3 Bringing research and strategy together through impact assessment and learning**

Finally, the ER surfaced a tension between IIED's proof of contribution at outcome level and its high ambition in influencing impact level change. The ER recommends that IIED management should consider the following:

### ***Strengthen impact-level learning***

IIED's recent direction of travel has been strongly influenced by the SDGs and the elevation of sustainability to a higher level of global commitment and collaboration. IIED management describes this as a "major breakthrough" that puts IIED and partners' shared agenda of environment and development centre stage: *"It gives further legitimacy to the types of work we do and also spurs us to be more ambitious in exploring how to address the reality of growing unsustainability and inequality over the coming decades."*<sup>47</sup>

However, the ER has identified a gap in IIED's reporting on contributions at impact level, reflecting an operational focus on outcome level changes in policy and practice while having ambitions at a much higher level of transformational change in local-to-global systems. IIED's Board Theme Paper of November 2016 confirms recent increased investment in

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

*“IIED’s skills for effective and innovative monitoring, evaluation and learning”* in order to close this gap.

Beyond its own measurement and learning needs, there is also an opportunity to help partners linking strengthened impact evaluative learning and reporting to the SDG impact ambitions. This ties in with IIED management’s identification of strategic focus on *“stronger expertise on results assessment, measures, metrics and learning”*, which is in line with IIED’s positioning *“as a key source of analysis and solutions for complex challenges which need multi-disciplinary, multi-level focus”*.<sup>48</sup> IIED is already moving into this space through the series of briefings it is publishing together EVALSDGs about effectively designing, conducting and using evaluation for adaptive SDG programme implementation, follow-up and review. IIED’s TAMD initiative also worked on building evaluative capacities to understand impact and support reporting on adaptation and climate-related objectives (national and international). Also, IIED’s recent work on the adaptation goal and how to measure it speaks to this agenda within the UNFCCC.

Becoming stronger at impact-oriented M&E of its own portfolio, however, could achieve two linked internal and external strategic objectives. It could help IIED strengthen itself as a learning organisation while strategically moving it to a more central role in the SDGs impact learning agenda. Engaging old and new donors in this two-stage impact learning trajectory moreover could leverage public support for sustainable development.

### ***Move impact M&E to the centre of a learning organisation***

There is an underpinning opportunity for higher level impact assessment to strengthen IIED as a learning organisation in which M&E has a more central role. M&E would shift more strategically beyond activity and outcome reporting to a more central role in an expanding programme learning cycle. As discussed above, M&E might work with impact pathways as dynamic ToCs to test, reflect and share within and across teams.

This shift might also prompt a more systemic approach to cross-group sharing and synergy. As evidenced by the ER’s case study review, IIED has demonstrated the utility of cross-group learning around methodologies (e.g. multi-stakeholder engagement) aided by the institutional memory of its staff. IIED has also shown the effectiveness of adaptive project management aided by flexible funding and leadership’s trust in autonomous staff performance. Significantly though, the ER picked up an apparent tension over the word ‘silo’ and the extent to which this helps or hinders IIED as an organisation that strives to be both effective and more than a sum of its parts. This tension certainly needs resolving in a way that progresses the best elements synergy and autonomy within the organisation.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.