NEW HORIZONS FOR CONSERVATION

A GLOBAL DIALOGUE ON RIGHTS, INCLUSION AND OUR CONNECTION WITH AND DEPENDENCE ON NATURE

DIALOGUE IS A PROCESS AND A WAY OF BEING TOGETHER

FOREWORD

As WWF enters its 60th anniversary year and considers the future of conservation, we convened a global dialogue to explore innovative approaches to conservation that can help meaningfully balance benefits for people and nature in a rapidly changing world.

In the current context, as COVID-19 impacts deepen our understanding of the intricate connection between planetary and human health while further exposing fault lines around the inequalities in our societies, our aim was to bring together a wide range of perspectives on the dilemmas and imperatives inherent to advancing planetary health and human well-being.

The dialogue took place over three sessions between June and September 2020, each convened as a small group (10-15 person) exercise to provide space for exchange and exploration. There were 40 participants from 25 countries, representing a diverse range of professional backgrounds and lived experiences. These included representatives of indigenous peoples and local communities; those who seek to set, or influence, global, national or municipal policy; thought leaders in the fields of the natural and social sciences; those with extensive experience in leading conservation, development or rights-based programmes at regional, national and local levels; those who advocate for human rights, environmental and social justice; and those with backgrounds in finance, economics, tourism, health, education, storytelling, mediation, conflict resolution and other disciplines.

In the spirit of open dialogue, all participants participated in short 1:1 interviews ahead of the group exercises to help shape the shared agenda. The exercises were guided by Chatham House Rule to create an open space for discussion.

This summary report aims to share key messages that emerged throughout the global dialogue, trying to fully capture the richness in perspective and the wealth of knowledge that has been generously shared. In particular, an effort has been made to show how new lenses of thinking can be applied to the practice of conservation, underpinning a recurring theme of the dialogue that holistic approaches are needed to deal with the scale of challenges faced today and in particular, to realise the potential turning points as the world grapples with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a next step, WWF will consider internally, and with partners and others, how the learnings from the dialogue will influence our organizational approach.

This report is not a recommendation, nor does it represent WWF's view on the diverse issues raised. Rather, it is a summary of the individual perspectives of the participants who contributed to this dialogue. Although participants regularly used the first-person plural (i.e. "we") in their contributions – often expressing what they feel humanity, society or duty bearers must seek to achieve – this should not be interpreted as being a shared view of the dialogue group. Where views were widely held within the dialogue group, or where a significant diversion in views existed, authors of this summary report have aimed to capture both the strength and the rich variation in perspective.

WWF would like to thank, wholeheartedly, the participants that joined us in the global dialogue series for the wisdom, knowledge, challenges, hopes and expectations shared. WWF also wishes to express sincere gratitude for the guidance and support provided by Nicola Bedlington, Martin Hiller, Monique Newton and our facilitator Dr. Eliane Ubalijoro.

Dialogue participants
in alphabetical order:

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David R. Boyd	Tagaloa Cooper-Halo
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INTRODUCTION

WWF's choice to explore dialogue as an instrument for engagement for this exercise came from a motivation to provide open space for listening and learning, and to enable emergent creativity by connecting across disciplines

The dialogue process, as conceptualized by physicist David Bohm[1], is often used to help groups and communities co-create or work through complex or a challenging problems. Dialogue is a process and a way of being together that centres on listening to others' perspectives without judgement or debate. In dialogue, we agree to question our own fundamental assumptions – a challenging practice because most of us enter into conversations and discussions from a perspective of wanting to demonstrate the value of our views, being prepared to debate the pros and cons of a particular issue, or even wanting to "win" and convince others to take our side. But, in a dialogue process, there is no fixed outcome because if we are truly open to other perspectives, we cannot know in advance what the outcome will be.

The environments WWF works in are ever-changing, affected by shifting geopolitical, social and economic realities; new technologies; the impacts of globalization; and the often catastrophic impacts of environmental, social and economic crises and conflict. A new paradigm and innovative solutions are needed to tackle the unprecedented challenges we see today and require us to adapt, explore new methods and approaches, and find real and

lasting solutions by fostering collaboration across point of views, interests and perspectives. The value of dialogue, therefore, comes in the opportunity to consider new ways of thinking and new lenses of understanding.

WWF's global dialogue took place as a three-part series. Discussion questions were co-created with participants and focused on broad topics within the following themes:

- A rights-based approach to planetary and human health – balancing individual, collective and nature rights;

- Nature conservation and the socio-economic impacts for communities – exploring benefits and challenges;

- Nature conservation by communities – exploring inclusive conservation in practice.

A number of undercurrents ran across all three exchanges, alongside examples of best practice to emulate, challenging practice to avoid, and recommendations for ways forwards. A summary of findings are shared here.

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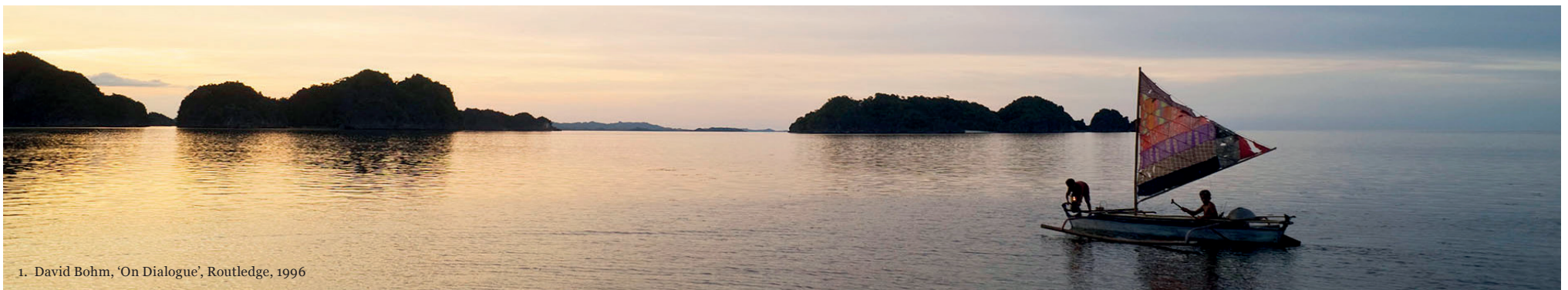
1. David Bohm, 'On Dialogue', Routledge, 1996

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POWER

In convening this global dialogue, WWF set out to explore approaches to conservation that can meaningfully benefit people and nature in a rapidly changing world.

In doing so, participants explored a broad range of themes related to the complexity, and urgency, of balancing efforts to halt nature loss and the degradation of the planet while ensuring thriving and healthy communities. The undercurrent running through these discussions – whether focused on systems change, on economic and investment models, or on programme design – remained the same, centering on both inclusion and power.

Who has voice? Who has power? Who has agency?[2] Who has the power to create a decision-making space and decide who is invited into that space? What does inclusion in a process mean if sovereignty is not recognized and agency is not secure? What are the dominant power structures at play in a community and who is truly represented within them? How are power and agency shared with the most marginalized, with those whose voices are often excluded? When we speak of inclusive approaches, can we be inclusive of rights, health, development, and social justice agendas to build more integrated ways forward? Can inclusion extend to new lenses of thinking, such as incorporating principles of ecofeminism or of mindfulness, designed to open spaces and to enable agency? And, critically, what of the "voice" of nature? How does nature get its seat at the table?

Participants emphasized that the fault lines in our dominant political, economic and social structures mean that the communities most disproportionately affected by climate change, nature loss, and the exploitation and extraction of natural resources are often those that struggle with limited agency, or power, over land and resource management.

The impacts of inequality, particularly of entrenched poverty, are critical to this dilemma where individuals often face false choices between meeting immediate needs and longer term resource protection and restoration. As one participant expressed, "conservation begins with poverty alleviation" – noting that

conservation efforts need to be intertwined with development, health, equity and social justice movements to shift from interventionist to holistic approaches.

Similarly, participants noted that nature itself is too often seen as a byproduct or point of exchange in wider political and economic agendas, with its central role in sustaining our global commons, as well as community livelihoods and physical and spiritual well-being, underrepresented in policy development.

There was general agreement that addressing these fault lines requires a fundamental shift in power structures that enables the agency and influence of indigenous peoples and local communities, and strengthens the rights of and to nature.

In reflecting on how such power shifts could be realized, participants spoke of a number of "repositionings" that are required, foremost among them being the imperative of ensuring sovereignty over indigenous lands and recognition of land rights and tenure for indigenous peoples and local communities. Reference was made to times when communities have either retained their power of self-determination or regained it. This included the impact of the Forest Rights Act on some parts of India and the successful Maori advocacy for the recognition of the rights of New Zealand's Whanganui River, together with their own rights concerning the river. Securing territorial rights has therefore been a critical precursor to enabling agency for those communities and, with the responsibilities inherent therein, creating conditions for more holistic protection of nature.

Several participants referenced the particular vulnerability of the "protectors of the house", referring to land and human rights defenders and environmental activists involved in land rights struggles. They noted the need for frameworks and policies that, in turn, protect the protectors, who can be exposed to extraordinary risk and persecution.

Imbalances of power in representation, voice and inclusion in decision making are directly linked to oppression, inequality and the degradation of nature.

2. Human agency is defined as the capacity to make intentional choices, to initiate actions based on these choices, and to exercise control over the nature and quality of his or her own life - the exercise of freedom involves rights, as well as options and the means to pursue them. A. Bandura (2001), Social cognitive theory: an agentic perspective. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 1(2), p164-180

The importance of bringing a gender equality perspective to conservation was also expressed –giving a voice and a role in decision making to women, who are often closest to the land, responsible for keeping communities thriving, and the most impacted by poverty.

Ideas were shared about incorporating concepts of ecofeminism, which see a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women.[3] The ecofeminist approach in political ecology talks about power and oppression, about historically and currently marginalized groups, about equitable and rights-based decision making, and about managing the local and global commons in an inclusive way. As a number of participants shared, ecofeminism builds on matrilineal approaches common to indigenous traditions, where "Mother Earth and her interests" get a seat at the table.

Such approaches can also start to address the "politics of representation" where power structures within communities can lead to the dominance of some voices over others. This is seen as especially important for communities that are internally extremely iniquitous, where there are multiple castes, classes and ethnicities, and where space has to be actively created for "those who are not being heard – women, the landless, the internally marginalized".

Within the constellation of actors focused on advancing planetary and human health, the recognition of the power dynamics at play between large international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and community actors was also a point of reflection. While often working toward shared aims and through empowering symbiosis, recognition that imbalances of power, resources and influence also exist is seen as crucial for honest reflection on the questions of which actors set the agenda and which are expected to contribute to it. Here, reference was made to the colonial legacy of what was described by some as "Western interventionist models" where the correlation between intent and impact can be challenged.

Consideration was also given to the power dynamics inherent in the very concept of inclusion, or participatory approaches, given the construct they suggest of one group – whether it be a government, private actor or NGO – having the legitimacy to create a space and then invite others to participate as stakeholders, rather than

being leading voices in their own right. Participants, particularly those representing community interests, spoke of the challenging choices many face, with decisions being made to validate spaces "not because there is a sense of shared ownership or equitable partnership but out of need to have your voice heard".

Throughout the dialogue, participants expressed their understanding of how imbalances of power in representation, voice and inclusion in decision making are directly linked to oppression, inequality and the degradation of nature. Designing conservation programmes that will have meaningful benefits for people and nature means examining these power dynamics, thinking and seeing differently, centering communities and the nature they depend on, advancing new concepts of partnership, strengthening the voice and agency of nature itself, and seeing conservation as contributing to a range of agendas that can be most effective when approached holistically.

Participants speak about power

"People usually know that a choice exists, but often they don't have that choice. They end up picking or choosing, but it's not really choosing, is it; it's just what they were getting. People usually can see the longer term, but many are stripped from their agency. And this goes back to a human rights approach, because this creates two classes of citizens: one who has agency and one who has no agency. We have to consciously give back that agency, because we've taken it away."

"When people are poor, they have fewer choices, and that tends to result in different uses of resources than if they had other choices. And when there is natural resource destruction, the impacts of that tend to hit the poor much more quickly and much harder than it hits other people. So the poor end up sort of stuck on both sides; without choice, without agency, facing the impacts the most."

"We need to tackle the issue of inequality. Not just economic inequality and social inequality, but also inequality of access to resources. We need to go beyond human rights issues and talk about power. Oppression is very interconnected to this show of exploitation of natural resources. And the historically marginalized groups of people, including women, girls, LGBTQI, indigenous people, black people, are affected most by this depletion of natural resources. So it has to be about bringing the lens of oppression. This is what ecofeminism brings to the table when it's about environmental issues."

"Our traditional indigenous societies are matrilineal. Right now, we live in a hyper-masculine society that is very male dominated. One of the principles that I bring to my work in the environmental field, even within my daily interactions, is trying to create that space for

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3 Mary Mellor, 'Feminism and Ecology,' New York University Press, 1997

women, encouraging them to lead. I am hoping that we can embrace that because I think that gender equity will, in the long term, help us with the conservation goals that we are trying to develop here."

"When a company or the government comes and wants to negotiate, and give you a part within the process, it is quite easy for us to just go along with the system. This feeling that you really want to be heard, and listened to, and really want to be respected, often drives us into processes that we don't want to be a part of. If you get to power, even if it's just a small amount of power within your self-determination, you think you must be just like them. You are so colonized, that you start to think colonized, meaning that you become the same as the government towards other interests. We are facing quite big risks of losing traditional knowledge, and losing a lot of importance of our culture and our rights, just in order to fit in the system where we're not suited for."

"One thing that I've come across a lot when I was working with refugees, is the vulnerability to be represented by someone else. Even the most open, democratic, technological societies have huge issues with the loss of voices, of voices being completely underrepresented. That challenge is even more so in places where there is an asymmetry of power between the government and the community. You can think that you've had lots of consultation, you've had lots of joint decision making – but actually, you haven't. You've just done that with a few people, a few self-appointed leaders, and that doesn't mean very much. This reinforces some of these inequalities within communities."

"Mutual respect, relationships of trust, relationships of faith and not othering – those are some of the principles that are extremely important for inclusivity. Mutual respect of ways of being, mutual respect for world views, mutual respect for different knowledge systems."

"We need to ask ourselves the fundamental question of the legitimacy of the nation state. And to my mind, the notion of inclusivity goes that fundamental, because in so far as we recognize the legitimacy of nation states at the level of the countries, and at the level of the United Nations, we will always be talking the language of 'Oh, we need to include indigenous peoples and local communities', rather than nation to nation dialogues – so, for example, the Sami as a nation, and Sweden as a nation. This is a very fundamental challenge to my mind of what we mean by democracy. And to go back to the original meaning of democracy, it is power of the people, it is not power of the nation state, it is not power of those we elect, it is not power of the bureaucrats, it is not power of scientists sitting in formal institutionalized spaces. And unless we get there, and assert the power of communities, of autonomy, and self-determination, we will only be touching at the margins of what real inclusivity should be."

"Let's look to the examples of where we were able to truly build democracy in a way that is inclusive of the people who should be having the power, and inclusive of the rest of nature because its rights are also being recognized in some way."

" Whenever the word inclusivity is mentioned, the first question that comes to mind, is who is including whom? Who is the main actor, where does the power lie? Who is the primary initiator of the process of inclusiveness? "

RIGHTS

The global dialogue placed a particular emphasis on rights – human rights, both individual and collective, and the rights of and to nature – by looking at the opportunities and limitations of existing rights frameworks and at areas where these frameworks need to be expanded or, in recognizing the rights of nature, newly developed.

A strong view emerged that shifting power, and so ensuring agency of and a voice for the underrepresented, requires integrated approaches that strengthen the interdependence of individual, community and nature rights. This is seen as essential to confronting the urgent challenges of environmental degradation we face today while creating more equitable, just and thriving societies. A critical question centred on whether existing rights frameworks, such as the UN Declaration on Human Rights or the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which guide entitlements and obligations, are as encompassing as they should be. Perspectives of participants varied – from those proposing such frameworks are "the most powerful catalysts for transformative change that we have ever had" to those asserting that any framework, however strong, can only be as significant as the capability of individuals and communities to claim those rights, bringing issues of representation and agency once more to the fore.

These questions were particularly pertinent to the discussion of land rights, and of recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities to their ancestral lands and territories. Several participants expressed the view that the pathway to securing tenure is obstructed by systems that are not designed to empower or promote agency. Restrictions that in many places prevent women from owning land and the bureaucratic processes that insist on written land titles over traditional approaches to territorial management were cited as two such examples.

A number of participants shared their own experiences of being evicted from their land or of seeing investments – whether for commercial or conservation purposes – taking place in their territories without free, prior and informed consent. They highlighted how the loss of land rights also impacts the loss of community, lifestyle, culture, tradition, knowledge and language, as well as the ability to care for and protect vital lands and natural resources. This led to a strong call by a range of participants for the acceptance of people's rights to the places they have been part of at the onset of any community engagement.

This interdependence between territorial rights and the rights to nature emphasized the vital importance for many participants of establishing the right for all human beings to a healthy environment to fulfil their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health requirements and for the functioning of strong and thriving societies. The right to a healthy environment was described by one participant as having six substantive elements: "clean air, clean water and adequate sanitation, healthy and sustainably produced food, a safe climate, non-toxic environments in which people live, work, study, and play, and healthy ecosystems and biodiversity". Recognizing these rights, as a number of countries have begun to do, would also include recognizing the responsibilities of duty bearers to fulfil them.

Reflections on the right to nature and the right to a safe and healthy environment were especially prominent in light of COVID-19 impacts and other nature-climate-health interfaces. For example, it was pointed out that heat and extreme weather patterns are responsible for illness caused by poor air quality and increases in vector-borne disease, and affect malnutrition and food insecurity; those who are most vulnerable often live in places that are most fragile and most rapidly changing, and bear the brunt of the change – for example, sea water encroaching on rice paddies leading to malnutrition and increases in diseases such as dengue and cholera; the connection between nature and our mental, emotional and spiritual health is often under-estimated; we need it to connect to our self, to our communities, and to life itself.

A challenge is presented though when we consider how to integrate individual and community rights with the rights to nature that cross borders and boundaries. How do existing frameworks allow us to respond to a new reality in which the far-reaching consequences of environmental degradation and nature loss mean we are all living in each other's backyards?

As one participant proposed: "We now live in the depths of the Anthropocene, in a hyper-connected world", creating a need for a new dimension of a rights-based approach to navigating our future, one

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that allows us to govern the global common and to talk of "humanity's planetary rights". A new framing of a rights-based approach that aims at sharing our finite resources equally can therefore be seen as critical to recognizing the "fundamental moral obligation of us as humans to share with each other the remaining space on Earth".

Examples were shared from countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and New Zealand[4] of giving a voice to nature by recognizing it as a legal subject. These developments were seen as critical for shifting public consciousness and policy discourse from nature as an object to be used as a resource, to nature as a subject with rights to be respected. A noteworthy component of this discussion focused particularly on the concept of giving nature a legal personality through a universal declaration of the rights of nature. It was proposed by a number of participants that this should be seen as part of a wider paradigm shift in which humans as a species are understood as part of a larger natural ecosystem, and not the only voice influencing the future of other species on the planet.

Participants speak about rights

"Various communities require nature to make a living, and many of these people are defending their territories against private companies. Even though we know we are all living in a crisis, nature is not a priority for the governments; they have been developing policies and economic models that have pushed people out from rural areas and they gave concessions to many private companies that over-exploit many of these areas. There are people dying while defending their territories against the state and the private companies. The people want to preserve their way of life and they have the right to self-determination."

"One of the most powerful human rights that we can turn to in the 21st century is the right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The right to a healthy environment has six substantive elements and then it's also critically

important that, as we set out on the path to fulfil those elements of the right to a healthy environment, we recognize the procedural aspects, which are that everyone has a right to information about all of these issues, everyone has a right to participate in decision making and everyone has a right of access to justice and effective remedies if their rights are being threatened or violated."

"Suddenly, the global commons changed entirely their meaning to all of us. It's not okay that we risk losing one of the Earth-regulating biomes, the Amazon. We need to have a new form of universality, a new form of collective ability to govern all the global commons together, for our joint future. That, to me, is a new dimension to a rights-based approach, which does not in any way neglect the importance of addressing the local individual rights, but we have to also talk of humanity's planetary rights."

"We are at risk of destabilizing the whole planet. And that translates to the recognition that we must navigate our future within a safe operating space on a manageable and resilient Earth system, which in turn translates to the need to share the finite, scarce and absolute budgets of natural capital, of natural resources, of systems that provide the basis for our life support. We started to recognize that for carbon, but the same applies for all natural capital; if it's biodiversity, if it's water, if it's air. It's a question of a rights-based equitable sharing of the remaining space on Earth, because we're hitting the ceiling of the stability of the whole planet."

"This is a moment for transformation. We need to listen to the message that nature is telling us now. Rights of nature is the way to break this paradigm, it's the way to give nature a voice and to consider nature at the negotiating table when we take any decision. This is the moment to scale it up globally, and recognize a universal declaration for the rights of nature. That is the approach we need to take in this new normality that nature is forcing us into; otherwise, we have not really heard the message."

"I am coming from a human rights background, where we always talked about putting human rights first. And I think that there is a problem there, honestly, because we're still putting humanity somewhat at the pinnacle of this planet. But we're not the pinnacle. We all know how destructive we are. People that live closer to nature, who are more attached to it, are more likely to care for the environment than people who live remote from nature. The big issue is that we always tend to think of things from a human point of view, from an economic point of view. The question is how can we actually see ourselves, as humans, not as the focal point of the intervention? How do we put ourselves not out of the equation but as one part of the equation, with everything around us as equals, and not trying to maximize our own benefit in whichever way possible."

4 More information on the rights of nature in Bolivia, Ecuador and New Zealand.

❝ Indigenous peoples and local communities are communities that live in nature; their livelihood is connected to nature. Therefore, to me, a human-rights-based approach is an approach that doesn't rob this community's entitlement of their rights to have access to that nature. ❞

SYSTEM CHANGE

A thriving world – resilient, sustainable and just for all – relies on effective political, economic and societal systems that can advance the protection and restoration of nature while ensuring the many benefits of nature – spiritual, cultural, physiological and economic – are equitably shared among rights holders, now and in the future.

Throughout the global dialogue, participants reflected on our dominant systems and debated the extent to which these systems need to be fundamentally altered to address the interlinked challenges of growing inequality and nature loss.

Divergent views were put forward on the degree of radicalism that is needed or useful as we consider systems change. Some shared that the urgency of the challenges we face today, and particularly the limited time available to address climate and nature crises, would not be achieved by upending current systems. "If we start by questioning capitalism and everything in the current economy, we will not arrive at the rapid change that we need," said one participant. It was suggested instead that change will be more achievable if we focus on what is working well, on the policies or approaches undertaken by nations that are moving forward comprehensive agendas, and then show how to make good practice transferable.

On the other hand, the case was also made for challenging the system at its very roots. Here it was argued that strategies are needed to transform the blatant failures in political and economic systems that "perpetuate structural racism, patriarchy and the oppression of women and marginalized groups, fundamentalism, and disrespect of nature and resulting environmental degradation". The view was put forward that "we cannot expect to address blatant failures and oppression by tweaking around the edges". In particular, fears were expressed that recovery efforts from COVID-19 would be another proxy for aggressive profit-orientated and non-sustainable models. This led to a significant reflection on representation – and the notion that the pace of change one may feel is needed will often depend on one's place in the current system and whether one feels well represented, or deeply excluded, by it.

Participants focused on particular fault lines within these systems as a way of breaking down wider systems challenges into specific areas for analysis and reimagining. Particular attention was paid to the fault lines created by the dominant fixation on economic value, growth and advancement over other critical aspects of individual and community prosperity, and how this affects understanding both of the benefits of nature, and of how these benefits should be realized and equitably shared.

By labeling benefits and impacts in financial terms, we fail to fully realize that "sometimes having social sustainability is more valuable than financial sustainability". Can we therefore think of different and new economic models that more fully centre the UN Sustainable Development Goals to unify economic development and community well-being? In particular, can we replace the emphasis on gross domestic product with gross natural product and a political economy of sustainable development? Why do we let markets regulate life, instead of life regulating the markets?

One of the most challenging questions in this space is on how to appropriately and holistically value nature. Many shared the perspective that the financial measurement of ecosystems services over the past decades has been integral to translating the value of nature in a way that is tangible for policymakers and private enterprise. This view suggests that putting a price tag on nature allows us to value it, balance this against other costs, and confront the tendency for individuals, particularly those in urban environments, to be "lazy about nature" when its benefits are seen to be free.

Reflections were shared that during this pandemic, or during times of forest fires or heavy air pollution, people and governments become more attuned to the need for a healthy environment. But a few months after these situations settle, people tend to revert to business as usual. Monetizing the health benefits of the environment and the costs of preventive action and balancing them against the costs of things like healthcare, disaster and humanitarian relief can therefore strengthen the case for nature conservation.

On the other hand, a strong sense of trepidation was shared about the growing pressure to "commodify nature" and the challenges this

The pace of change one may feel is needed will often depend on one's place in the current system.

presents. How do you value natural systems that have taken millennia to develop? If nature is viewed primarily through a financial lens, how do we overcome the fault lines in the capitalist system where profit is prioritized and rarely shared equitably? And, critically, how do we balance the financial benefits of nature with the deep spiritual, cultural and health benefits which are often overlooked? These values cannot be traded off against each other, and certainly cannot be translated into economic terms.

It was argued that commodification of nature often comes with the insistence that communities develop "westernized management plans" that may contradict traditional approaches to land and resource management or diminish traditional cultures. The commodification of knowledge was also raised as a concern. A number of participants shared that as the demand by the developed world for knowledge from indigenous peoples increases, there has been growing pressure to claim intellectual property rights over this knowledge, turning even cultural characteristics into commodities.

With the COVID-19 pandemic providing a constant backdrop to the dialogue, the interconnection between nature and health was particularly emphasized, with participants referencing the direct impacts of the natural world on physical health, as well as mental, spiritual and emotional health. Here, the link to cultural traditions and to intergenerational sharing of the value of nature was seen as paramount, if less tangible to measure.

Many participants proposed that what is needed then is to find new ways – new investment models and new engagement models – that empower communities and actors who influence them to define the benefits of nature as they see them, and to value nature holistically. In particular, if communities are to be able to truly realize socio-economic benefits from conservation efforts, they must have access to financing and investment models that are equitable, inclusive and focused on longer-term transformative change.

Participants were divided in their assessments of whether current investment models are improving. Many suggested that newer business approaches – through impact investment, development finance and guarantee instruments – were opening up much-needed space for community-led impact. However, others did not believe private investment, with an inevitable emphasis on returns, could ever be truly accessible or beneficial to the poorest of the poor. Systemic issues

related to representation, accessibility, language and cumbersome grant-making and reporting processes were cited as significant barriers, and also prompted specific proposals for improvement.

Opinion converged around the need for longer-term approaches that do not push for results within three- to five-year timeframes and "trap" grantees in proposal-writing and reporting cycles. Instead, they need to provide time and space for diverse, community-led approaches to flourish. Here, questions were raised about how development and conservation models could be fundamentally altered to promote longer-term aims, and reflections were shared on the role of international NGOs in both advancing and exacerbating these challenges.

It was noted by a range of participants, including those representing civil society organizations themselves, that NGOs have a tendency to expound broad "world-changing" ambitions but define them through short-term, single-outcome programmes or projects. These are then designed through complex management plans and monitored through reporting frameworks that are rarely translated into local languages and are reliant on systems that will be unfamiliar to many local actors. It should be asked then how we can design approaches in a way that can fully integrate local knowledge and ways of being, and build longer term partnerships that enable community-led aims.

A number of participants also expressed recognition that some forms of development and conservation can do more harm than good given the complex route between intention and impact. If change is to be effected beyond a singular lens (e.g. preservation of elephant habitats) with a view to integrating agendas (e.g. preservation of elephant habitats, reduction in human wildlife conflict and support for community well-being), integrated approaches and strong social indicators are needed to holistically assess the efficacy of these programmes. It was proposed by some that while conservation organizations have a role to play as the guardians of nature, fulfilling this role effectively requires as much of an emphasis on social science and modern anthropological skills as biological skills. Conflict resolutions skills, in particular, were cited as among the most important 21st century skills, for any industry or actor and as vital for making sure that more communities and more people have access to learning how to defuse conflict, resolve conflict, and work through conflict.

How do we balance the financial benefits of nature with the deep spiritual, cultural and health benefits which are often overlooked?

Participants speak about system change

"We know that in the Western paradigm of time, there's linearity; there's the beginning, there's an end, and there's a particular speed – a particular speed in terms of how things need to get done. And more often than not, that speed is connected to capital accumulation, and connected to a political economy, so there is very limited patience. We need patience, we need to align our pace, while acknowledging the imperative to act given the wider planetary emergency."

"We should not always label everything in financial terms; sometimes social sustainability is more valuable than financial sustainability; I might be living a very healthy life and not having or needing any money. Today, we are forcing people in Africa, in Asia, in other parts of the world, we are forcing a kind of intellectual communism … but we might be completely wrong about our methodologies. How do I define the price of coal, or a kilogram of gold, that took millions of years [to materialize]? We're trying to push everything into financial values. We're defining millions of years of nature on the small concept of financial returns that is less than hundreds of years old."

"With good intentions, we as facilitators are imposing systems of formalization that again come from the westernized models of conservation. Even when a community has been able to claim and get recognized their community rights, they have to produce a management plan based on a paradigm that comes from the farm and conservation world. It's not a paradigm which communities have used in order to govern and manage their parts of the ecosystems

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for millennia. How can we actually create spaces for multiple forms of governance, using multiple forms of knowledge, and how do we facilitate processes by which commodification of both knowledge and resources does not happen? How does one assert, or reassert, or help the community to assert,, the relationship of caring and sharing with the forest? The effective relationship as people, rather than the commodified relationship?

"I have a very close friend, he's a traditional eel fisher, and he will take his grandkids out in the winter, cut the ice, teach them how to make the eel poles, show them where to go, they spear the eels, they take the eels out of the water, he helps them prepare them, the kids will take them to the community elders, or they have a community feast. All of that pride and that intergenerational

importance is really important to feed the culture of the spirit, but there's no way to put an economic value on that. If we neglect our spirit, that void gets filled with other things. Neglect of our spirits leads to things such as substance abuse like drugs, alcohol, or you'll see people that will try to fill that void of spirituality with consumerism. And our Western society feeds off that, thinking that economics is the way to happiness."

❝ People and communities are expected to participate, and compete, in a market-based economy to have their basic needs met, to have food, shelter, safety – when these basic needs should be understood as fundamental human rights, instead of something left to the markets to determine. ❞

"We need some acceleration in the world, and there's not enough NGO money in the world to achieve what we want. The private sector needs to be involved and needs to be seen also as solving some of the problems. Coming from the private sector, I see many opportunities, but it is also important to look at where it doesn't always go well. I think the problem is always that for the private sector, we need a business model, we need to think long term, will we get our return, and then we'll reinvest the money. But that's not always possible, or at least you need research to explore this. So that's where we need grants and where NGOs and the private sector need to work together."

"If the private sector is so successful, why do we have so much disparity in the world? And who even gets the impact investment? PowerPoint, Excel and Word, so we are marginalizing again the non-English speakers and the traditional speakers until we break the barriers of language and other monies. How many indigenous people get the money – the first money, not the trickle down effect? None of us pay for airports, not roads, which is highly subsidized. These are assets on which we drive, on which we fly. Nature is an asset, and the people who preserve it need to be subsidized to keep that asset on our behalf."

"As a practitioner in an organization where we receive donor funds, we have also traditionally been saying: trust your funds to us because we know our communities. We know the people that we serve. And, as you can imagine, that has always been a challenge. But over time, we've tried to be accountable for the support we receive, and at the same time try and find a convergence or an interface between that support and delivery to what's really needed."

"I worked on a project in a community in northern Canada and it was really interesting to see how the government was taking a very non-conscious understanding of what progress means, which for them was about mining, economic development, bringing the labour and the educator and employment. But when I spoke to the community, what I started to understand was all of these mass-scale development initiatives had impacted people's access to land, has impacted their traditional way of life. It created a social breakdown, which led to increases in gender-based violence, which led to higher drinking, which led to all of these things that we see as social health issues and mental health issues. All of those things that we call unhealthy were actually a result of economic interventions that we have kind of done in good intentions, not understanding that a lot of what we do may have a good intention, but has huge social ramifications."

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❝ Civil society talks so often about large programmes, about the big things we are going to do, but when it comes to implementation we only think in terms of one- to five-year projects and we need a report by the end of the year, we need deliverables, documentation and lovely pictures for the donor. There is a complete mismatch on how civil society works. ❞

WAYS FORWARD

To explore approaches to conservation that will meaningfully balance benefits for people and nature in a rapidly changing world, participants considered the "repositionings" that are needed to shift power dynamics and to strengthen the representation and agency of marginalized voices.

They shared reflections on how to integrate rights frameworks so that individual, collective and nature rights are looked at symbiotically and how the crucial issue of land rights for indigenous peoples and local communities is advanced. Participants considered the case for and against radical systems change, positioning perspective within the context of the urgent need to effectively address the climate and nature crises in ways that combat oppression and structural inequality.

They discussed the many interdependencies between living in healthy ecosystems and having healthy choices, and considered the incredible value of nature for physical and mental health and for cultural and spiritual resilience. They explored fault lines, testing the limits of our economic models and value systems, in order to consider more holistic ways forward. And they explored complex questions, including how do we understand our new realities in which territorial boundaries are at once diminished and more important than ever in advancing rights and justice; and with the far-reaching impacts of environmental degradation meaning that everyone lives in each other's backyard, how do we address these responsibilities while recognizing that respect for and reliance on local, community practice must be the guiding force for effective equitable change.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of the dialogue, creating even more clarity about the intricate link between planetary health and human well-being and prompting reflections on the signals nature was giving about our ways of life. As one participant shared: "Should we really consider this moment as a tipping point? Or is it a return? To slower, more contemplative, traditional ways of being?"

Underpinning these discussions was the sense that new lenses of thinking need to be embraced, or traditional lenses rediscovered, to find ways through the complexity which now confronts us and to move toward more open ways of seeing and of understanding. In particular,

reference was made to movements of mindfulness, of appreciative enquiry, of restorative justice, and other reflective and trust-building methods that can be applied to conservation and many other sectors.

A similar emphasis was placed, by several participants, on more rigorously advancing precautionary or preventative approaches, as raised in the context of healthcare and of natural resource management. As one participant shared, a precautionary approach, which implies that you'll be careful about the resources that you use and look at what is needed as opposed to what is wanted, is inherent to indigenous value systems and should be more widely applied.

These reflections prompted a range of ideas for ways forward, or "social re-imaginings", which are shared below. Some relate to fundamental systems change and are directed at all actors – across disciplines, across geographies, and representing public and private interests – who have a part to play as disruptors. Others are specific to global and local civil society organizations – particularly conservation NGOs – and concern methods of engagement which can be strengthened or newly applied to support truly transformative, inclusive change.

Reference was made to movements of mindfulness, of appreciative enquiry, and restorative justice that can be applied to conservation.

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IDEAS FOR WAYS FORWARD

- Advance steps that can be taken to support indigenous peoples and local communities to secure land rights .

- Consider the policies and practices needed to support and protect environmental and land rights defenders, the "protectors of the house".

- Consider whether a universal declaration of nature rights is needed, or other means that would give recognition to the legal persona of nature.

- Consider forms of governance – across nations, communities and within programme implementation – that embrace different spaces for learning, knowledge sharing decision making, and in the process reimagine the social spaces we share.

- Renew focus on preventative approaches, as can be linked to health agendas, or to precautionary means of living and of resource management as embodied in traditional indigenous practices.

- Apply lenses of ecofeminism to policy design and programme implementation to address gender inequality and the oppression of marginalized groups.

- Embrace approaches from movements of mindfulness, contemplative practice, restorative justice and conflict resolution to centre emotional and social learning in community-focused engagements.

- Slow down in order to scale up. Rethink time and pace to promote longer-term investment plans and programme design over 10-15 year timescales to guide transformative change and to build trust and respect between global, national and local actors.

- For civil society organizations, emphasize interpersonal skills and capability building among staff and value negotiation, facilitation and conflict resolution skills as highly as core conservation or development capabilities.

- Consider representation,inside and outside of organizations. Ensure that all engagements between civil society organizations and community leaders are defined as relationships of equals and based on mutual trust and respect.

- Consider how to enable agency and improve representation and access across all interventions, particularly by enhancing multilingual approaches to proposal development and diversifying approaches to reporting.

- Apply social indicators consistently across programmes to better understand the correlation between intention and impact, and to holistically engage all actors in assessment of project direction and benefits.

- Harness the power of integration to resolve complex problems by connecting well-defined agendas across development, conservation, health, and social equity with lenses of restorative justice, mindfulness, and conflict resolution. Adopt this integration within global policy frameworks and within specific programme design by taking interdisciplinary approaches to proposal development.

Should we really consider this moment as a tipping point? Or is it a return? To slower, more contemplative, traditional ways of being?

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Participants speak about ways forward

"[In many parts of the world...] we see nature as this thing that we look at, we could take pictures of, but we don't actually see our role in the ecosystem. And part of the work that we need to do, is to try to really understand that it's not all about urbanization and using nature and calling it natural resources that can be bought and sold. It's actually understanding that we do have a role within nature, and if we abuse that role we will have such things as large scale climate disasters, like this whole pandemic. The elders have told me that this is part of Mother Nature's adjustments."

"A state controlled participatory system would talk about one committee, which is the decision-making committee where the discussions would happen. Whereas the community space has multiple spaces; it has spaces of decision making, it has spaces of learning, it has spaces of dialogues. And our experience is that many communities make distinctions between these spaces because if your learning is happening in the same space where you have to make decisions, then it's a very restricted learning, because you have to defend your position because it's about taking a certain decision. There are many examples of these communities who are very protective of what they call the learning spaces, the basket, the study circle. In some of these community institutions one of the things is creating space for co-creation of knowledge, where they invite people from outside, and say, also our knowledge system has its own limitations and there are dimensions which are new to us and we would like to learn about it. But how do we do it as equal actors, where multiple knowledge systems are equally respected?"

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"You have this interesting kind of convergence of the mindfulness movement teaching people how to meditate, engaging contemplative practices, and really what some of the scientific terminology is to down-regulate stress and up-regulate pro-sociality, which is a fancy word for just saying for trust, for teamwork, for collaboration. It's an interesting moment where the mindfulness movement converges with the social emotional learning movement, giving us some interesting insights via the neuroscience of compassion and conflict resolution."

"When we're having this conversation, I feel like there's this turn towards paying more attention to multiple forms of knowledge, and multiple ways of thinking, including that of indigenous people.

❝ From my healthcare sector perspective, I am focused on prevention. Sometimes I feel like, have we actually completely given up on the possibility that we can prevent disease? We are driven by systems that have been siloed to focus on just one kind of singular outcome. We've lost some of our imagination. We need to confront ourselves; can't it really be done by doing the best we can? We have to acknowledge that maybe we collectively lost a little bit of fire. I feel like we need a complete social reimagination. ❞

But it's actually a return. It's a return to the ways of knowledge and being that our current political economy tried to eradicate, tried to extract its labour from, so it's a fascinating moment."

"As a civil society, we often look at governments and use them as punching bags. But I would also point the finger back to civil society and ask, what have we done? How many resilient models have we created that withstood the pandemic? I see a problem that when we as civil society organizations, when we need to understand the communities, or the nature and the community, we actually send the youngest and most inexperienced people to the group and then they meet with the most experienced people from the community. That itself, there's a loss in translation. And then when we try to present to the funder, we use the most sophisticated semantics that only certain people would understand."

"We discovered when we started engaging with the Forest Rights Act, it took us seven or eight years to get the first titles to the communities, and along the way, people were just saying, "what's going on, why is it taking so long?" Well it's taking so long because it's a community lead process and it will take whatever time it takes. And that's something that we've got to recognize, and something that we've got to build in. You can help create and facilitate something, but at the end of the day, I have to leave behind the space for communities to take over and run the process on their own. And where that has happened, in the few places that I've seen that happen, it's been truly a process entirely led by communities, and unless we do that, it won't work, and it won't be a legitimate process. So to me, the notion of time, and space, and letting the process be driven from within, rather than externally, is a very important lesson that we learned along the way."

"For me, conservation is living also. And meaning a balance between living in the area and protecting it, for future generations. We have lived within this area for thousands of years, and we have managed to still be there, and still live from nature, with nature. And we need to remind ourselves about the history: it is actually not the indigenous who forced this negative impact on nature, it is the world around us."

❝ We have always used our territory as this space, a bubble, where we interact with nature, where we interact with the environment and we have to take care of that territory, because it's the home for everyone. And that's what we try to keep healthy, we keep our environment healthy. If we keep our house healthy and clean then we are also going to be safe, and we can be resilient and sustain life in the longer term, for the future generations. ❞

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IN CLOSING

The ideas shared throughout the global dialogue include important reflections for the conservation community, together with a range of other sectors and players, to further consider and embrace as we move forward in our shared aim to achieve a thriving, resilient, just and sustainable future for all.

We hope that the findings summarized will be valuable to all participants, and to partners current and new, as critical questions of sustainability and equity are explored within your own organisations, networks and communities. In particular, we hope that the interdisciplinary approach undertaken throughout the dialogue, to bring varied perspectives together, acts as an impetus to continue to work across communities and agendas to find creative solutions to the pressing challenges we confront.

For WWF, we will draw from the dialogue learnings, in particular, as we work to steadily strengthen inclusive and rights-based approaches to conservation and sustainability, even in the most challenging socio-political realities. These learnings will also help to shape reflections on our own positioning and role in the landscapes where we work, and as we consider, with partners and others, our ambitions, strategies and responsibilities in an ever-changing world.

We would like to again express thanks to everyone who has been involved in the dialogues, with sincere gratitude to dialogue participants. WWF aims to maintain an ongoing dialogue with them and others as we work towards a world in which people and nature thrive.

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