

Workshop Brief 13-14 May, 2024 | Bergen, Norway

# Disentangling successful adaptation using theory of change



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## Introduction

- IMAGINE Adaptation hosted an international workshop on “Disentangling successful adaptation using theory of change” on May 13–14, 2024 in Bergen, Norway. We aimed to create a collaborative space for rethinking and identifying the changes needed for effective climate adaptation.
- The goal of the workshop was to generate an environment for experimentation and co-production where we could collectively think of what change is needed to successfully adapt to climate change
- The workshop began with a masterclass by Iñigo Retolaza Eguren, providing a foundational understanding of the theory of change and discussing its utility in structuring discussions and making adaptation initiatives more intentional from the start.
- During the second day, the workshop participants developed a collective desired change statement emphasising the need for equity and wellbeing considerations as well as the “critical conditions” for achieving the desired change. In the final session, the participants reflected on “signs of change,” discussing what we “expect to see” and would “love to see”.
- The insights of the workshop will be used to inform the ongoing work in IMAGINE Adaptation particularly as we move to the context-specific case study stage of the project.



**Workshop Goal:**  
to generate an environment for experimentation and co-production where we could collectively think of what change is needed to successfully adapt to climate change.

**Workshop participants (in alphabetical order):** Neil Adger, Cecilia Alda Vidal, Ana Terra Amorim-Maia, Inès Bakhtaoui, Jon Barnett, Marta Berbes-Blazquez, Tia Brullo, Lorenzo Chelleri, Eric Chu, Johannes Dittmann, Lorraine Dongo, Mathilda Englund, Susannah Fisher, Sean Goodwin, Sirkku Juhola, William Lewis, Joshua Long, Ishfaq Malik, Sara Meerow, Marta Olazabal, Lisa Schipper, Douwe van Schie, Kayin Venner, Gina Ziervogel. **Workshop organisers (in alphabetical order):** Cecilia Alda Vidal, Ana Terra Amorim-Maia, Sean Goodwin, William Lewis, Marta Olazabal.

## Visioning the desired change: What is the adaptation we want to see?

- In the first session, we worked on creating a collective desired change statement. Participants were provided with a preliminary statement, created by summarising the individual abstracts they had submitted before the workshop. To create this preliminary statement, we summarised each abstract and extracted keywords, then combined these into one comprehensive sentence that broadly encompassed all the themes.
- Participants were given five minutes to review and edit this statement individually. Afterwards, they were divided into five groups of five and given half an hour to develop a shared desired change statement for the group. Each group's statement needed to include a subject (who is affected by the change), a purpose (what we want to achieve), and a means of achieving that purpose (how the change is effected).

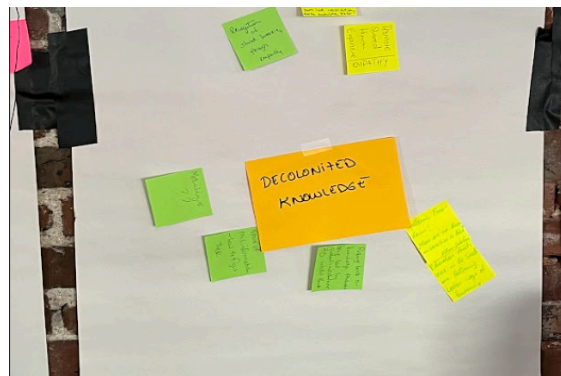
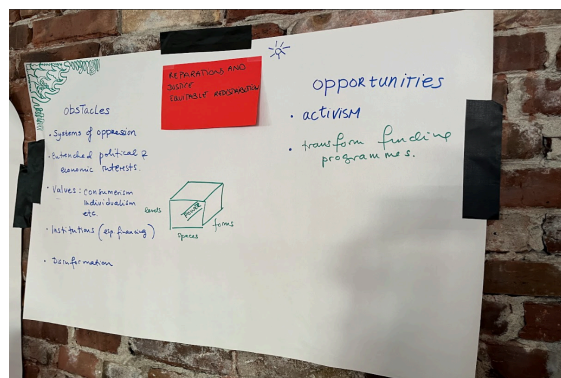
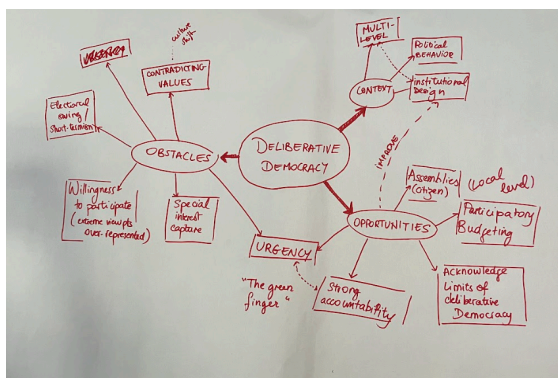


### Final overall group desired change:

“Everyone, especially marginalised people, can sustain meaningful and dignified lives with improved wellbeing and equity outcomes within planetary boundaries amidst climate impacts.”

## Conditions and determinants for successful adaptation

- In the second session of the day, we worked together to identify the most important conditions required to achieve the desired change that had been agreed upon during the first session of the day.
- Participants were given five minutes to individually consider the question, “What needs to be in place for the desired change to occur?” and write their short answers on cards. Following this, they were divided into five groups to discuss and select the four most important conditions necessary for the desired change. The groups identified a total of 18 conditions of various types; these were then categorised and ranked with the top four conditions discussed in greater detail in terms of opportunities and obstacles.



### The four most voted conditions:

1. Deliberative Democracy
2. Reparations and Justice & Equitable Redistribution
3. Cultural Shift & Sense of Urgency
4. Decolonised Knowledge

## From conditions to contributions: Indicators for successful adaptation

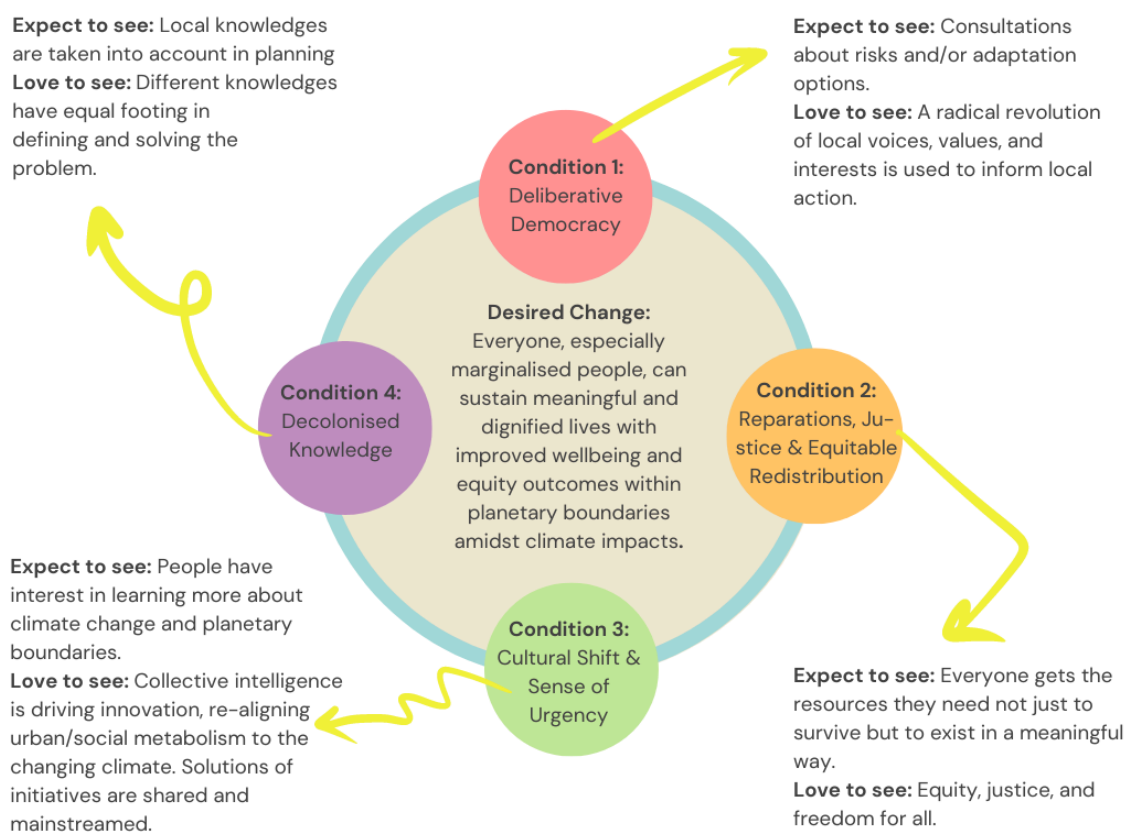
- In the final session, participants were first asked to individually reflect on one of the conditions for change that emerged from the previous session by providing several “signs of change”—things that could be perceived in some way to indicate that the conditions for the desired change are being met. Then, in pairs, participants explored the assumptions they were making about how and why these signs of change relate to the conditions of the desired change. Coming together in small groups, participants then tried to ground their signs of change in reality by identifying for whom change needs to take place, how this change could be measured, and by whom. Finally, participants reflected together on what kind of knowledge and knowledge processes ought to be in place for their signs of change.

### Examples of signs of change that were identified:

Condition	Expect to see	Like to see	Love to see
<b>Deliberative Democracy</b>	Consultations about risks and/or adaptation options.	More intensive, inclusive efforts that recognise equity, justice, and accountability.	A radical revolution of local voices, values, and interests is used to inform local action.
<b>Reparations, Justice &amp; equitable redistribution</b>	Everyone gets the resources they need not just to survive but to exist in a meaningful way.	Eradication of inequality and suffering.	Equity, justice, and freedom for all.
<b>Cultural Shift &amp; Sense of Urgency</b>	People are interested to know more about climate change and planetary boundaries.	People leave behind unsustainable practices and share adaptive practices, for organising groups for action and collaborating with institutions.	Collective intelligence is driving innovation, re-aligning urban/social metabolism to the changing climate. Solutions of initiatives are shared and mainstreamed through social media, schools, and institutions.
<b>Decolonized knowledge</b>	Local knowledges are considered in planning.	Bottom-up knowledge processes.	Different knowledges have equal footing in defining and solving the problem.

## Summary of workshop reflections

- In discussing the role of Theory of Change (ToC) in supporting climate adaptation, participants highlighted both its potential and its limitations.
- Initial concerns included ethical issues, the risk of ToC being used to impose external agendas, and its difficulty in addressing the complexity and differential vulnerability in adaptation efforts. There was scepticism about its value at broad scales and concerns about it being co-opted by funding agencies, which might reduce its effectiveness.
- On the positive side, ToC was preliminarily seen as useful for understanding systems and making assumptions explicit, thus fostering dialogue and collaboration. It has the potential to shift power dynamics, guide intentional, process-driven approaches, and help navigate complex change pathways. Participants valued its ability to create a roadmap for adaptation efforts, bringing stakeholders together and supporting dialogue and accountability. Ultimately, ToC was seen as a valuable tool when integrated with other methodologies, particularly at local levels, to foster long-term adaptation.



**Figure 1** – Conceptual visualisation of the concepts discussed during the workshop (these are examples of conditions and signs of change and do not constitute a comprehensive list of conditions or metrics for adaptation to climate change).

## Conclusions and Next Steps

- The “Disentangling successful adaptation using theory of change” workshop provided an opportunity to rethink how we understand adaptation to climate change. Through the theory of change, we hoped to integrate theoretical and practical perspectives to foster a deeper understanding of how to drive effective climate adaptation through deliberate, inclusive processes. By emphasizing a theory-driven approach, participants were encouraged to think critically about the underlying assumptions and desired outcomes of adaptation strategies. The masterclass underscored that a clear theory of change can guide adaptation efforts toward more systematic and measurable impacts.
- The outcomes of this workshop will play a critical role in shaping the ongoing efforts of IMAGINE Adaptation, especially as the project moves towards context-specific case studies. The collaborative insights and the collective vision generated during the workshop are expected to inform and enhance the understanding of adaptation processes and politics in the case studies.





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Contact: [imagineadapt@bc3research.org](mailto:imagineadapt@bc3research.org)

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