Call for chapter proposals

Transforming Environmental Governance through Action Research: The Potentials and Limitations of Pluriversal Collaboration

We invite chapter proposals and non-academic contributions (e.g. personal reflections, short interviews, poetry, graphic artworks) for an edited volume on the potentials and limitations of collaborative action research for advancing transformative change in response to the shortcomings of prevailing environmental governance. The book will be prepared under the scientific direction of Dr Damien Krichewsky (University of Bonn) and Dr Matthew Wingfield (University of the Western Cape) as part of the pluriversal action research project 'Transforming Environmental Governance in the Anthropocene: An Action Research in the Field of Access and Benefit-Sharing' (TEGA).[1]

By bringing together contributions from TEGA participants (the scientific project team, policy experts, public officials, Indigenous leaders, biotrade entrepreneurs, biodiversity scientists) and contributions from other transformative change initiatives, the book will explore *how and up to which point collaborative research can address the root causes of ecological destruction and injustices arising from modern developmentalism*, in contexts where mainstream environmental governance remains, by and large, faithful to onto-epistemologies, institutional arrangements, and interests that cement the *status quo*, and where transformative perspectives and ideas are difficult to translate into actual tangible change.

Based on the proposals received in response to this call, we will finalize the book concept and submit it to a publishing house for open access publication (e.g. Duke University Press, Minnesota University Press, M.I.T. University Press, North Atlantic Books, Verso). The international closing workshop of TEGA, to be held in Bonn (Germany) end of May 2027, will be an opportunity to gather contributors of the edited volume to discuss contributions, inquire both intellectually and somatically into the book's development, and foster cross-pollination and networking.

Background

The international governance frameworks through which late modern society addresses the problem of its socio-ecological unsustainability, such as the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 1992 UN-Convention on Biological Diversity, the 2015 Paris Agreement, or the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, are rooted in the post-Cold War project of global sustainable development that was built on democratization, multilateralism, evidence-based policy-making, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and an innovative and inclusive global market economy (Andonova & Mitchell, 2010; Clapp & Dauvergne, 2011; Gunningham, 2009; Hironaka, 2014). Notwithstanding significant achievements, these governance frameworks and their translation in national policies and laws have largely failed to meet their objectives: modern development keeps fueling climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, water insecurity, and other ecological disruptions that undermine the terrestrial web of life sustaining more-than-human existence, with disastrous effects that are highly unequally distributed among places, collectives, and generations (e.g. IPBES, 2019; Madani, 2026; UNEP, 2026).

About a decade ago, evidence of this discrepancy between policy objectives and socio-material reality led most governments and non-state governance actors to recognize the need for rapid and far-reaching transformation (Feola, 2015; Patterson et al., 2017). However, aspirational visions, pathways and calls for transformative action have lost traction before being enacted, in a world political context marked by the swell

[1] For more information on the project, see www.tega-project.com.

of authoritarian nationalism and aggressive geopolitics; epistemic fragmentation and 'post-truth' politics; deepening inequalities fueled by exclusionary and extractive forms of capitalism; and techno-scientific developments – not least AI – that outpace political regulation. Against this backdrop, aspirations and promises of inclusive and sustainable development confront widening cracks in the faith in modern progress (Beck, 2016; Blühdorn, 2024; Latour, 2017; Reckwitz, 2024).

Scientific research has produced a wealth of knowledge on this predicament. However, while knowledge fitting dominant ideologies and worldviews, institutional arrangements, and perceived interests, flows relatively easily in decision-making, more critical, disruptive and potentially transformative knowledge tends to be ignored, marginalized, or actively discarded, including in environmental governance contexts where actors are mandated to address problems of ecological unsustainability and related injustices (Blühdorn, 2020; Escobar, Osterweil, & Sharma, 2024; Koot et al., 2025; Löfmarck & Lidskog, 2017; Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

In 2024, a transdisciplinary team from the University of Bonn (Germany), the University of the Western Cape (South Africa), the University of Namibia, and the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research (Germany), with funding from the Volkswagen Foundation, started a three-year action research that addresses this problem in the field of Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) – a component of international biodiversity governance under the UN-Convention on Biological Diversity and its 2010 Nagoya Protocol. Guided by a pluriversal approach, the project gathered a diverse group of ABS stakeholders in a change-making process that

i. combined critical theories, co-operative empirical research, and collective inquiry (e.g., systems mapping, story circles) to examine the root causes of the shortcomings of ABS policies and regulations, and
ii. deployed a wide range of activities to devise transformative approaches and practices in this field of biodiversity governance, including transdisciplinary workshops and conference sessions; a social dialogue boot at the 2025 African Biotrade Festival; the co-creation of a Pluriversal Glossary of ABS and of a policy paper on ABS governance in South Africa; a science & art film on 'Unlocking the Transformative Powers of Access and Benefit-Sharing'; and the co-writing with an elder from the ǂAonin community of a case study published recently in the Local Biodiversity Outlooks 3 report on the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and communities to biodiversity stewardship.

We would like the edited book to be more than a standard academic product presenting the findings of a research project. Instead, we envision a rich and lively book that gathers the insights, wisdom, doubts, frustrations, and inspirations of people both within and beyond the circle of TEGA participants, who, in one way or another, have been involved in collaborative research directed towards transformative change-making in environmental governance contexts.

How to submit a proposal

If this call resonates with you, please send us a short abstract (300 to 500 words) describing what you would like to contribute, the context from which this contribution arises, and the format you envision (e.g., standard book chapter; short text; vignette; interview; poem; graphic artwork…). Please also indicate if you would be interested in attending the whole or part of the closing TEGA workshop on "Addressing Dysfunctional Environmental Governance through Pluriversal Transformation: Lessons Learned and Way Forward" (Bonn, 29 May to 1 June 2027).[2]

Proposals should be sent by email before the 20th of December 2026 to Damien Krichewsky (dkrichew@uni-bonn.de) and Matthew Wingfield (wingfield@sun.ac.za).

[2] We cannot guarantee participation, as physical space and financial capacities are limited, but we will do our best to accommodate the largest and most diverse group of participants.

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