

Strategy 2021–2024

# Knowledge for sustainable futures

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## Inspiring sustainable futures

In 2015, former Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon pledged to “put all countries, together, firmly on track towards a more prosperous, sustainable and equitable world”. He praised recent successes in fighting poverty and urged continued commitment. But he also warned of “unfinished business” left over from the just-concluded Millennium Campaign.

Since then, examples of that “unfinished business” have grabbed headlines and upturned people’s lives with increasing intensity: Species are disappearing from the face of the Earth at an unprecedented speed. Devastating wildfires have repeatedly ravaged Southern Europe, Australia, and the American West. New fundamentalisms and authoritarianism have gained substantial political weight, resulting in deeply torn societies. An unparalleled concentration of wealth in the hands of a small elite increasingly reinforces and exacerbates these growing societal rifts. Climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise steadily not least because of continued heavy investments in fossil fuels. And a global pandemic – linked to our overconsuming lifestyles – is killing hundreds of thousands and shattering the livelihoods of millions.

The profusion of crises has rendered many of us numb to further doomsday reports on the Anthropocene. Even the youth – many of our students included – often seem paralyzed at the mere thought of the challenges we now face, and they struggle to imagine ways of making this world a more hopeful place.

Scientists have provided unprecedented amounts of robust, high-quality data and knowledge to describe the nature and extent of our current crises, to illuminate causal connections, and to forecast scenarios under varying conditions. They have modelled critical thresholds, engaged in policy dialogue, and worked as advisors for setting new global targets.

Less prominent, so far, has been the science that aims to inspire urgently needed transformation – to put us on track to not only avoid the worst, but also ensure that everyone can thrive. Guided by the findings and proposed approach of the UN Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR 2019), CDE strives to generate knowledge that concretely contributes to transformative actions towards sustainable development, in cooperation with its partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe – as well as at the international level.

In implementing our new strategy, we seek to help overcome three general challenges that confront those working to realize the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### Speed and agility

We pledge to become faster and more agile in inspiring concrete measures for sustainable development, so as to avert irreversible damages in social and ecological spheres. For this, we must increasingly make use of numerous existing – but often little-known – sustainability innovations. As scientists, we must focus on synthesizing and assessing existing knowledge, and, importantly, strive to integrate knowledge and expertise from non-academic sources into our syntheses and assessments. By systematically adapting to respective local needs, we can accelerate, scale up, and scale out innovations on behalf of global sustainability.

### Integration and coherence

Sustainability transformations aim to spur progress simultaneously in socio-economic and ecological domains. Interventions aimed at particular goals must consider side effects impacting other goals. We will strive to account for interactions between different – often competing – target dimensions in order to strengthen co-benefits and minimize trade-offs. This strategy requires em-

bracing the systemic complexity and dynamics of sustainability challenges. And it stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing sectoral organization of policy areas and administrative units – a framework that heavily impedes coherent, effective policymaking. The scientific community faces similar difficulties based on its long-running disciplinary orientation. We aim to lead the way towards urgently needed collaborative inter- and transdisciplinary approaches capable of contributing substantially to sustainable development.

## Solidarity and partnerships

Transformations towards sustainable development demand joint, targeted efforts by civil society, policymakers, the private sector, and the scientific community. These partnerships are a powerful means to promote inclusive, solidary development within and between states. The scientific community has the opportunity to spearhead transnational partnerships for transformations towards sustainable development. Currently, massive global imbalances in research capacity present a major stumbling block to achievement of the 2030 Agenda. CDE will continue to promote individual and institutional capacity development – including in the global South – via progressive research and education partnerships, striving to make them a part of mainstream policy worldwide.

With its 2021–2024 strategy, CDE seeks to expand and concretize its commitment to transformative science. At the heart of our strategy lies a full-fledged theory of change. Combining our activities and targeted levers of change in specific impact areas, it outlines our envisaged pathways to transformation and the benchmark we want to be measured by.

As concerned scientists and citizens – who have the privilege of working on solutions to current crises – we will use our new strategy to contribute all we can to the transformation needed to ensure sustainable futures for all.

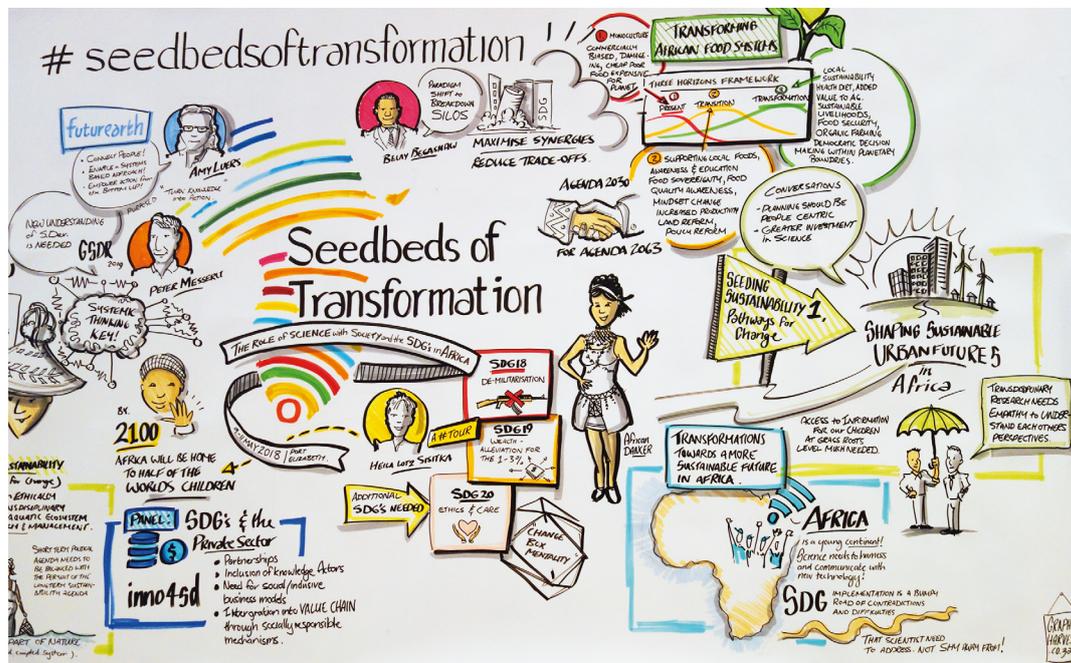


Photo: Future Earth

# 1 CDE's strategic goals

## 1.1 Vision

We envision a transformed world of dignified lives for all, open societies, and respect for our planet's environmental integrity.

## 1.2 Mission

CDE pioneers transformative research and generates effective, high-quality knowledge that inspires innovation in science, society, and policy. Committed to global partnerships for sustainable development, we chart inclusive pathways for overcoming today's development challenges and preventing future crises.

## 1.3 Commitments

1. Actionable knowledge – As an academic centre of excellence, we uphold the highest standards of scientific rigour while producing contextually relevant knowledge that captures the imagination and spurs action towards sustainable futures.
2. Inclusiveness – The transformative pathways we promote are mutually beneficial and honour our planet's ecological capacities. They especially strive to empower those at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder so as to reduce global inequalities. And they seek to safeguard and restore ecosystems to maintain and enhance their services for a just development.
3. Systems thinking – We aim to push knowledge frontiers in effectively addressing the interaction dynamics among different sustainability goals. This means enhancing co-benefits while limiting trade-offs among often diverging and conflicting targets. At the same time, we embrace complexity and assume a local-to-global perspective for responding to today's sustainability challenges.
4. Politics of knowledge – We contribute to local, national, and global development agendas, and promote science–policy innovation in the service of desirable futures. We seek to nurture agents of change by fostering transformative literacy and exploring the leadership skills needed to translate sustainability issues for policy debates and societal deliberation.
5. Partnerships – Our efforts are brought to fruition through our long-standing partnerships in Africa, Asia, Latin America, as well as in Europe and globally, effectively bridging contextual realities and global policies to achieve widely shared transformation pathways.

## 2 CDE's approach to transformations

### 2.1 Theory of change

For the international community, our current decade will be decisive in terms of engaging in a broad initiative of environmental and social justice to curb unsustainable development and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CDE's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and its highly interdependent goals is systematically outlined in our theory of change (Figure 1). By connecting our key activities ("what we do") to targeted levers of change ("what we promote"), we propose distinct pathways to deliver on *transformations for sustainable futures* in four critical impact areas ("what we aim for"). The four cross-sectoral areas we wish to influence in 2021–2024 are as follows: *sustainable land systems, just economies and human well-being, sustainability governance, and transformative education and science* (see Section 3 for details on our impact areas and objectives). Our unique approach to stimulate transformations rests on actual hypotheses, illustrated via four generic *pathways to impact* (Section 2.4).

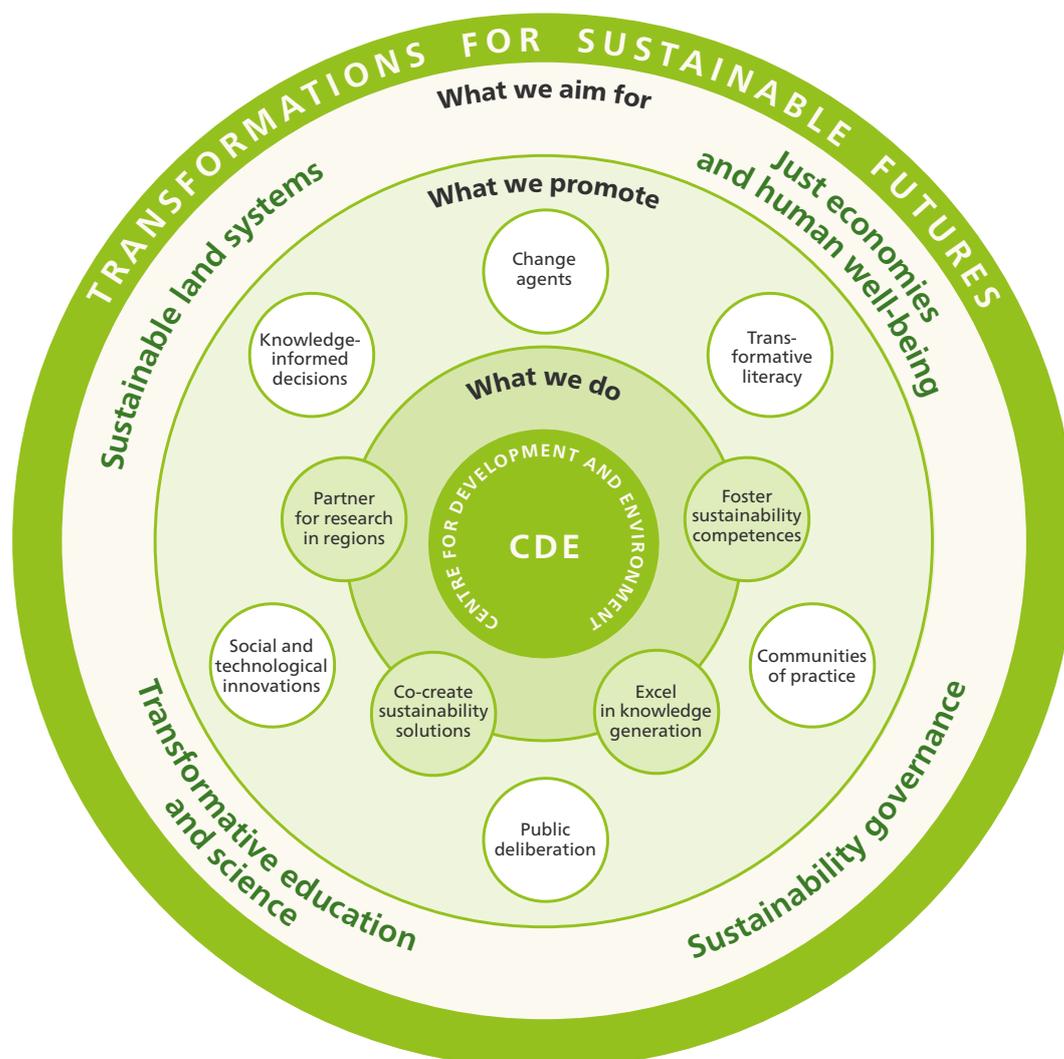


Figure 1: CDE's theory of change



Photo: shutterstock.com/AlexLMX

## 2.2 Our activities (“what we do”)

As an academic institution, we specialize in cutting-edge scientific analyses, thus contributing much-needed knowledge generation in the broad field of sustainability science. Based on our wide range of educational programmes, we foster sustainability competences at a number of qualification levels. Building on and complementing our core competences in scientific research and academic education, we maintain and invest in long-running international partnerships that ensure the relevance of our research in concrete regional contexts. Working within and between disciplines is central to our epistemic position. At the same time, CDE's proficiency in co-creating sustainable solutions rests on its sound cross-fertilization of non-academic and academic knowledge, framed within sensible, inclusive, and contextually relevant exchange formats (transdisciplinarity).

## 2.3 Our levers of change (“what we promote”)

Achieving the objectives in our four impact areas depends on many context-specific dynamics, external factors, and the interests and power of different actor groups. We strive for impact by promoting six levers of change:

- **Knowledge-informed decisions:** where CDE's activities create scientifically valid and socially robust knowledge that informs actions and decisions;
- **Social and technological innovations:** where CDE's engagement contributes to innovating social practices and greater consistency between technological development and human needs;
- **Change agents:** where CDE acts and/or empowers other persons or organizations to facilitate decision-making, innovation, issue resolution, negotiation, mediation, and consensus building through knowledge brokering, empathy, and servant leadership, among other mechanisms;
- **Transformative literacy:** where CDE's work enhances the abilities of individuals and societies as a whole to access, interpret, and utilize information about societal transformation, and to get constructively involved in these processes;
- **Communities of practice:** where CDE's engagement inspires groups of people who self-organize to pursue a common cause through shared practices and collective action;
- **Public deliberation:** where CDE's work facilitates democratic, inclusive decision-making based on the best evidence-informed arguments exchanged among equally entitled contributors to substantive debates.

CDE's activities trigger and support these mechanisms. Taken together, our activities and mechanisms unfold, as our unique approach, in four generic pathways to impacts.

## 2.4 Four generic pathways to impact

Theories of change involve strategically connecting activities to levers in selected impact areas. This is illustrated via four generic pathways that represent the impact hypotheses which guide CDE's ongoing activities: science, sustainability competences, regions, and co-creation. These pathways interact dynamically, and we tailor them in region- and project-specific ways.

### a) Science: Excel in scientific knowledge generation

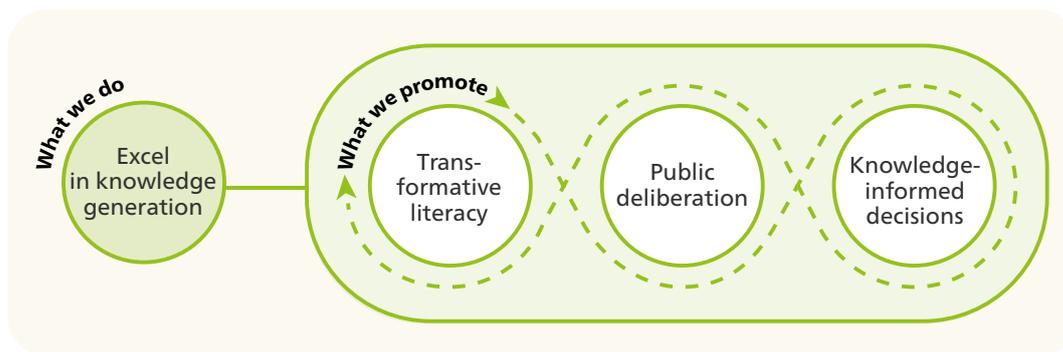


Figure 2: Pathway to impact “Science”

CDE fosters scientific excellence that feeds into teams and networks to build the interdisciplinary expertise needed to confront the highly complex sustainability challenges of our times. We generate scientific evidence, conceptual advances, and illuminating theories as main ingredients for comprehensive systems knowledge. We advance methodological innovation to explore unanswered questions and to contribute to scientific breakthroughs. Our independent assessments offer insights into causes of injustice and provide critical analyses of sustainability narratives. We exercise strategic foresight to open up new directions for research, recognizing regionally anchored challenges to sustainable development. Building on our scientific expertise and our participation in scientific assessments – e.g. IPCC, IPBES, GSDR reports – we contribute to syntheses of state-of-the-art scientific knowledge. We document pathways for sustainable development in solution papers and open-data platforms, and our analyses of good practices reveal their preconditions, limitations, and factors for success, thus promoting transformative literacy among all beneficiaries of our science.

All of these scientific advances serve to promote the availability and accessibility of scientifically valid and reliable knowledge as a commons for sustainable development. We actively engage in sharing scientific findings with broader audiences to nurture public deliberation by way of a broad range of communication formats and channels. We collaborate with users of scientific knowledge to facilitate utilization of research knowledge for decision-making and action for sustainable development.

Our research relies both on established disciplinary theories/methods and on working across disciplinary and other epistemological boundaries. As academic settings and career paths generally favour the former over the latter, we will continue to engage in science, education, and funding policy in order to transform the institutional context so that our transdisciplinary approach can thrive.

b) Sustainability competences: Foster transformative literacy and empower agents of change

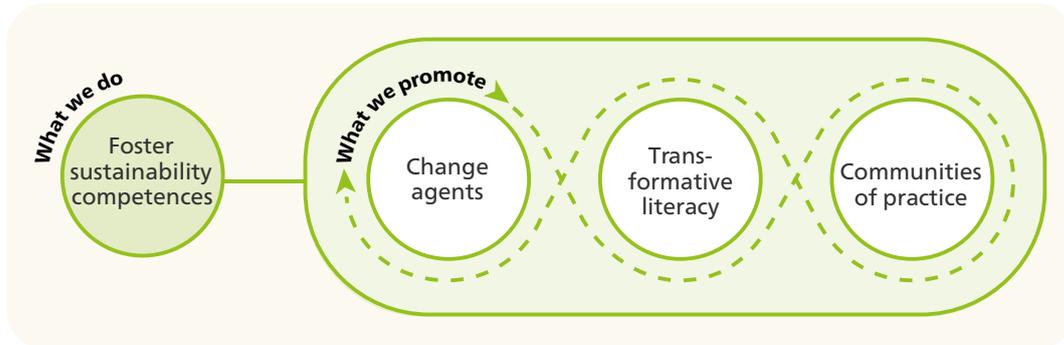


Figure 3: Pathway to impact “Sustainability competences”

We view our students as citizens, future decision-makers, innovators, and leaders. Our study programmes at the bachelor's, master's, and PhD levels offer them solid qualifications in their disciplines, but also impart inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge and methodological expertise. These include skills of systems thinking, coping with incomplete knowledge and uncertainty, anticipation, and critical reflection. We foster personal, social, and actionable competences, including the abilities to communicate, develop empathy, take responsibility, be accountable, link science with practice, and organize collective processes. We enable student-led innovations by making our broad partner network accessible and building bridges between academia and wider society.

CDE also offers postgraduate courses, trainings, and capacity development to enable researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers to expand their knowledge and skills, and to advance their competences to realize sustainable development.

CDE is a social learning organization. Working in and across five world regions, over 15 scientific disciplines, and all professional life stages, we continuously challenge each other and strengthen our own change agency, transformative literacy, and reflective leadership for sustainable development, including by nurturing spaces for knowledge integration and debate.

c) **Regions: Engage in transformative science within and across regions**

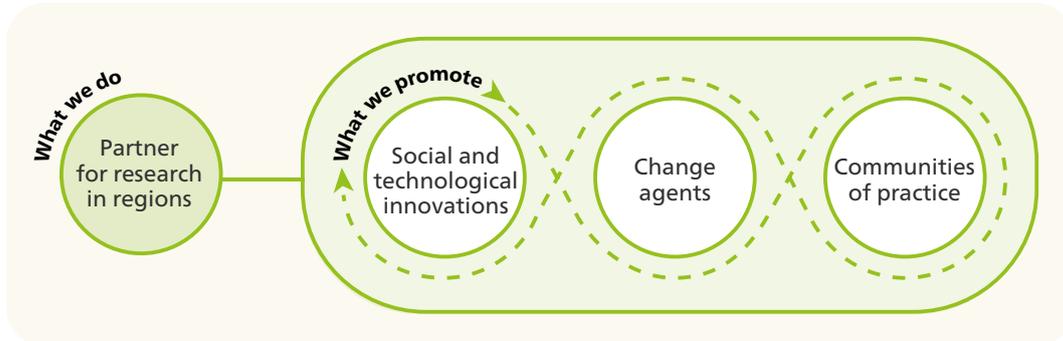


Figure 4: Pathway to impact “Regions”

CDE maintains fixed long-term institutional commitments in at least five regions worldwide. These research partnerships extend far beyond ad hoc networks brought together for isolated purposes. CDE and its regional partners operate as nationally and regionally anchored research teams. As multisectoral knowledge brokers, we foster social learning at the interfaces of science, policy, and society. Our long-term research engagement qualitatively sets us apart from the type of short-term data-extraction interventions common in many fields of science and development. This engagement enables us to dynamically link sociopolitically relevant research with local capacity strengthening and action to promote social and technological innovations.

CDE co-leads long-term partnerships with the scientific community, policy actors, civil society, and the private sector with a view to empowering individuals and developing knowledge societies. By bridging cultural, geographical, and organizational boundaries, our partnerships enable negotiation and realization of pathways for sustainability through collective action. Shared ownership facilitates the emergence of trust, reciprocity, and mutual understanding.

CDE bridges scales spanning the entire range from on-the-ground practice to engagement in UN conventions. We strive to connect local realities with global debates and to support global sustainable development that is rooted in scientific research and yet accountable to diverse peoples and places.

Cultivation of cross-regional collaboration enables us to form alliances that facilitate integration of diverse forms of knowledge and cross-regional learning about effective sustainability strategies. At the same time, the regional perspectives of our partners continuously challenge us to reflect on our orientation, activities, and governance, inspiring and pushing us to generate legitimate, relevant, and socially robust knowledge.

d) Co-creation: Generate viable solutions for sustainability



Figure 5: Pathway to impact “Co-creation”

Transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge is at the heart of what we do. We promote deliberation of urgent sustainability challenges by convening and participating in formal and informal social spaces, simultaneously striving for inclusiveness to address inequalities and power asymmetries. In the process, we co-create knowledge about systems, shared aims and goals, and potential solutions.

In futures workshops with students, entrepreneurs, civil society, policymakers, and associations, our teams explore alternative strategies for sustainability. In “living laboratories”, participants experiment to test and evaluate promising alternatives. Building on a jointly developed, socially robust, and scientifically valid knowledge base, unorthodox, tailor-made solutions to pressing sustainability challenges emerge, often evolving as self-sustaining social innovations. By supporting and linking labs across regions, we contribute to communities of practice among people who self-organize to reach a common cause.

As a knowledge broker, CDE promotes the scaling up and scaling out of best practices and successful pilot actions. Through our engagement with pioneers in on-the-ground action research and our rigorous scientific analysis of the evolution and effects of pilot actions, we gather cutting-edge practical and scientific knowledge. We facilitate knowledge transfer to change agents through demand-driven consultations, communications, and dissemination of targeted knowledge products.

CDE supports participatory planning, including land use planning. To this end, CDE mobilizes methodological expertise in geographic information systems, remote sensing, and IT solutions. We position these technical components as an integral part of broader participatory deliberations. Co-produced data and evidence serve as a basis for facilitating multi-stakeholder processes geared towards building a common understanding of issues, negotiating possible sustainability pathways and trade-offs, and inspiring social innovations. Working together builds trust over time, enabling iterative learning and progressive addressing of increasingly complex and sensitive issues. Tested and proven in pilot case studies, individual initiatives can be expanded nationally and tested for other contexts.

### 3 CDE’s impact areas (“what we aim for”)

CDE aims to spearhead, inspire and support transformations in four impact areas: *just economies and human well-being*, *sustainable land systems*, *sustainability governance*, and *transformative education and science*. Notably, *sustainability governance* and *transformative education and science* represent both: *impact areas* as well as *levers* that can be used to enable progress towards *sustainable land systems* and *just economies and human well-being*.

Four objectives in each impact area (Figure 6) will guide CDE’s activities in 2021–2024 in support of our overarching goal of transformations for sustainable futures.



Figure 6: CDE’s impact areas and related objectives



Photo: Albrecht Ehrensperger

### 3.1 Just Economies and Human Well-Being

Just economies are those that serve as a means (rather than as an end in itself) to improve human well-being and provide a path to social citizenship entitlements for all. Just economies serve human needs, enhance capabilities, and integrate subjective perceptions of quality of life. We face the great challenge of carving out distinct development pathways in the global North and in the global South – pathways that harmonize achievement of well-being, on the one hand, with respect of ecological limits, on the other. CDE contributes to these pathways by stimulating new understandings of prosperity, wealth, and well-being, and by evaluating, fostering, and supporting initiatives towards resource-light economies. Our contributions address four goals that reflect the implications of these transformations for different social groups and highlight key globalized interdependencies such as value chains, trade, taxes, international finance, and investments. To bring about transformative change, we will partner with actors at the local, regional, and global levels. This includes respective UN agencies, international and national development agencies, national governments, partners from bilateral donor agencies, regional stakeholders from the private sector, philanthropic actors, local and international civil-society organizations, and more.

#### a) Human well-being within our planetary boundaries

CDE will advance debates on the core elements constituting a high quality of life within planetary boundaries. Prevailing concepts of prosperity, wealth, and work – that emerged out of specific historical conditions – are no longer adequate to overcome today's massive societal and environmental challenges. We will shed light on new pathways by researching well-being models that are economically sound, socially just, and respect ecological integrity. By comparing various measuring tools and designing alternative ones, we will demonstrate what it takes to achieve dignified lives – especially for those at the lower end of the social ladder ("leaving no one behind") – while engaging in public debates and contributing to political negotiation of shared sustainable futures. We envisage taking these efforts further by strategically adopting the levers proposed by the 2019 UN Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR).

### **b) Growth-independent pathways towards resource-light economies**

CDE will test and experiment with novel pathways towards alternative production and consumption. Bottom-up partnerships with grassroots initiatives, municipalities, and companies can serve as laboratories for incubating socio-technological and social innovations, investigating their sustainability contributions, and assessing their scalability. Theory development offers important insights into the growth-dependence of current development strategies. We will launch corresponding initiatives with municipalities and civil-society organizations who are interested in exploring resource-light development pathways and building transformative literacy.

### **c) Just societies in a globalized world**

While globalization has produced enormous gains for some, there is glaring evidence that large segments of human society have been bypassed and that land and other resources are being over-exploited worldwide. CDE will strengthen its research in redistributive and predistributive justice and translate it into the policies and practices that states and institutions urgently need in order to buffer the extremes of globalization. CDE's contributions towards functioning institutions and local economies will focus in particular on work and employment, global social protections, taxation, and finance. Important but under-researched themes include the implications of change towards post-growth economies in light of global interdependencies.

### **d) Sustainable trade and investments**

Striving to identify "winners" and "losers" of transformations, CDE integrates local and international perspectives in its approach to sustainable development. Global value chains, trade arrangements, production networks, and infrastructure investments are important parameters of global development, in addition to fiscal policies and financial flows. Shaping these on behalf of fairer, more transparent, inclusive, mutually beneficial, and environmentally integrative frameworks provides important leverage towards sustainable development across scales. CDE will pursue fundamental research and multi-stakeholder initiatives in local contexts as well as policy dialogue to support trade negotiations and regulations for international financial flows, among other initiatives.



Photo: Hanspeter Liniger

## 3.2 Sustainable Land Systems

Land is critical to the sustainability outcomes of competing development priorities. Thus, the way we use land resources and ecosystems will significantly impact our ability to solve the challenges taken up by the 2030 Agenda. CDE promotes transitions towards sustainable land use and land management that provide a healthy resource base for secure livelihoods within multifunctional landscapes. In our research and outreach activities, we address the complexity of land claims at different scales – local to global – and across distant land systems.

### a) Sustainable land use

CDE contributes to sustainable use of land and related resources in farmlands, pastures, and rangelands through research and implementation. At the global scale, we actively seek to shape the discourse and research agenda on "land degradation neutrality". As a key institution in the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) network, we are in a unique position to put land on the global agenda, broker knowledge between science and society, and foster capacities. At national and subnational scales, we assess the mechanisms, spatial dynamics and impacts of land degradation processes – e.g. soil erosion, water resources degradation, loss of biodiversity, spread of invasive alien species – and we develop strategies and planning tools for policymakers and implementing agencies to address them. At the local scale, we assess the impacts of land use on soil and water quality and other ecosystem services. Together with extension agents and partners in the non-governmental and private sectors, we provide tailored instruments and knowledge products – including digital tools – to assist land users in identifying options for good practices.

### b) Agroecological transitions

We develop and promote agroecological transitions according to a holistic approach. This approach integrates (1) better knowledge, individual and institutional capacity, and policy support for sustainable land management, together with (2) agroecological farming systems for secure agricultural production and better nutrition. The approach rests on a three-pronged strategy. First, proof: with our knowledge bases, digital tools, and other outreach materials, we provide evidence – to governments, NGOs, and land users – of the need and potential for sustainable land management

and agroecological practices in various contexts. Second, priority: with academic and non-academic partners in several countries, we design processes to guide decision-making and we propose context-specific land-based solutions that enhance ecosystem resilience and enable local land users to make a living while preserving a healthy, biodiverse resource base. Third, pull: we address barriers to the adoption of best practices by identifying and tapping leverage points on behalf of sustainable land management and agroecology – e.g. financial support and incentive mechanisms – and by supporting the creation of viable, diversified value chains.

### c) Multifunctional landscapes

CDE works towards securing nature's contributions to people, that is, the various ecosystem services that are fundamental to humankind's long-term well-being (e.g. crop production, soil nutrient cycles, pest control, climate regulation, biodiversity protection, and cultural identity). To this end, we foster management and planning of multifunctional landscapes embracing agricultural lands, forests, conservation areas, and human settlements. We assess how human activities affect nature's contributions to people, as well as the trade-offs and synergies created by various development trajectories. Evaluation of people's values and competing claims on land is another key focus. Applying participatory visioning and planning approaches, we jointly explore land management alternatives that secure nature's contributions to people while reconciling claims on land. Change agents are supported through open-access databases, facilitation of social-learning platforms, training activities, and financing schemes developed with private investors. We engage in and foster competence building and development of communities of practice with national and local governments, businesses, civil-society organizations, and local people.

### d) Sustainable telecoupled land systems

We aim to empower land users and concerned stakeholders to better deal with the increasingly globalized dynamics of land use decision-making. Enhancing ecosystem resilience and maintaining nature's contributions to people is not possible without accounting for interactions at different scales. To address this, we disentangle globalized flows of commodities, money, and information across space and time, and we link landscape approaches with value chain and telecoupling perspectives. Emphasis is placed on impacts of international interactions on local land systems and human well-being, as well as related indirect land use changes and spillover effects elsewhere. We further identify potential agents of change through conceptual and methodological advancements and bring them together to support social learning, transformative literacy, and collaboration across scales and sectors. In this way, CDE collaborates with actors from the local to the international level and helps them account for globalized interactions in their land use decision-making processes. Collaboration with global research networks such as Future Earth's Global Land Programme (GLP) helps ensure scientific excellence in the topic.



are driven by sustainable societal purposes in living up to their commitments. Assessing company commitments to environmental and social justice requires examination of power asymmetries and related intersectional features that often lead to exclusion of vulnerable communities from full enjoyment of human and environmental rights. CDE will deepen its public-private dialogues to strengthen global human rights compliance and acceptance of responsibility among multinational corporations. Finally, we will support mountain regions under pressure from climatic, demographic, and economic changes to create sustainable mountain futures.

#### c) Transparency and accountability initiatives

CDE aims to engage in transparency and accountability initiatives to help build trust and rebalance inequalities in favour of groups at risk of marginalization, including indigenous communities, women, displaced persons, and human rights defenders. We will strengthen transparency and accountability about land investments, namely through our work with the Land Matrix Initiative. Embedding geospatial data analysis and application development within multi-stakeholder processes will enhance data quality and inclusive, knowledge-based land governance and conflict transformation. Examples include our activities in the initiatives of OneMap Myanmar and Knowledge for Development (Laos). In addition, we will critically assess and work to improve procedures of Environmental and Social Impact Assessments as well as Human Rights Impact Assessments in the commodity sector, aiming to increase inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. At the same time, we will contribute to policy dialogues on transparency in commodity trading, including with respect to pricing mechanisms.

#### d) Sustainable land and food systems governance

Systemic solutions are needed to confront challenges of land use and food sustainability. With this in mind, CDE will partner with change agents from civil society, the private sector, and governments across regions and scales in pursuit of just transformations of food and land systems. We aim to act as a trusted knowledge broker to bridge geographical, sociocultural, epistemological, and institutional distances. Democratic decision-making, sustainable resource use, and environmental justice are common threads running through our engagement. Relatedly, we will engage with agroecology as a transformative science, practice, and social movement on behalf of sustainable food and land systems. Further, we will promote territorial approaches to agroecological value chains and native foodscapes. These approaches will ideally inspire alternative development pathways in regions under pressure from mega-infrastructure projects, large-scale commodity extraction, and climate change.



Photo: Bishal Bhandari

### 3.4 Transformative Education and Science

To support transformation for sustainable development, science and higher education must be embedded in real-world contexts, and collaborate with societal stakeholders. This requires changes in the way science and education are shaped, with a stronger focus on how they support transformative literacy, sustainability literacy, change agency, and co-production of knowledge. Together with its regional partners and members of the University of Bern, CDE aims to achieve major progress in fostering transformative learning processes and developing spaces for transformation, as well as supporting institutional and policy change in higher education and science. Our learning-oriented activities will take into account the UNESCO "Framework for the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) beyond 2019", and will aim to improve the ability of actors and institutions to deliver on behalf of the SDGs.

#### a) Reflective leadership and change agency

Going forward, we will build on CDE's strong tradition of fostering social learning processes and supporting interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and training for sustainable development. Learning processes in CDE's research, education, and outreach activities in different contexts will continue to focus on both conveying knowledge and fostering competences relevant to sustainable development. In addition, our approach to learning as a lever for transformation will include an explicit focus on cultivating change agency and reflective leadership, not only in our bachelor's, master's, and PhD programmes, but also in our postgraduate and professional training courses (e.g. CAS) and other formal/informal formats. To this end, together with current and new partners, we will test innovative face-to-face and online approaches to increase these key competences in formal, semi-formal, and informal transformative learning settings, from local to global levels. We will submit our teaching and coaching approaches and programmes to thorough analysis, including impact analysis, together with higher-education partners in Bern and in networks such as the COPERNICUS Alliance. As a learning organization, we will reflect on our own learning processes and their impacts, with a view to continuously improving our ability to contribute to transformation within and through CDE. We will also ensure that the results of CDE research projects are channelled into training material, thus ensuring effective knowledge and information management and up-to-date training contents.

### b) Spaces for science–society partnerships

To enable individual and social learning for transformations in research and education activities, dedicated safe spaces must be established based on science–society partnerships. Real-world laboratories, futures labs, incubators, learning landscapes, forums, and knowledge and stakeholder platforms offer such spaces and enable exploration of narratives of sustainability, co-creation of knowledge, negotiation of visions, and testing of new pathways for transformation. In the field of publication and communication, where there is a need for innovative spaces to support transformative approaches, CDE will continue to spearhead change by means of the journal Mountain Research and Development and related activities. Together with partners in teaching, research, and outreach, CDE will enhance existing spaces and create new ones, introduce new face-to-face and online means of fostering individual and social learning, and analyse the methods used in various constellations to different ends, in order to increase the effectiveness and reach of these joint-learning approaches. CDE will also cultivate the space needed in institutional settings for student-led innovations to bring about change. Finally, together with selected partners in the regions, we will develop approaches and social spaces for local cross-regional learning, scaling of effective interventions for sustainability and corresponding methodological innovations.

### c) Higher education for sustainable development

Based on its mandate to assist the University of Bern with integration of sustainable development in the teaching of all faculties, CDE will increase its mainstreaming impact and leverage the move towards a whole-institution approach. At the same time, it will promote integration of sustainability in curricula on a demand-driven basis at the local, national, and international levels. Additionally, it will strive to acquire projects that serve to support development of sustainability-oriented higher education in the global South. To this end, CDE will join efforts with like-minded higher-education institutions in CDE's partner regions and internationally. It will extend the reach and relevance of its research on learning processes and teaching practices by partnering with pedagogical universities and applied universities. CDE will continue to offer summer schools with its institutional partners in Switzerland and resource persons in the global South and explore online means to promote transformative science and learning across borders. Through its regional policy, CDE will endeavour to foster training of trainers in both the global North and South, consolidating a network of teachers and coaches capable of translating high-quality insights into sustainability topics and methods, as well as fostering needed competences for sustainable development and transformative research.

### d) Science policy for sustainability transformations

CDE will continue to engage in policy forums, networks, and institutions at the local, regional, national, and international levels, aiming to promote research for sustainable development where we know that our expertise can make a difference. Further, we will engage in debates about adequate research funding schemes and institutional set-ups for transformative education and science. We will also exchange with other higher-education institutions in Bern and in Switzerland to explore the possibility of jointly establishing the first "Chair in Education for Sustainable Development" in Switzerland by 2030. Finally, we will continue to contribute to global science and science–policy networks such as the Global Land Programme, the COPERNICUS Alliance, the Mountain Research Initiative, and Earth System Governance.

## 4 Our centre and its partners

### 4.1 Skilled and engaged staff

The people working at CDE are our most valuable asset and, as such, fundamental to the success of our mission. We strive to invest continuously in the composition of CDE's broader team – our staff at the headquarters and in the regions, as well as CDE members and associated researchers. Our students are of particular importance to our mission. Our approach involves maintaining a skilled and balanced multidisciplinary group of specialists in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, supported by a strong group of specialists in professional services. We value staff with both specialist expertise and experience in intercultural cooperation and dialogue with society and policymakers. Accordingly, our human resources strategy enables distinct academic and implementation-oriented pathways.

CDE is an equal opportunities employer and strives to enable various models of arranging work alongside other commitments. We embrace diversity and ensure equal treatment in our hiring procedures, in gender-specific junior development programmes, and in career support. CDE also has a long tradition of promoting equal opportunities between the global North and South; these efforts are implemented at every possible level.

Fostering continuing education and lifelong learning is another core objective. As such, we aim to continuously optimize and regularly evaluate and adapt CDE's human resources strategy and its instruments for career planning, career advancement opportunities, formal training, and on-the-job training.

A healthy work–life balance of our staff is a key factor in harnessing our innovation potential. We wish to support our employees in successfully harmonizing career, studies, and private life. To this end, we strive to enable flexible working models such as part-time work, job-sharing, telecommuting, and annual working time arrangements wherever possible.

To meet our goal of pioneering transformative research for sustainable development, we will build on CDE's long-running partnerships and networks. We will make every effort to deepen and expand our cooperation with partners from research, education, policy, government administrations, civil-society and non-governmental organizations, and the private sector in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and internationally.

### 4.2 Our partners and networks

#### a) Academic partners

Achieving our goals and strengthening our position as a leading institution and role model in research for sustainable development is only possible when we maintain close ties and cooperation with various partners and networks in academia.

At the University of Bern, we aim to further deepen our research cooperation with CDE's current members and partners in geography, social anthropology, biology, sociology, trade and law, and contemporary history. To accomplish our mission, we will incorporate selected new members from the University of Bern and affiliated research entities with specific expertise. We will consolidate and further develop the University of Bern's network on education for sustainable development and its efforts to integrate sustainable development into bachelor's- and master's-level curricula.

Within Switzerland, relations with research partners and research networks will be extended. Building on existing collaborative arrangements between the universities of Bern, Basel, Zurich, and Lausanne within the International Graduate School (IGS) North-South, we aim to initiate formal collaboration with further Swiss universities and leading research institutions engaged in transformative research for sustainable development, among them the Wyss Academy for Nature.

At the international level, we aim to strengthen our research cooperation with partners from low-income countries, Switzerland, and globally. We adhere to the principle that research for transformations towards sustainable development must always reflect specific social–ecological

contexts and their dynamics. Accordingly, CDE will step up its investments in maintaining and enhancing cooperation with our partner offices and their research networks in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

Particular attention will be given to expanding existing cooperation with leading research institutions concerned with sustainable development. CDE will seek to shape and promote the establishment of multinational research cooperation agreements to conceptualize and concretely support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together with other international research institutions and think tanks and in cooperation with non-academic organizations, we will support the implementation of this agenda through knowledge and our continued engagement at the interface of science, civil society, and policy.

#### **b) Non-academic partners**

CDE believes that transdisciplinary approaches are indispensable for producing knowledge that contributes to transformational change towards sustainable development. Accordingly, we will continue to promote partnerships between academia and non-academic actors, including policy-makers, government administrations, international organizations, civil-society organizations, and private-sector actors. In partnership, we will co-produce relevant knowledge for exploring promising transformation pathways, and we will initiate and engage in public and policy debates. Our partners in Swiss administration include agencies from the national, cantonal, and communal levels. At the national level, CDE will continue its long-standing cooperation with state agencies assigned to implement Switzerland's international cooperation and sustainable development agendas. They include the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO); the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN); and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). At the cantonal and communal levels, we aim to further expand our existing cooperation and join forces with new partners, namely from the administration of the Canton of Bern, selected cities, and regional bodies.

Exchange between researchers and civil society is another focus of CDE's activities. We aim to maintain and enhance CDE's leading role as a competent and credible knowledge partner in public dialogue on sustainability and global development debates. Swiss non-governmental organizations working in the field of sustainable development and international cooperation, including Alliance Sud, their umbrella organization for policy development and advocacy, are our main partners in this endeavour.

CDE also maintains close relations with major international organizations concerned with sustainable development. Important partners include United Nations agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), as well as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the World Bank. Our relations with these partners build on various joint project activities and will be further developed to expand our engagement with policy at the global level. Last but not least, CDE will remain an active member of the International Land Coalition (ILC).

### **4.3 Strategic networks and alliances**

We consider it crucial to support Swiss and international academic networks that coordinate sustainability research, act as intermediaries between research and education, and are committed to innovative science policy. At the national level, through its staff and members, CDE continues to play an active, policy-shaping role in various commissions and bodies of the Swiss Academies, as well as in other networks.

We believe in the power of global alliances and networks for sustainable development. Representative examples are the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) network, which promotes sustainable land management practices around the world, and the Land

Matrix Initiative, a global undertaking to increase transparency in transnational land deals. Together with our international partners, we will continue to strengthen these strategic alliances and networks. We will also markedly increase our investments in global sustainability initiatives – most notably the Future Earth research platform for global sustainability and the International Science Council (ISC). To support these research initiatives, CDE hosts the international project office of the Global Land Programme, one of Future Earth's core projects. Further, CDE will actively engage in international initiatives to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda, through research contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the Global Water Partnership, and other emerging initiatives. CDE confirms its commitment to fostering sustainable development in mountains in close collaboration with a global network of organizations active in mountain research and development, including the Mountain Partnership and its Secretariat, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI), and other organizations in major mountain regions.

## 4.4 Professional services

### a) Consultancy and expertise

In addition to its own research and teaching, CDE carries out research and implementation mandates for public- and private-sector clients, facilitating knowledge sharing and providing policy advice and knowledge-based support. CDE also takes on research-based mandates in the fields of training, monitoring and evaluation, conference and event organization, as well as strategy and programme development.

### b) Wider services

CDE is a professional and efficient one-stop shop, offering all relevant services from a single source, and thus assuring the quality and visibility of its own research and practice-oriented products as well as those of its partners. Our range of services includes analysis of geospatial and earth observation data; development of web-based knowledge platforms; production of knowledge products for policy and the wider public; public relations and communications; translation and editing; publication support; information and documentation services; as well as graphic design and layout.

## 4.5 Resilient business model

CDE operates as a non-profit research centre of the University of Bern. To successfully carry out its activities and fulfil its obligations towards its partners, CDE takes care to ensure a balanced financial account. Core funding is provided by the University of Bern. CDE seeks to maintain a healthy, diversified business model through collaboration with its long-standing main funding partners in Switzerland and abroad, while joining forces with new funding partners from the private sector and philanthropy.

### a) Balanced project portfolio

Fundamental changes occurring in the financing strategies of government and multilateral partners, as well as a growing number of national and international competitors, mean that CDE must continuously review and optimize its funding strategy. This includes ensuring a balance between research grants and implementation mandates and, together with suitable partners, preparing high-quality bids for project funding in line with our overall strategic goals. To ensure continued funding for our research activities, we aim to invest more in the development and design of financing partnerships with state, multilateral, and private actors who wish to support research for sustainable development. Together with other members of the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE), we jointly work to influence Switzerland's foreign policy on science and to secure the long-term funding of our research partners in low-income countries.

### **b) Sustainable business operations**

CDE and its staff are committed to respecting the principles of sustainable development in the way we run our operations and infrastructure. In line with the University of Bern's sustainability strategy, we strive for resource efficiency in our use of infrastructure, equipment, and consumables. CDE seeks to purchase products manufactured in an environmentally friendly and socially responsible way. With its travel guidelines, CDE takes care to minimize business travel and, when travelling is unavoidable, ensures that public transport is used wherever possible. To reduce travel, CDE makes electronic communication technology available to its staff as well as its members and supports CDE partners in setting up suitable telecommunications infrastructure at their offices.

## **4.6 Quality assurance and learning**

We are committed to safeguard and continually improve the quality of our work. CDE systematically promotes Quality Assurance and Development (QAD) and in a variety of ways. Our aim is to perform better and to carry out our tasks more effectively. All of CDE's activities (research, teaching, services) are integrated into our internal QAD process and feed into the University's Quality Assurance System.

### **a) Knowledge management**

We endorse innovative and integrative contributions, cross-cluster/regional collaboration and learning towards sustainable development. To this end, we will promote adequate exchange and develop new methods to stimulate further organizational learning, and continuously invest in our knowledge sharing platforms.

### **b) Processes and controlling**

Various standardized internal processes support CDE in achieving its strategic objectives. Several consistently applied procedures – in the areas of employment and acquisition, for example – guide CDE management and staff in their work. They are systematically documented, regularly reviewed and adapted, thereby taking into account feedbacks of CDE staff. All procedures are made available via CDE's intranet. Key figures for the financial controlling are revised and complemented in line with the requirements for an internal monitoring system.

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