Strategy 2016–2021
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Founded almost 25 years ago at the University of Bern’s Institute of Geography, the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) became one of the university’s strategic interdisciplinary research centres in 2010. In line with the university’s overall Strategy 2021 and guided by CDE’s own first six-year strategy, the centre has continuously developed its portfolio of activities in fulfilment of its mandate. Today, CDE promotes research, teaching, and implementation in the fields of sustainable development and global change, working together with the University of Bern’s Executive Board, selected research groups, as well as national and international partners.

With our first strategic phase drawing to a close and our four-year mandate from the University of Bern renewed, we embarked on a revision of our strategy in early 2015. The aim was to devise a new strategy that will guide our activities until 2021. We quickly realized that our mission from the first phase was still valid, and that we wanted to continue our collaboration with partners in research and development along the same lines; but we also saw that renewing our strategy offered a great opportunity for reflection. As a growing research centre in a highly dynamic environment, we felt the need to reflect on our position and adapt it, to sharpen our thematic foci, and to consolidate the school of thought that constitutes CDE’s added value. Indeed, while our new strategy offers a transparent image of what we aim to achieve to the public, it mainly targets CDE itself – its staff and its partners.

The process leading to the present document began with an extensive self-evaluation. We identified our own strengths and weaknesses and assessed opportunities and threats in the Swiss and international research and policy landscapes concerning our core topics: sustainable development and the environment. We commissioned an external consultant to interview key stakeholders of CDE and analyse how external partners perceive our performance. Further consultations with varying groups of CDE staff and with our Executive Board eventually led to the finalization of this document.

Our strategy for 2016 to 2021 begins with a presentation of our position in 12 theses (Section 2). The theses outline our perspectives on and our conceptions of key debates and concepts related to “development”, “sustainability”, “sustainable development”, “transformations”, and the role of “science”. We purposely posit 12 theses; we hope to spark a continuous debate within and outside CDE about the conceptions presented, with a view to further refining and adapting them in the coming years. Based on the 12 theses, we define our overall strategy (Section 3), which comprises our vision, mission, and values, as well as three overarching goals. Taken together, this constitutes what we hope to strengthen and advance in the coming years: a school of thought which represents CDE’s added value and shapes all our work and activities, and which, in turn, is continuously shaped by our work and activities. The subsequent description of our approach (Section 4) explains the key elements of this school of thought and how it relates to CDE’s thematic clusters. The clusters simultaneously represent our sharpened thematic foci and constitute CDE’s operational units, thereby linking projects to staff members and their competences. We then present each cluster in detail (Section 5), including their cluster-specific missions and four thematic priority areas each. This is followed by our strategic perspectives on CDE’s partners and partner networks (Section 6). Finally, we outline how we aim to work and collaborate and what services we must provide to achieve our ambitions for the next six years (Section 7).

We are excited to take up the manifold challenges laid out in this strategy, and we hope that it will spark even greater enthusiasm and commitment within and beyond CDE.
Is development still a meaningful concept?

1. **Development as change.** At its simplest, development means change – change for the better. But change never unfolds in a vacuum, and what constitutes “better” is seldom universally agreed upon. Rather, development unfolds as a process of managing change in a landscape of power relations. This process is subject to various discourses that shape the direction of change. Historically, such discourses have established common norms – such as “wealth”, “well-being”, “happiness”, and the Millennium Development Goals – or posited structural transformations such as “modernization”, “growth”, or “emancipation from underdevelopment”.

2. **Challenging prevailing discourses.** Development always occurs in context: its goals and pathways depend on concrete settings and on what people in these settings perceive as problems. In addition, change concerns at least three dimensions – the social, the economic, and the environmental – and change in one dimension invariably affects the others, causing unforeseen impacts and demanding trade-offs. This is why blueprint development models are increasingly being called into question, and why we must approach development in an integrative way.

3. **Repoliticizing development.** At CDE, we believe that the whole world is a developing world, and that development should ultimately increase people's well-being achievements, especially among populations whose voices tend to go unheard. At the same time, the expansion of people's choices must not undermine the human rights of others, and it must respect environmental integrity. Persistent and widely unquestioned growth paradigms continue to foster disturbing dynamics of uneven development, and we view radical post-development debates as little productive for finding alternative development pathways. Therefore, we believe that the development debate needs to be reinvigorated and its political edge restored. As scientists, we assume the responsibility of debating development as a commitment to enlightened, democratic, and equitable societies, of which we deeply feel part and parcel.

How we conceive of sustainable development

4. **Sustainability as a vision.** We understand sustainability as a vision that guides development. Sustainability offers a multidimensional, normative concept for use in research, social learning, social deliberation, and political decision-making. Today, the most relevant globally negotiated normative framework on sustainability is provided by the Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. It builds on a history of increasing global institutionalization around sustainability issues, beginning with the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and advancing through the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

5. **Fundamental challenges.** Nevertheless, this globally negotiated vision of sustainability confronts at least three fundamental challenges. If ignored, these challenges could erode the credibility and usefulness of the sustainability concept – ultimately reducing it to just another buzzword in a failed development discourse. First, as the normative framework is made operational in a complex reality of interrelated social, economic, and ecological processes, seemingly complementary sustainability goals become incompatible and necessitate multiple trade-offs. Second, sustainability depends on how its various aspects are valued by all those involved. Given the infinite number of perspectives among current and future generations, valuations will always remain incomplete. In addition, the environmental dimension is often undervalued because it lacks advocates, and because environmental impacts often show up long after the change that triggered them. Third, the vision of sustainability must be adapted to specific sociopolitical arenas to become operational. This makes the process of defining what is sustainable highly context-specific, leading to disagreement between different places and scales.

6. **Sustainable development as a process.** These fundamental challenges make it clear that the seemingly shared ideal of sustainability can never be fully attained. Precisely for that reason, CDE is committed to uncovering differing, frequently ignored development perspectives and voices as well as to uncovering emerging conflicts and trade-offs. More importantly, we shift the focus from sustainability as a vision to sustainable development as a process. Striving for sustainable development means accounting for diverse values, empowering voices that tend to go unheard, and transforming trade-offs into widely shared and appreciated solutions. Considerations of justice – both distributional and procedural – should determine which values prevail over others.
Justice concerns must inform negotiations over development pathways between different stakeholders, different sectors, the global North and South, local and global, today and tomorrow. In a nutshell, we conceive of sustainable development as a creative process, guided by justice, of shaping social-ecological relations in and between different contexts, while taking account of continuously negotiated sustainability values in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

Transformations towards sustainable development

7. **From reactive to creative.** What types of transformations have the power to spark this creative process? Accommodating change through incremental adaptations and mitigation is not only insufficient, but also runs the risk of casting sustainable development in overwhelmingly negative terms – merely as an obligation to correct and react to failings. We believe that adaptation and mitigation measures must be complemented with deliberate transformations based on human agency and choices. These transformations must explicitly address the structures, values, and behaviours underlying current sustainability challenges in order to create alternative pathways towards sustainable development.

8. **Conditions for change.** Problems of unsustainable development are often “wicked” problems, fraught with factual uncertainties and pulled between multiple stakeholders’ interests and highly contested values. Unlike simple – or merely “complicated” – problems, they cannot be solved by ever more sophisticated scientific analyses or use of best practices. Overcoming these wicked problems requires collective processes of searching, learning, and shaping alternative pathways, while empowering agents of change with our insights and knowledge.

9. **Appraising transformations.** Transformations of this kind challenge the status quo and may threaten those who benefit from dominant systems and structures. Nevertheless, these transformations appear to be emerging in diverse social and political contexts: sometimes they are embedded in traditional systems, but increasingly they are supported by new information and communication technologies. We aim to gain more systematic insights and contribute to these initiatives by critically assessing and supporting their transformative potential in terms of the depth, scope, speed, and scale necessary to meet the global challenges we face.

Engaged and transformative science for sustainable development

10. **New frontiers for science.** We firmly believe that scientific knowledge is needed to achieve transformations towards sustainable development. But wicked sustainability problems are seldom captured within the boundaries and approaches of established scientific disciplines. This often limits the usefulness and effectiveness of scientific research. Thus, as an academic institution, we assume the responsibility of advancing and complementing existing research approaches that focus mainly on systems knowledge by emphasizing and improving target and transformation knowledge.

11. **Accounting for the normative dimension.** While we subscribe to scientific principles of knowledge production, we also accept the challenge of accounting for the normative dimension of sustainable development in our research. This requires engagement on four distinct, yet interrelated levels: we strive, first, to investigate and analyse how different stakeholders value sustainability; second, to empirically assess whether and how the outcomes of social-ecological processes correspond to the previously negotiated sustainability values; third, to engage, in our role as scientists, in social learning processes on behalf of sustainable development in different contexts; and fourth, to reflect and be transparent about our own normative positions, the epistemological foundations we build upon, and the power inherent in knowledge and institutions such as ours.

12. **Co-producing knowledge.** Research approaches that include these elements combine disciplinary research with inter- and transdisciplinary research and feature co-production of knowledge with a wide range of academic and non-academic partners. At CDE, we are committed to engaged and transformative science for sustainable development: to co-producing systems, target, and transformation knowledge with concerned actors in concrete settings in an effort to achieve major transformations towards sustainable development.
3 CDE’s overall strategy for 2016–2021

3.1 Vision

We envision science as engaged and transformative: as having the power to spark substantial transformations towards sustainable development. We see these transformations unfolding within our generation and having the scope, speed, and scale needed to meet the global challenges we face. As a research centre that pushes the frontiers of science, CDE is considered a highly credible academic institution and a role model in the field of research for sustainable development within Switzerland and beyond.

3.2 Mission

We strive to take the lead in doing and promoting science that is engaged and transformative. This means upholding highest standards of scientific excellence, while also taking into account the limits of science. Building on empirical evidence and illuminative theories, we offer knowledge that informs and guides sustainable development in different regions around the world and at multiple scales. Our commitment is to advance innovative approaches in research and education that are appropriate for transforming highly complex sustainability problems into widely supported pathways towards sustainable development. For this purpose, we engage in social learning and co-production of knowledge in several world regions, invest in long-term partnerships, and connect local realities to global debates.

3.3 Values

We adhere to the principles of human rights, social and cultural justice, and inter- and intra-generational equity while accounting for the ecological boundaries of our planet. We support and develop capacity through equal partnerships and intercultural respect. As an interdisciplinary research centre, we build on the commitment and specific capacity of all partners, and we believe in the added value created by trust-based collaboration, transparent information, and mutual learning.

3.4 Strategic goals for 2016–2021

The key elements of our strategy for 2016 to 2021 translate into three overall strategic goals. We aim …

Science
… to lead the advancement and contribute to the growing recognition of engaged and transformative science for sustainable development, by means of academic agenda setting, high-quality research and education, conceptual innovations, and outstanding methodological competence.

Transformations
… to put our knowledge and tools in the service of transformative initiatives and be reflexive and respectful change agents for sustainable development in and between different development contexts.

Contexts
… to engage with partners from science, policy, civil society, and the private sector in at least six regions worldwide in order to develop and empower knowledge societies based on long-term research partnerships.

Everyone at CDE will work towards these strategic goals. In our annual planning process we will jointly define specific objectives and plan how we will collaborate in at least six regions to create synergies and optimize our effectiveness. The overall strategic goals are in line with the mandate given to CDE by the University of Bern, which comprises specific targets and indicators.
4 Approach

CDE’s approach described in this section links the overall strategy (Sections 1–3) with our main thematic foci and our organizational structure (Sections 5–7). The key feature of our approach is that all of CDE’s organizational units share a common school of thought (presented in Sections 1–3) and work together to fulfill CDE’s mission of doing and promoting engaged and transformative science, while each unit has a coherent and distinct thematic focus (Figure 1). This is why we refer to our main organizational units as “clusters”: they group people, projects, knowledge, and competences around a specific thematic focus while remaining open to dynamic collaboration both among each other and with our members and external partners.

4.1 CDE’s school of thought

CDE’s school of thought – to be considered as our unique selling proposition – comprises the following key features (depicted in the white inner circle in Figure 1):

- We pursue a joint mission of promoting transformations towards sustainable development by means of engaged and transformative science. We do so in cooperation with our research partners at the University of Bern, in Switzerland, and in various world regions.

- We strive to make a difference in the fields of “science”, “transformations”, and “contexts”, as formulated in our three overall strategic goals. Our focus on science is not limited to research but also comprises education and learning, to which we dedicate a separate thematic cluster.

![Figure 1: Overview of CDE’s approach](image)

CDE’s approach brings together our school of thought (inner, white circle) and the thematic foci and organizational units through which we pursue and implement it (outer, green circles). We work in three thematic clusters: Sustainability Governance, Socio-Economic Transitions, and Land Resources. Each cluster produces systems, target, and transformation knowledge and combines disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches. A fourth thematic cluster on Education for Sustainable Development (not shown in figure) fosters engaged and transformative science by developing relevant capacities and competences among students and partners.
We focus on building creative linkages and interactions between science, transformations, and contexts (symbolized by the two-way arrows in the inner circle in Figure 1): (1) We link specialized science to transformations by advancing inter- and transdisciplinary approaches that establish dialogue between scientists and policymakers, foster evidence-informed decision- and policymaking, and set in motion joint learning processes for shaping alternative development pathways. (2) We link science and contexts through innovative long-term partnerships with academic and non-academic partners. Maintaining and further developing our partner networks in key regions is of utmost strategic importance to us. In doing so, we adhere to the guiding principles for transboundary and intercultural research partnerships, which ensure sound knowledge generation in the service of transformations towards sustainable development. (3) We bring together knowledge about transformations in different contexts, from local to regional and global levels, in order to access leverage points beyond specific sociopolitical arenas and at the same time harness the power of aggregate change. To this end, we develop concepts and methods for cross-scale comparison and generalization of our findings.

4.2 CDE’s thematic foci

CDE focuses on three key areas in the essential dimensions of sustainable development: land resources, socio-economic transitions, and sustainability governance. Each of the three thematic foci is addressed by a cluster comprising related projects as well as staff members and their competences. These clusters serve as theme-focused meeting grounds for CDE’s partners from research, policymaking, and development cooperation; at the same time, they anchor our research in specific scientific disciplines and communities. Seen from outside, the thematic clusters serve as entry points to CDE’s research. The areas shaded in lighter green in Figure 1 stand for themes and research activities which are covered by partners rather than by CDE itself.

The three green circles in Figure 1 illustrate our principle of producing systems, target, and transformation knowledge in pursuit of our shared mission to advance engaged and transformative science for sustainable development. Differentiating these knowledge types highlights the key concepts that each thematic cluster has defined and will work with (see Section 5 for details). Thus, based on frequently disciplinary systems knowledge in their thematic focus areas (outer green circle), the clusters address related normative questions that challenge their perspectives on systems knowledge and lead them to generate target knowledge in concrete development contexts (middle green circle). This requires collaboration between researchers from different disciplines and with partners from beyond the scientific community. Finally, when it comes to producing transformation knowledge, shaping alternative development pathways, and bringing about transformations towards sustainable development, the three thematic clusters converge and work together (inner green circle).
5 Our fields of activity

In line with CDE’s overall position, strategy, and approach presented above, our work in the coming years will concentrate on a number of thematic priority areas where we believe science has much to give in terms of supporting transformations towards sustainable development. Aiming to offer engaged and transformative science for sustainable development, we will continue to strive for disciplinary excellence while employing inter- and transdisciplinary approaches. Particular attention will be given to concepts, methods, and processes that are relevant and specific to research for sustainable development. Building on these scientific foundations, CDE will implement its tertiary education programme and engage in capacity development and social learning to support and advance transformations towards sustainable development.

People and activities will be grouped into four thematic clusters and a services unit. Three thematic clusters will address specific thematic priority areas in the essential dimensions of sustainable development, while a fourth one spearheads CDE’s activities in education for sustainable development. Our comprehensive services unit will support the clusters in their work (see Section 7).

As an integral part of our activities, the thematic clusters will collaborate with partners in at least six regions to create added value and harness synergies in our effort to achieve CDE’s ambitions. Working with key partners, we will set up observatories of global change in our partner regions, address conceptual issues such as cross-scale methods, and focus on transformation processes in several of the world’s mountain regions.

5.1 Land Resources

We study processes and dynamics in land resources such as soil, water, and vegetation within social-ecological systems, and analyse changes in land use and land management at and across various spatial and temporal scales. Land resources and the ecosystem services they provide are often threatened by overuse, climate change, and desertification, as well as by increasingly competing claims and globalized demands. Our aim is to identify current land resource developments, their valuations, and the potentials they offer for greater sustainability. Together with stakeholders, we strive to harness these potentials and promote more sustainable land use and land management in several of CDE’s partner regions.

The Land Resources cluster will contribute to achieving CDE’s overarching strategic goals by working on the following thematic priority areas:

- Local land system change as a cause and consequence of globalized decisions
- Assessment and valuation of ecosystem services
- Land management that benefits natural resources and ecosystem services
- Decision support for scaling out sustainable land management

Local land system change as a cause and consequence of globalized decisions: Studying social-ecological systems, we identify patterns and trade-offs accompanying land system change caused by stakeholders’ ecosystem service demands and land use claims. Our aim is to understand both local and distant drivers and impacts of land changes, as well as the feedbacks between drivers and impacts. This work provides insights into the outcomes of land use decisions, including those taken by geographically distant decision-makers.

Assessment and valuation of ecosystem services: Identifying and quantifying changes in ecosystem services as comprehensively as possible provides a basis for evaluating different land management systems and their direct and indirect contributions to human well-being. We develop methods to identify, measure, and value ecosystem services together with diverse local and global actors, acknowledging that the value of a service depends on actors, place, and time. Our aim is to support deliberative processes in which actors determine and negotiate ecosystem services’ values and identify potentials for mitigating trade-offs and creating synergies.

Land management that benefits natural resources and ecosystem services: To enable informed statements about threats to and potentials for sustainable land use, we strive for long-term monitoring
systems in selected regions worldwide. Based on comprehensive – but scientifically precise and easily applicable – indicator sets and reliable quantitative data, we assess land use and land management impacts on soil–water–vegetation processes and ecosystem services. We study land degradation and desertification processes, as well as the benefits and trade-offs of sustainable land management within a given landscape or watershed. For this purpose, we combine a variety of methods from the natural and social sciences at different spatial and temporal resolutions.

Decision support for scaling out sustainable land management: Our aim is to support participatory, multi-stakeholder decision-making processes that facilitate exchange and promote mutual learning between practitioners and scientists, and make use of the state-of-the-art knowledge gained. This involves, in each region, developing a framework to support evidence-informed decisions on sustainable land management and help mainstream and scale out good practices at different scales. In doing so, we take into account local livelihood strategies and the global context, reflecting on actor, policy, and institutional environments from local to global levels.

5.2 Socio-Economic Transitions

Based on the idea that cohesive societies are an essential foundation of sustainable development, the Socio-Economic Transitions cluster explores alternative development pathways to advance social justice. Concerned about our globalized economy’s disturbing inequality and alarming environmental effects, we enquire how the gains and risks of globalization are shared between regions, social groups, and within families. We focus on processes of structural change, examining shifts in the relations between people and places and how they affect people’s options and agency. Framing multidimensional disparities as both a cause and an effect of development, we ask whether people’s capabilities have expanded. Our analyses capture the links between assets and well-being achievements in areas such as agriculture, energy, poverty, employment, and innovation.

In line with CDE’s overarching strategic goals, the Socio-Economic Transitions cluster will work on the following thematic priority areas:

- Concepts of poverty, inequality, and well-being
- Appraisal of social and technological innovations
- Sustainable and equitable production and consumption patterns
- Knowledge-sharing tools for alternative development pathways

**Concepts of poverty, inequality, and well-being:** The way in which poverty, inequality, and well-being are framed from global to local scales largely determines the questions asked and the measures taken. We engage in theory to provide critical perspectives on development, and we adopt innovative types of poverty measurement that uncover neglected dimensions of deprivation. A particular focus of our work is on the link between exposure to poverty and ethnicity, gender, class, caste, or generation. Based on comparative assessments of different contexts, we offer insights into how development shapes poverty, inequality, and well-being, and how they are interrelated.

**Appraisal of social and technological innovations:** While innovations and technologies addressing prevalent development problems abound, their adoption is uneven. We aim to conduct appreciative analyses of how change happens, and to appraise the factors that help overcome barriers to innovative development pathways. Social and technological advancements are equally important, and it is our special commitment to make science and technology work also for those who tend to be bypassed by the gains of globalization.

**Sustainable and equitable production and consumption patterns:** We maintain that the industrialized world must take bold steps towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns, and that the connection between economic wealth and ecological footprint must be addressed from a perspective of uneven development. To advance such change, we will contribute to debates that are critical of the growth imperative, and will explore the transformative potential of sufficiency and solidarity economy proposals in the global North and South.

Our fields of activity
Knowledge-sharing tools for alternative development pathways: High-quality academic knowledge will remain ineffective if it is not understood and taken into account by civil society. We aim to harness the potential of innovative communication approaches and technologies for sparking debates on sustainable development and inequality, and to provide entry points for transformations as shared commitments between academic and non-academic audiences.

5.3 Sustainability Governance

The Sustainability Governance cluster investigates how institutional change at local to global levels affects the ways in which different actors use land-related resources, and how resource governance can be improved with a view to sustainable development. We work to increase intra- and intergenerational social and environmental justice by supporting and promoting deliberative decision-making and collective action. Emphasis is placed on the development of instruments for mapping, diagnosing, and balancing trade-offs between different Sustainable Development Goals related to competing claims on food, land, and water. This includes exploring inter- and transdisciplinary pathways for transforming current policies and institutions on behalf of sustainable development, based on deliberative processes.

In line with CDE's overarching strategic goals, the Sustainability Governance cluster will work on four thematic priority areas:

- Actors and institutions in rural change processes
- Governance of competing claims on natural resources
- Policy coherence for sustainable development and environmental justice
- Transdisciplinary knowledge co-production and deliberations

**Actors and institutions in rural change processes:** To be sustainable, development processes must be governed in line with the principles of social justice and environmental integrity. An adequate transformation of the institutions – the rules, norms, and regulations – needed to govern rural change processes requires comprehensive knowledge about the values and aspirations of diverse actors, be they public or private, in cities or in rural areas. Our work in this thematic priority area concentrates on investigating and developing innovative strategies for transforming resource governance.

**Governance of competing claims on natural resources:** Sound knowledge of competing claims on natural resources is key when it comes to designing policies, programmes, and projects for sustainable development at multiple spatial and institutional scales. We aim to support the identification, analysis, and balancing of trade-offs and foster synergies between different Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, we develop and test concepts, methods, and tools that help guide transformation towards more sustainable outcomes.

**Policy coherence for sustainable development and environmental justice:** Policy coherence for sustainable development will be further developed as an approach for reconciling diverging policy objectives and fostering synergies between sectoral, public, and private policy arenas. Environmental justice constitutes an important case in point: it offers an innovative normative reference that lies at the heart of debates on competing claims and sustainability trade-offs, and can thus serve as a benchmark for assessing the degree of coherence between different policy processes and outcomes with regard to the advancement of sustainable development.

**Transdisciplinary knowledge co-production and deliberations:** Transdisciplinary research and deliberation has become a central means of sparking collective action between scientists and other societal actors. We will continue to advance transdisciplinary approaches and methods, and we will appraise transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge in terms of the extent to which it helps make institutions of resource governance more deliberative. Our aim is eventually to qualify transdisciplinarity in terms of its contribution to more democratic governance.
5.4 Education for Sustainable Development

Our focus in both research and education is collaborative transformative learning. We understand sustainable development as a continuous process of searching, learning, and shaping alternative pathways. Actors must be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to be able to actively participate and take responsibility. University graduates can play key roles as citizens, entrepreneurs, policymakers, researchers, and in many other functions. To build knowledge and foster skills relevant to sustainable development among students, we offer curricula and courses at all tertiary education levels. Furthermore, we support lecturers who integrate sustainable development into their education activities. Findings from CDE’s ongoing research in different fields of sustainability science and in various regions around the world constitute a major source of first-hand insights conveyed in our courses.

The Education for Sustainable Development cluster works on four thematic priority areas, in line with CDE’s overarching strategic goals:

- **Curriculum development and implementation**
- **Approaches and tools for formal and informal training**
- **Transformative learning**
- **Alliances and communities of practice for learning for change**

**Curriculum development and implementation:** To build transformation knowledge and skills relevant to sustainable development, we offer a number of curricula and courses at all levels of tertiary education. Students of all faculties and departments at the University of Bern have the opportunity to attend CDE’s Bachelor Minor and Master Minor in Sustainable Development. The International Graduate School (IGS) North-South brings together PhD students from various world regions. The Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) in Sustainable Development offers further education at the postgraduate level for practitioners.

**Approaches and tools for formal and informal training:** Scientific communities are in a position to make substantial contributions to sustainable development by producing knowledge not only to understand systems, but also to help formulate sustainability targets and to enhance transformation towards sustainable development. To create broad awareness of such opportunities in all disciplines, we develop tools such as guidelines, videos, and slides; in addition, we offer tailored coaching and workshops. Our aim is to support academic institutions, faculties, and lecturers in identifying disciplinary links to sustainable development and integrating sustainable development in their training and curricula.

**Transformative learning:** The continuous search for trade-offs between ecological, sociocultural, and economic interests demands negotiated solutions. Processes of mutual learning are becoming increasingly important in this respect. Our focus lies in particular on transformative learning – learning for, not about, transformation. Together with academic partners in the fields of pedagogy and didactics, the Education for Sustainable Development cluster engages in research aimed at advancing collaborative transformative learning.

**Alliances and communities of practice for learning for change:** Activities related to sustainable development are ongoing at various universities and departments, including in the field of education for sustainable development. To create synergies, we are building a growing alliance and community of practice of mainly university members interested in, or responsible for, education for sustainable development. We are jointly developing approaches and tools to advance education for sustainable development and exchanging knowledge and experiences. The aim is to find new opportunities for interdisciplinary and inter-institutional cooperation in research and education for sustainable development.
To meet our goal of providing engaged and transformative science for sustainable development, CDE will continue to build on 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 Switzerland and internationally.

6.1 Research partners

Achieving CDE's ambition to become a leading institution and role model in research for sustainable development will not be possible without close 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 consolidate our portfolio of activities, we will incorporate selected new members from the University of Bern who cover additional aspects of sustainable development. 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, and Zurich within the International Graduate School (IGS) North-South, we aim at initiating formal collaboration with further Swiss universities and leading research institutions engaged in research for sustainable development.

At the international level, we aim to strengthen our research cooperation with partners in Europe, North America, and globally. Given that research on the effects of global change and on ways to initiate transformations towards sustainable development must always be anchored in specific social-ecological contexts, a strategic focus of CDE's activities will be on targeted investments into cooperation with our partner offices and their research networks in at least five regions in the global South. We aim to initiate and conduct comparative research on globally relevant issues of sustainable development together with our long-term partner institutions in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Central 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 aid implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its evaluation and monitoring processes. Together with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and possibly in cooperation with other international research institutions and think tanks, we will support initiatives emphasizing dialogue between scientists and policymakers and will engage in cooperative efforts to monitor and report on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This endeavour will include cooperation in specific research areas with selected international research institutions from the CGIAR system, such as the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), and others.

6.2 Non-academic partners

CDE truly 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 policymakers, government administrations, international organizations, civil-society organizations, and private-sector actors. In partnership we will co-produce relevant knowledge, working together to translate it into policy-relevant products. These knowledge products will inform major ongoing debates on development, facilitating evidence-informed policymaking and practice.
Being part of the university of Switzerland's capital city, CDE will continue to contribute practical knowledge to Swiss and international policies in the fields of sustainability, development, and science:

– Our partners in the Swiss Government are the agencies assigned to implement Switzerland's international cooperation and sustainable development agenda. They include the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); the Human Security Division (HSD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO); the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN); and the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). We will strive to reframe our cooperation with these government agencies in terms of a renewed partnership between governmental and non-governmental institutional actors in the service of sustainable global development.

– 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 development, and 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. Major 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 the outreach of CDE's work to global policies. Last but not least, CDE will remain an active member of the International Land Coalition (ILC).

6.3 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 aims to continue to play an active, policy-shaping role in various commissions and bodies of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences, as well as in other research, educational, and development organizations.

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 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 its Knowledge–Action Networks that are currently being established. To support this research initiative, CDE will host the international project office of the Global Land Project, one of Future Earth’s core projects. Further, CDE will actively engage in international initiatives to support the implementation of Agenda 2030, 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, key donors such as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), and many other organizations in major mountain regions.
A range of professional services provided by in-house staff enhances the quality of our activities in research, education, and policy support. These services enable us to meet a number of specific objectives defined in CDE’s mandate from the University of Bern, especially in the areas of communications and public relations, knowledge management at the interface between science and policymaking, equal opportunities for career development among women and men, and quality assurance. To ensure CDE’s success as an interdisciplinary research centre, we strive to maintain a proficient, highly motivated staff reinforced by an economically sound, forward-looking financing model.

7.1 Our services: providing high-quality support

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-related mandates in the fields of training, monitoring and evaluation, conference and event organization, as well as strategy and programme development.

CDE aims to be 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. CDE will continue to develop its services for science, government administrations, policy, and civil society – and continuously adapt them to technical innovations and societal changes. Our range of services includes processing of geospatial and earth observation data; web and database development; public relations and communications; knowledge management; translation and editing; publication support; information and documentation services; graphic design and layout; as well as management of complex projects.

7.2 Human resources: our key asset

Human resources 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, students, and external partners. This involves maintaining a skilled and balanced multidisciplinary group of specialists in the natural and social sciences, as well as 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.

CDE is an equal opportunities employer and strives to enable an optimal work–life balance. We seek to ensure equal treatment from day one: 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.

We wish to support our employees in successfully harmonizing career, studies, and family life. To this end, we seek to enable flexible working models – part-time work, job-sharing, telecommuting, and annual working time arrangements – wherever possible. Fostering continuing education and lifelong learning is another core objective. As such, we aim to continuously optimize and regularly evaluate existing CDE instruments for on-the-job training, formal training, career advancement opportunities, and career planning.

7.3 Maintaining healthy finances

CDE operates as a non-profit, interdisciplinary 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 secure, long-term budget. Core funding is provided by the University of Bern, and CDE aims to maintain its current turnover of approximately CHF 12 million annually in collaboration with its long-standing main funding partners in Switzerland and abroad, while also working towards a more diversified funding basis.
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 development mandates and, together with suitable partners, preparing high-quality bids for targeted acquisition efforts. 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. CDE will join forces with other members of the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE) to influence Switzerland’s foreign policy on science and to secure the long-term funding of our research partners in the global South.

7.4 Support processes and quality assurance

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. In line with our current strategy, we have created a new staff position with the express aim of further professionalizing CDE’s internal processes and coordination between its different organizational units. Further, project management, reporting, and controlling processes and tools will be refined in line with requirements for an internal monitoring system stipulated by the financial controlling authorities.

CDE promotes Quality Assurance and Development (QAD) systematically and in a variety of ways. We do so with the aim of performing our tasks better and more effectively. All of CDE’s areas of activity (research, teaching, services) are integrated into our QAD process. We strive to safeguard and continually improve the quality of our work. To this end, the management as well as staff at different levels will receive targeted support from an in-house quality coach. QAD will regularly be discussed and evaluated by CDE’s committees. The most important management processes and related activities are documented in writing, regularly reviewed and adapted, and made available to staff via CDE’s intranet.

7.5 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. We put these principles into action wherever possible within CDE’s financial and administrative activities. 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, and staff are encouraged to prevent and recycle waste to the greatest possible extent. CDE takes care to minimize business travel and, when travelling is unavoidable, ensures that public transport is used wherever possible. To minimize travel, CDE makes electronic communication technology available to its staff as well as its members and supports CDE partners in setting up suitable telecommunication infrastructure at their offices.

7.6 Organizational structure

CDE’s organizational structure is designed to support the implementation of our overall objectives while taking into account our guiding values and the needs of our diverse stakeholders.

In particular, CDE’s organizational setup will support the creation of added value in knowledge generation for transformations towards sustainable development by linking research and education with policymaking and implementation from local to global levels. Accordingly, CDE’s organizational structure is optimized for close and mutually rewarding cooperation with our partners in academia and beyond. It is further designed to support financial sustainability by means of efficient and streamlined processes that put CDE’s staff and their partners in cooperation at the centre.
President
Prof. Dr. Urs Wiesmann

Board Members
Prof. Dr. Markus Frischer*
Prof. Dr. Ben Jann**
Prof. Dr. Heinzpeter Znoj

Management

Directorate
Prof. Dr. Peter Messerli, Prof. Dr. Thomas Breu

Executive Committee
Directors
Associate Director, Finance and Personnel
Associate Director, Strategy and Processes
Associate Director, Portfolio and Networks

Programme Committee
Executive Committee
Heads of Cluster
Head of Regional Cooperation
Special Advisers
CDE Members

CDE Strategy 2016–2021

Thematic Clusters

Land Resources
- Local land system change as a cause and consequence of globalization decisions
- Assessment and valuation of ecosystem services
- Land management that benefits natural resources and ecosystem services
- Decision support for scaling out sustainable land management

Sustainability Governance
- Actors and institutions in rural change processes
- Governance of competing claims on natural resources
- Policy coherence for sustainable development and environmental justice
- Transdisciplinary knowledge co-production and deliberations

Socio-Economic Transitions
- Concepts of poverty, inequality, and well-being
- Appraisal of social and technological innovations
- Sustainable and equitable production and consumption patterns
- Knowledge-sharing tools for alternative development pathways

Education for Sustainable Development
- Curriculum development and implementation
- Approaches and tools for formal and informal training
- Transformative learning
- Alliances and communities of practice for learning for change

*Institute of Plant Sciences; **Institute of Sociology