

Transformations to Sustainability

The Transformations to Sustainability Programme is a programme of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), implemented in partnership with members of the Belmont Forum and representing a major contribution to Future Earth.

Call for Proposals for Transformative Knowledge Networks

The ISSC, in partnership with members of the Belmont Forum, has opened a call for international Transformative Knowledge Networks. A minimum of three Transformative Knowledge Networks (TKNs) will be funded, to the value of up to €900,000 each over three years.

Call publication	18 December 2014
Online submission opens	2 February 2015
Submission deadline	31 March 2015, 23:59 South African time
Funding decisions expected	July 2015
Envisaged term of award	October 2015 – September 2018

Go to: www.worldsocialscience.org/transformations

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Introduction and context

Research on global environmental change and sustainability increasingly goes hand-in-hand with calls for deep social change. It is impossible to address today's great challenges of global environmental change and sustainability without a better understanding of how real and enduring social transformation comes about and how – if at all – it can be initiated, fostered or steered. Profound social transformation may be planned or unintentional, and it is always the result of complex, multi-dimensional processes involving multiple actors and occurring at different rates and scales. What do we know about possibilities for transformation, for example, in places that face converging problems of climate change, environmental degradation, poverty, social conflict, corruption and inequality, and in societies that might be considered the sources of some of these problems? What changes at individual, organisational, cultural and systemic levels would be regarded as transformative in these situations and how can they be realised in ways that are socially acceptable? What novel visions for change exist, whose visions count, and how do powerful interests influence trajectories of change? What are the possible levers and who are the potential agents of change? What types of decision-making processes are required to foster democratic processes of transformation, to overcome path-dependencies and entrenched self-interests and unjust power distribution? What is the role of research in such processes?

The Transformations to Sustainability Programme seeks to address these types of questions by supporting research on the complex processes of social transformation needed to secure effective, equitable and durable solutions to urgent problems of global environmental change – such as climate change, biodiversity loss, water and food security, energy production and consumption, rapid urbanisation – and their complex relationships with persistent social problems such as poverty, inequality and social discontent.

The programme is designed both to strengthen social science leadership in global change and sustainability research and to foster on-the-ground progress towards greater sustainability. It will enable social scientists from all parts of the world, including low- and middle-income countries, to develop networks that will:

- Undertake research on the needs and opportunities for social transformation in concrete socio-ecological contexts;
- Bring together researchers from different disciplines and fields of science, as well as different regions of the world;
- Engage stakeholders meaningfully in the co-design and co-production of solutions-oriented knowledge and the development of networks of mutual learning, and;
- Build capacity for international research collaboration and support early career social scientists.

This initiative is intended as a major contribution to the work of Future Earth¹, a global research platform that provides knowledge and support to accelerate transformations to a sustainable world. Future Earth is co-sponsored by the members of the International Science and Technology Alliance for Global Sustainability².

¹ For further information: www.futureearth.org

² Membership of the Alliance includes the ISSC, the International Council for Science (ICSU), the Belmont Forum and International Group of Funding Agencies for Global Change Research, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations University (UNU) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). For further information: www.stalliance.org

Programme description

Programme objectives

The Transformations Programme ultimately wishes to help inform and enable transformations to more sustainable and equitable societies around the globe. By broadening and deepening our understanding of transformative social change, it is hoped that the programme will help to:

- Craft more effective, durable and equitable solutions to the problems of global change and sustainability;
- Increase the use of such knowledge by policy makers, practitioners, the private sector, citizens and activists, and;
- Create a Global Knowledge Trust on social transformation: a repository of knowledge and a reference point for expertise on social transformation that will continue to inform the development of solutions beyond the formal lifespan of the programme.

To achieve these broader objectives, the programme intends to:

- Mobilise a broader community of social scientists to become involved in solutions-oriented research for global sustainability and to make use of the best existing social science knowledge on social change and transformation for this purpose;
- Help to fully integrate social scientists into important international initiatives such as Future Earth, and infuse knowledge on social transformation into other Future Earth and Belmont Forum-supported projects;³
- Develop and test new approaches to the co-design and co-production of solutions-oriented knowledge for sustainability, and;
- Provide a basis for the building of innovative, multi-stakeholder networks of knowledge creation, dissemination and mutual learning for longer-term collaboration on processes of transformative change.

Thematic focus

The thematic focus of the research activities supported by the programme is on processes of deep social change and needs and opportunities for transformation to more sustainable and equitable societies. This focus has two dimensions:

- *Social transformations to sustainability:* Transformative Knowledge Networks will conduct internationally comparative research on processes of social transformation, building on the ISSC's 'Transformative Cornerstones of Social Science Research for Global Change'⁴ framework (see summary, Annex 1). In their efforts to produce new knowledge, Transformative Knowledge Networks should explicitly seek to draw on the existing body of knowledge on processes of social transformation and change from a variety of social and human science disciplines.
- *Concrete contexts of application:* The research on social transformations should be conducted in relation to concrete problems of global environmental change and sustainability in specific social-ecological settings. Such problems include, for example, climate change, water and food security, biodiversity loss, energy production and consumption, waste management or urbanisation, and their complex interactions with

³ The Belmont Forum is a group of representatives of the world's major and emerging funders of research on global environmental change and international science councils. <https://igfagcr.org/>

⁴ Hackmann, H. and St. Clair, A. (2012), *Transformative Cornerstones of Social Science Research for Global Change*, International Social Science Council. www.worldsocialscience.org/documents/transformative-cornerstones.pdf

unsustainable patterns of growth, persistent poverty, growing inequalities and social discontent. Proposals that do not make a link between a social transformation need/opportunity and a specific environmental or sustainability challenge will not be considered.

Principles of Transformative Knowledge Networks

Transformative Knowledge Networks should conduct empirical research projects and related activities over three years of funding.

In addition to having a thematic focus as described above, proposals for Transformative Knowledge Networks must be in line with each of the following principles to be considered eligible:

- *Social science leadership:*
 - Transformative Knowledge Networks must be coordinated by social science researchers (with a PhD in a social science or at least five years' equivalent research experience) from academic institutions or other organisations that have a strong focus on research.
 - Transformative Knowledge Networks should be coordinated either by one social scientist from a low- or middle-income country⁵ or by a team of two social scientists with at least one from a low- or middle-income country. In the latter case of shared coordination, the distribution of leadership responsibilities must be justified.
- *Internationally comparative research:* Comparative research must be conducted across at least three countries, spanning at least two regions⁶ of the world and including at least one low- to middle-income country, and including local knowledge partners in each country involved in the research.
- *Interdisciplinary research:* Transformative Knowledge Networks should involve researchers from the relevant academic disciplines, depending on the concrete problem focus, including, as appropriate, the social, human, natural, engineering and health/medical sciences. Particular emphasis should be placed on connecting research communities from global environmental change, poverty, and development fields.
- *Transdisciplinary research:* Transformative Knowledge Networks should pursue the co-design, co-production and co-dissemination of knowledge with the relevant academic and non-academic knowledge partners, e.g. practitioners, civil society, NGOs, policy-makers, managers, business leaders, and the media. The proposal itself must demonstrate evidence of having been co-designed with the relevant academic and non-academic partners.
- *Integrated collaboration:* Each partner should contribute meaningfully to the achievement of the objectives of the network, which should also be reflected in the distribution of responsibilities and funding. Proposals should clearly demonstrate the added value of the collaboration.
- *Capacity-building:* Transformative Knowledge Networks should:
 - Involve knowledge partners from low- and middle-income countries;
 - Demonstrate direct benefits to early career social scientists who obtained their PhDs no more than 10 years ago;

⁵ From low- to upper-middle-income countries, according to the World Bank categorization: <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups>

⁶ Following the World Bank classification resulting in seven regions: Sub-Saharan Africa; East Asia and Pacific; Europe and Central Asia; Latin America & Caribbean; Middle East & North Africa; South Asia; High-income countries.

- Enable non-academic knowledge partners to participate meaningfully in Transformative Knowledge Networks.

Activities should link with and strengthen relevant academic educational networks and outreach activities, particularly in developing countries.

Networking

In order to ensure that the Transformative Knowledge Networks contribute to building the envisaged Global Knowledge Trust on social transformation, the programme will bring Network Coordinators and their main network partners together on an annual basis. The annual Transformations Knowledge Workshops will facilitate cross-network knowledge-sharing and learning, assist with capacity building within the Knowledge Trust, stimulate theoretical and methodological reflection, widen and extend outreach opportunities and activities, strengthen network leadership, and encourage joint publication on social transformation as well as on the practices of transdisciplinary science. The first annual Workshop took place on 17-19 November 2014 in Potsdam, Germany. It is foreseen that the second annual Workshop will take place on 11-12 September 2015 in Durban, South Africa, in conjunction with the [World Social Science Forum 2015](#) on 13-16 September. See 'Eligible costs' for the budget implications.

Funding framework

The Transformations to Sustainability Programme is being supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for an initial period of four years (2014-2018).

A call for proposals for seed funding was made by the ISSC in March 2014, which resulted in 38 seed grants.⁷ The current call for Transformative Knowledge Network proposals is an open call, *not* restricted to the recipients of seed funding. The call is being implemented in partnership with members of the Belmont Forum. The selection process and the grants will be handled by the National Research Foundation of South Africa. The Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) will support Japanese researchers involved in the successful proposals, up to a maximum total amount specified in Annex 2. Note that Japanese researchers who would be eligible for JST funding must comply with JST requirements – see Annex 2 for more details.⁸

It is envisaged that three Transformative Knowledge Networks will be funded up to a maximum of €900,000 each over three years, from October 2015 to September 2018. (Grant applications under €900,000 will be accepted.) Co-funding of Transformative Knowledge Networks can be considered, provided that the Transformations Programme grant makes up the majority of the funding.

The ISSC is seeking financial support from other funding agencies and donors in order to make further calls for Transformative Knowledge Networks in 2016 and beyond. More information will be available on the programme website in 2015.

The Transformations Programme anticipates the implementation of common activities with the Belmont Forum beyond 2016.

⁷ With core funding from Sida and supplementary support from the Economic and Social Research Council UK (ESRC) through the Newton Fund, the Swedish Secretariat for Environmental Earth System Sciences (SSEESS), the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the National Research Foundation of South Africa (NRF), seed funding was provided to 38 groups. Successful proposals received up to €30,000 to be used within 6.5 months (September 2014 to March 2015).

⁸ Partners who would not be eligible for JST funding may nevertheless benefit from core programme funding.

Programme Governance

Programme Steering Committee

The Transformations to Sustainability programme is guided and overseen by an international, multi- and transdisciplinary [Programme Steering Committee](#) appointed by the ISSC. In addition to its responsibilities for advising on strategy development and resource mobilisation and for overseeing programme management, the Steering Committee makes final decisions on the selection of proposals and the associated allocation of funds. In order to avoid conflicts of interest, Steering Committee members cannot participate or serve in advisory functions to the applicants or funded Transformative Knowledge Networks.

Funding organisations supporting the Programme have observer status on the Steering Committee.

Programme Management Team

The Programme will be run by a management team involving ISSC and NRF staff, coordinated from the ISSC Secretariat.

Assessment criteria and proposal selection process

Proposals will be assessed in a two-stage international peer review process, with three external reviewers per proposal, selected from a pool of reviewers proposed by participating organisations and experts, followed by a selection panel comprising the members of the Programme Steering Committee, with additional expertise as appropriate. The final decisions on funding will be made by the Steering Committee. Applicants will receive feedback in due course following the communication of results.

Proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Relevance to the Call for Proposals
2. Intellectual merit and innovativeness
3. Appropriateness of the methods, including:
 - a. Research approach
 - b. Justification of the countries/research sites/case-studies involved
 - c. Depth of the collaboration – appropriateness of disciplines and societal stakeholder groups involved, including evidence of co-design during the proposal writing phase by academic and non-academic knowledge partners
4. Feasibility of the work plan
5. Relevance of qualifications of the coordinator(s), wider research team and knowledge partners
6. Effectiveness of network structure and coordination arrangements
7. Extent of capacity building
8. Adequacy of communication/outreach/engagement strategy
9. Adequacy of monitoring, evaluation and learning plan
10. Appropriateness of budget (maximum grant of 900,000 EUR over three years)

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to apply as Network Coordinator in more than one proposal and not to be directly involved in more than two proposals.

Application guidelines

Submission procedure

The online submission system, hosted by the NRF, will be accessible by direct link from the Transformations Programme webpage from 2 February – 31 March 2015. The Network Coordinator will be required to set up a personal account in the NRF system in order to proceed with the submission process. This process should be begun as early as possible.

Applications must be written in English. *Applications which exceed the character limits, which do not include all the required elements or which provide unsolicited supplementary material (such as letters of support) will not be considered.*

The application should be prepared in advance according to the templates provided in Annex 3 (proposal) and 4 (budget) to avoid accidental loss of data during the submission process. The responses can then be copied and pasted into the online submission form.

Eligible costs⁹

- Core research project funding:
 - i. Personnel
 - ii. Meetings and travel
 - iii. Fieldwork, data collection & storage costs
 - iv. Subcontracting
- Economy-class travel, accommodation and other expenses (e.g. vaccinations) directly related to meetings with knowledge partners and field visits to research sites and institutions involved in the research;
- Scientific exchanges (e.g. scoping meetings, seminars, knowledge gap workshops, sandpits, action labs), conferences (hosting and attending);
- Equipment essential to the research;
- Materials and consumables, including software licences, and costs associated with access to and the use of equipment and services not available in the Host Institution that are specifically required for the research;
- Intermediaries/process facilitators for working with policy makers, practitioners, civil society and other user groups/stakeholders; appropriate training in the development of these skills;
- Training in new methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches (e.g. for early career researchers);
- Communication tools and expertise, dissemination activities and publication support;
- Project monitoring and evaluation activities and expenses;
- Indirect costs, as a contribution to the general overheads of the host institution, up to a *maximum of 20% of direct costs* but excluding the cost of any equipment.

Note: All applications should budget for at least two network partners (including at least one Network Coordinator) to attend *four* annual Transformations Knowledge Workshops (one per year from 2015 to 2018), at an estimated average cost of €1500 per person for each event.¹⁰ In 2015 the budget for attending the Workshop should be €2500 per person, to include the costs of attending the World Social Science Forum immediately afterwards (involving an additional 3 nights and registration fees).¹¹

⁹ Partners eligible for JST funding must comply with any JST regulations on eligible costs.

¹⁰ This is a rough estimate, as the locations of the Workshops are not yet known. However, over the course of four Workshops, this represents a reasonable estimate.

¹¹ See <http://www.wssf2015.org/WSSF-2015/registrations.html>

Obligations of grantees

Successful applicants will be required to sign a standard grant agreement with the ISSC and NRF, covering items such as the term of the grant, the payment schedule, ethics, reporting and auditing requirements (all TKNs will be subject to an audit). *The grant will be transferred to and must be administered by the institution of (one of) the Network Coordinator(s).*

The Network Coordinators will be the main contact points for the ISSC and NRF for the duration of the network. They will be responsible for representing the TKN, for its participation in programme activities, and for the reporting requirements placed on the network as a whole, which will include evaluation and monitoring.

Anticipated milestones

- Call for TKN Proposals, 18 December 2014
- Opening of online submission form, 2 February 2015
- Deadline for submission of proposals, 31 March 2015, 23.59 South African time
- Expected communication of decisions, July 2015
- Expected launch of TKNs, October 2015
- Transformative Knowledge Workshop 2015, 11-12 September 2015, Durban
- World Social Science Forum 2015, 13-16 September 2015, Durban
- Transformative Knowledge Workshop 2016 (place & date TBD)
- First annual report, December 2016
- Transformative Knowledge Workshop 2017 (place & date TBD)
- Second annual report, December 2017
- Transformative Knowledge Workshop 2018 (place & date TBD)
- Final report, December 2018

Contacts

Before making a direct inquiry, please read the call for proposals carefully and consult the online Glossary of Terms and Frequently Asked Questions.

For inquiries concerning the content of the call, please contact:

Ms. Sarah Moore, Programme Coordinator

Ms. Connie Bellonie, Programme Administrator

Email: transformations@worldsocialscience.org

Website: www.worldsocialscience.org/transformations

For inquiries concerning the application process or grants management at the NRF, please contact:

Mrs. Lynn Erasmus, Professional Officer, Grants Management and Systems Administration.

Email: Lynn@nrf.ac.za

For inquiries concerning the Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) funding, please see Annex 2.

Annex 1: Transformative Cornerstones of Social Science Research for Global Change

The ISSC's *Transformative Cornerstones* report provides a research framework for understanding climate and other environmental changes as social processes embedded in specific social systems. The framework provides tools to question and rethink the shape and course of those processes and systems through time. They are called transformative because answers to the questions raised in each cornerstone should inform actions that result in ethical and equitable transformations to sustainability.

Cornerstone 1: Historical and contextual complexity

The first cornerstone concerns the complexity of global change. Social science needs to understand the political economy of these processes, and how they relate to other social problems, including persistent poverty. The task here is to distinguish between the interconnected drivers of global change, and to clarify the interdependencies of people's vulnerabilities to these and other social processes, such as migration or conflict. In-depth historical analyses are needed to explain the complex trajectories that have led to today's unsustainable lifestyles and models of progress, and to draw lessons from earlier instances of transformative change. It is also important to understand the influence of context: to address how global change risks, impacts, perceptions, experiences and responses differ across the world, across social classes, gender, race or faith, and between personal or professional identities.

Cornerstone 2: Consequences

Identifying and mapping current and future threats from global environmental change and their impacts on people and communities is the work of the second cornerstone. It is about exposing the diverse realities of living with such change, and calls for a special focus on poor and vulnerable communities. Research on the consequences of environmental change advances our understanding of the lives of those affected by processes such as climate change, including their coping mechanisms, responses, innovations and limitations. It raises important questions about social boundaries and tipping points related to environmental pressures on human systems, economies and the social fabric of life. This cornerstone also requires study of the outcomes of policy solutions and technologies, and how both can be improved.

Cornerstone 3: Conditions and visions for change

This cornerstone is about social change: how it happens, at what levels and scales, and what directions it might take. The purpose is to understand what drives individual and collective change, including changing social practices. It identifies what kind of leadership and what other capacities are required for successful change to occur, while being absolutely clear about the limitations and democratic pitfalls of deliberate intervention. Another goal is to shed light on criteria for successful, transformative actions towards equitable sustainability at the local, community level, and on how to scale these up into transformative global thinking. Feasible visions for change matter, but so do the methods and procedures by which they are built and the ways in which global change and its consequences are framed. This cornerstone raises questions about different narratives of socially desirable change, lifestyles and alternative futures. It also addresses concerns about social engineering, and asks about the feasibility of participatory approaches to achieving alternative visions of the future. Building consensus in ways that include marginalised and non-scientific views is a key challenge.

Cornerstone 4: Interpretation and subjective sense making

This cornerstone confronts the values, beliefs, interests, worldviews, hopes, needs and desires that underlie people's experiences of and responses (or lack thereof) to global change. These in turn shape personal narratives and social discourses about the nature of the world and the environment, and so drive people's views on the necessity for a transformation to global sustainability. It challenges social scientists to make sense of the assumptions and blind spots that underlie choices and priorities. These assumptions can block awareness of what needs to change and keep systems deadlocked in inaction. This cornerstone raises questions about the nature and role of transformative learning, and investigates the reasons for indifference, scepticism and denialism in the face of potential cataclysms such as climate change.

Cornerstone 5: Responsibilities

The double injustice imposed by the effects of environmental change on already vulnerable populations and on those without a voice calls for urgent work on what it takes to foster global and intergenerational solidarity and justice. It cannot be assumed that all responses will be “just” interventions. This cornerstone foregrounds obligations, duties and responsibilities to poor and vulnerable people and to future generations, bringing these concerns into the legitimate space of scientific inquiry, policy and practice. It addresses methods, evaluation systems and policy mechanisms, and ensures ethical approaches in the development of new visions and the building of new social systems. It focuses an ethical lens on all interpretations of and responses to environmental change, be they of a technical, political, economic or discursive nature.

Cornerstone 6: Governance and decision making

Many of the policy processes related to environmental change are poorly understood. Social science knowledge is needed on how decisions are made in the face of uncertainty; what pathways are available for influencing decision making; what determines the success or failure of political agreements; and what drives political will. Knowledge is also needed of the possible effects of different ways of framing environmental change on policy makers and practitioners. Not all expert input has the same policy appeal or is given an equal hearing by those in power. It is important to understand the role of science in policy processes, to know what makes knowledge work, whose knowledge counts, and where the limits of expert knowledge lie. This cornerstone focuses on institutional design and reform, and on building structures to enable dialogue across competing interests, values and worldviews, under conditions of uncertainty.

Source: Hackmann, H. and A. Lera St. Clair (2012), *Transformative Cornerstones of Social Science Research for Global Change*, International Social Science Council.

www.worldsocialscience.org/documents/transformative-cornerstones.pdf

Annex 2: Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST) requirements

Depending on all conditions of eligibility and peer review being met, the budget earmarked by JST for this call will be up to €200,000 (according to exchange rates at time of funding).

It is expected that applications to this call will be international collaborative research proposals with the consortium composition as defined in the call for proposals, and that JST will fund the eligible Japanese partners of successful applications to the limit of €200,000 in total.

Note that the budget of any single Transformative Knowledge Network proposal may not exceed €900,000 over three years, i.e. any funding provided by JST to Japanese partners is considered an integral part of the budget, not a supplement.

The official national call announcement for Japan will be published on the JST website:

<http://www.jst.go.jp/>

Prospective Japanese partners in a Transformative Knowledge Network proposal are advised to contact their National Contact Point (see below) before starting to prepare a proposal.

In addition to the common application process, Japanese partners in a proposal will have to register their applications on the Cross-Ministerial R&D Management System (e-Rad) by the date indicated in the official national call announcement:

<https://www.e-rad.go.jp/index.html>

Eligibility and national funding modalities:

Any independent researcher personally affiliated with (and actively conducting research at) a domestic Japanese research institution, regardless of nationality, is eligible to apply.¹²

'Domestic Japanese research institution' refers to universities, independent administrative institutions, national/public testing and Research Institutions, specially authorized corporations, public-service corporations and enterprises, etc. that satisfy requirements predetermined by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). Please refer to the MEXT homepage for more information:

http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kansa/houkoku/1301688.htm

The scale of funding provided to successful proposals will depend on the budget of each fiscal year.

Funding will be provided in support of research, travel and personnel expenses, as well as indirect costs (up to a maximum of 10% of direct costs).

Full details (in Japanese) regarding Japanese applications can be found on the call announcement page: http://www.jst.go.jp/sicp/announce_belmont_t2s.html

National Contact Point

Name:	Soichi Kubota
Address:	7, Gobancho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0076 Japan
Phone number:	+81(0)3-5214-7375
Email address:	belmont@jst.go.jp

¹² Partners who would be eligible for JST funding must comply with their regulations. Partners who are not eligible for JST funding may nevertheless benefit from core Transformations Programme funding.

Annex 3: Application template

Provided separately in Word format.

Annex 4: Budget template

Provided separately in Excel format.