

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

RESEARCH, POLICY ADVICE AND TRAINING FOR A COLLABORATIVE MULTIPOLAR WORLD

2025-2031

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1 IDOS FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

The German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) is a renowned research institute and influential think tank. We conduct empirical, theory-led and application-oriented research on global challenges, enable transregional knowledge cooperation and training, and offer policy advice for sustainable futures. The concept of “sustainable futures” underlines that our one common planetary future can only be ensured through the transformation of social, political and economic systems in ways which guarantee that the needs of present generations are met, while the planetary foundations of human life on Earth are protected, and the capabilities of future generations, human life and cultures are safeguarded. Many contextualised and realised sustainable futures – united in diversity – ensure the foundation for one common future for human life on Earth. This also means that participation and inclusive forms of imagining, designing and pursuing futures within our planetary boundaries lie at the heart of sustainable futures, which are increasingly contested in an often geopolitically and geo-economically dominated world.

1.1 What makes us unique

The combination of four elements makes IDOS’ approach to research, training and policy advice unique in the world.

First, the focus on the interdependence of “development” and “sustainability”. Our research focusses on low- and middle-income countries and societies – often referred to as the “Global South” – as well as on global governance that is socially just, climate-stabilising and ecologically sustainable, thereby enabling a good life for everyone, irrespective of social, religious or ethnic background, gender or age. The focus on low- and middle-income countries and societies entails research and knowledge cooperation that is practised in settings shaped by the challenge:

- a) to overcome the imbalances of a post-colonial world order, in which material and power resources are unequally distributed, and latecomers to the capitalist world economy are struggling to improve their livelihoods;
- b) to foster the transformation towards environmental sustainability while acknowledging legitimate aspirations for a decent life; and
- c) to renew the institutional and societal foundations of inter- and transnational relations as well as political and social orders, which are contested and increasingly fragile.

Second, a research approach that carves out pathways towards sustainable futures which are value-based and practicable. Our research is thus guided by a normative compass and recognises the trade-offs and conflicting interests in decision-making processes. It aims to find viable pathways to and solutions for sustainable futures to ensure that humankind can achieve a good life within our planetary boundaries. At the same time, we are living in a world of power imbalances, rising geopolitical tensions and violent conflicts. Democracies are under attack, and populism threatens to replace evidence-based policy-making. Around the world, incumbents are defending established, unfair and unsustainable practices. In fact, the prospects for sustainable futures are much bleaker than they were just a decade ago, when the world community agreed on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals as well as the Paris Agreement. Against this background, our research prominently incorporates the political dimensions of

problems. It is essential to understand power imbalances, veto and reform coalitions as well as what determines societal acceptance. We thus deliberately avoid a very common mistake: suggesting purely technical solutions for problems while ignoring that, to be successful, these need to be deeply engrained in politics and socio-cultural practices.

Third, a transformative approach at the science–policy–society interface. IDOS works in close partnership with policy-makers and other societal stakeholders, jointly identifying knowledge gaps in the search process for sustainable futures. This entails research autonomy characterised by a deep engagement with policy-makers, political parties, parliaments and ministries; public and private implementing agencies; as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other societal stakeholders in order to understand policy processes and be able to identify leverage points. In addition, it is characterised by scientific independence during the entire research process – from the design stage to the dissemination phase – in order to avoid any type of capture by the particularistic interests of stakeholders. Navigating these fruitful relationships also requires elements of transdisciplinary co-design, co-production and co-dissemination, which we practise with our partners from different sectors and geographies, as well as continuous feedback loops between research and practice.

Fourth, a global partnership approach to research and policy. IDOS deliberately breaks with post-colonial research traditions that take “Western” epistemologies and guiding principles (“*Leitbilder*”) for granted, apply a dichotomy of “developed vs. developing” and continue to reproduce biased knowledge systems in which low- and middle-income countries and societal actors are essentially reduced to (research) objects. Rather, we work in diverse trust-based research networks with partners around the globe, keen to learn from our partners’ perspectives and agency. We thus work towards generating multi-perspective research across different world regions (“decolonising” and “de-westernising”) by collaborating with a wide range of partners and deliberately investing in the further institutionalisation of transregional partnership networks and platforms.

The institutes’ strategy 2025-2031 outlines IDOS’ mission and vision of “Sustainable Futures: Research, Policy Advice and Training for a Collaborative Multipolar World”. It builds on IDOS’ strategy 2018-2024, “Research, Training and Policy Advice for the Global Common Good”.

IDOS’ History – 60 years of research, policy advice and training

The German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) was founded on 2 March 1964. It was a period in which Germany’s involvement in international development cooperation was gaining momentum, with the founding of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 1961. IDOS, then still called the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), was founded to prepare university graduates for work in the new field of development policy and international cooperation and to support German development cooperation through research and policy advice. The first training course was officially opened on 27 April 1965 by Federal President Lübke and Federal Minister Scheel.

Today, 60 years later, we look back at six decades of research, policy advice, training, knowledge cooperation and joint learning, with the constant aim of finding innovative and implementation-oriented solutions to current development challenges. The focus of our work lies on the interdependence of ‘development’ and ‘sustainability’ and the system of international cooperation itself, in the context of geopolitical shifts. As such, IDOS stands for independent, transformative and collaborative research, policy advice, knowledge cooperation and training for constructive cooperation in a multipolar world.

1.2 Mission and vision

IDOS' mission, which is based on the three pillars of research, policy advice and training, is

to collaboratively develop shared visions of, as well as scientific expertise and transformative innovations for sustainable futures.

This threefold approach is integral to scientific practice¹ at IDOS, which aims to bridge research and policy-making via diverse formats of national, transnational and transregional knowledge cooperation.

We fulfil our mission while being guided by **our vision**:

We aspire to co-shape a collaborative multipolar world for sustainable futures. We do so by conducting high-quality research, offering independent policy advice, and learning across borders and regions while seeking to align “development” and “sustainability”.

With this vision, IDOS stands in for a world shaped by constructive cooperation. We do so with a strong focus on partnership-based approaches in research, policy advice and training as well as early researcher development. We empirically study some of the world's most pressing challenges – taking into consideration human-human and human-environment interactions in a changing world order – as well as the drivers of change (i.e. climatic, technological, demographic, among others), the steering capacities and the institutional landscapes at all governance levels for addressing these challenges. These long-term drivers of change structurally determine which futures will be possible and desirable within the limits of our planet's carrying capacities. We assess political regime types, cooperation modalities, institutional varieties and policy instruments that enable or hinder societal change processes towards sustainable futures. We support international structures that allow for subject- and content-oriented, scientifically grounded and informed transnational and transregional exchange and dialogue in a multipolar world order. Through these dialogue formats, networks and training programmes, IDOS fosters cooperation, including in settings where contestation and systemic rivalry threaten to take over.

As a research institute and think tank that has grown significantly over the past two decades, we aim to be widely recognised internationally within science, policy-making and practice, and we strive to be known for our intellectual leadership in multilateral settings, the European Union (EU) and Germany.² We do so in partnerships with universities, research institutes and think tanks around the globe with the intention of contributing towards the continued building of a global science system and think tank landscape for sustainable futures. The embedding of IDOS in the German, European and global science landscapes have been strengthened structurally through the appointment of two joint professoral positions with the University of Bonn. Two additional professoral appointments are under way with the University of Duisburg-Essen and the University of Göttingen. In addition, the following universities have appointed IDOS staff members as extraordinary and honorary professors: Stellenbosch University, South Africa; the University of Turin and Roma Tre University in Italy; Cairo University in Egypt; Ewha

¹ We define “science” in line with the Science Council (2015) of the United Kingdom as “the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world” (comparable to the term *Wissenschaft* in German) and as comprising mutually interdependent research, training and research-based policy advice.

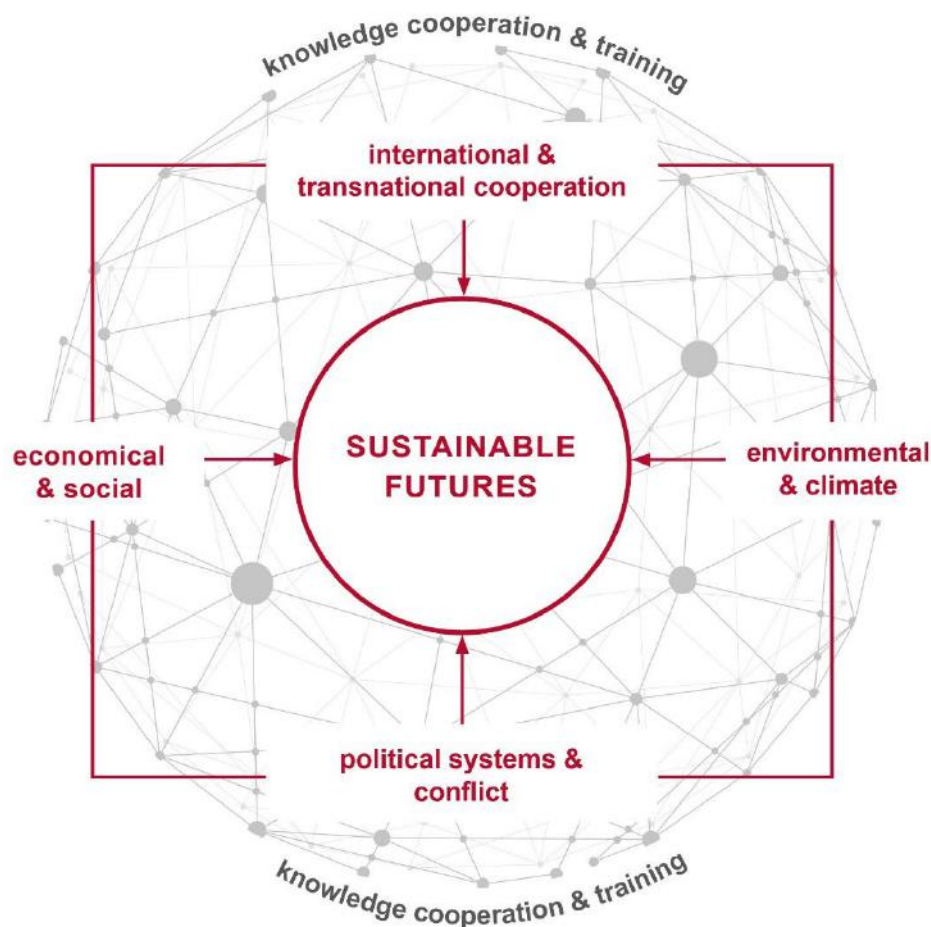
² In order to assess our recognition and influence, we draw on available rankings and metrics, including the most recent “Global Go To Think Tank Index”. Our ambition is to be among the top five globally recognised research institutes and think tanks in our field.

Womans University in South Korea; and Leuphana University Lüneburg and the University of Applied Sciences Bonn-Rhein-Sieg in Germany. These institutionalised links to the university systems of a number of countries mirror IDOS' international identity and wide scope, from basic to application-oriented research, policy advice and training.

1.3 IDOS' approach to research, policy advice and training

The world finds itself in a difficult situation: Post-pandemic geopolitical tensions are high due to wars and open violent conflicts inter alia in Europe, the Middle East and the Sahel region, in addition to high debt levels and spiralling inflation rates, all of which are feeding into mistrust across regions. The effects of global warming, biodiversity loss and contestations over natural resources and energy security further exacerbate risks. Poverty, hunger, social inequalities, deteriorating social cohesion and political instability are on the rise. Our multipolar world is reaching a critical juncture: Will the world of the future be able to reform and strengthen the multilateral governance system as a means of fair and constructive problem-solving? Or will zero-sum competition between geopolitical poles lead to the demise and continued fragmentation of multilateral structures?

IDOS' approach to research, policy advice and training



IDOS' threefold approach of research, policy advice and training for sustainable futures uniquely positions the institute between political, social, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. As a research institute and think tank, we offer intellectual guidance, space for scientific exchange, as well as empirical, analytical and technical expertise for constructive cooperation between and among regions, countries and social groups. Based on research, training and cross-sectoral consultations in partnerships, we seek paths that avoid destructive competition and offer advice for policy-making oriented towards sustainable futures.

Research in partnership: Through international partnerships and networks, we aspire to conduct excellent research and engage with colleagues and decision-makers in advancing towards a geographically broad-based international science system. Due to substantial variations in scientific infrastructures, funding and capacities, scientific insights (including long-term data series) on global and local change processes still contain “Western” biases – even if heterogeneous in themselves – and substantial gaps regarding data and the comprehension of everyday realities in low- and middle-income countries, rural regions and marginalised social groups. IDOS aims to contribute towards a social and geographic diversification and pluralisation of knowledge creation (including “de-westernisation”) in addition to enriching the available knowledge and expertise concerning relevant multifaceted social and political realities. This can be achieved by sharing collected open source data and developing data collection efforts that are to sustain and include different geographies and scales over extended time periods.

Through its transnational and transregional partnerships and by jointly defining and implementing research agendas, IDOS develops research-based solutions for sustainability challenges, including context-specific conceptual, institutional and social innovations. We do so based on an understanding of “development” as the conceptualisation and realisation of futures in and by societies, that is, as the dynamic, non-linear process of ongoing change on all continents and within all societies. “Sustainability”, for its part, is an intergenerational challenge in and across the social, economic, environmental and political spheres, and at the same time a matter of transregional justice in the present. Together, the two concepts require qualitative, multidimensional and universal documentation as well as analysis of how futures are conceived and realised in societies around the world.

Policy advice: IDOS provides independent and research-based advice for sustainable futures to decision-makers in Germany, Europe and other countries and world regions, as well as at the global level, such as the United Nations (UN), the G7 and the G20. The advisory formats range from the fostering of trusted relationships with experts in decision-making, implementing agencies, foundations and NGOs in the wider field of international cooperation to scientifically-based mandated advice through advisory bodies and high-level advice on concrete policy challenges in Chatham House Rule discussion formats. Accordingly, the types of advice range from scientifically-based considerations on possible futures, political steering potential and the development of political narratives to remedies of structural challenges in the institutional landscape of the international development system and technical advice on policy, implementation and cooperation instruments. As such, IDOS mobilises scientific knowledge and networks to overcome conflictual perspectives in a multipolar world and contributes to trust-building as a basis for collaboration towards sustainable futures.

Knowledge cooperation and training: Through its academies, IDOS shapes dialogue processes that allow for a joint definition of problems and the envisioning, negotiating and shaping of sustainable futures, bringing together actors from different world regions, sectors and social groups. A modular and integrated design of the three academies at IDOS ensures

a high level of international competency development with future decision-makers in the field of international cooperation for sustainable futures from Europe, Africa and globally influential middle-income countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America. We thereby contribute to the strengthening of institutional landscapes needed for defining and implementing policies for sustainable futures that are oriented towards the common good.

IDOS advisory practices in the period 2025-2031 aim at a) contributing to accelerated, scientifically-based and transformative policy-making and wider societal actions supporting the 2030 Agenda. In view of b) a possible post-2030 Agenda, we contribute to discussions shaped by the understanding that a joint global agenda on sustainable development provides an important unifying element to international relations and is even more important, given the geopolitical search for one multipolar order rather than multiple (conflicting) orders. This will be achieved by carrying IDOS' transnational and transdisciplinary partnerships in research, policy advice and training into science–policy–society processes shaping inclusive and sustainable futures at the local and national levels.

Geographic focus at IDOS

IDOS' research covers a wide and evolving range of topics related to "development" and "sustainability", from democratic governance to inequality, from climate change to multilateral cooperation. In light of the universality aspiration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our work addresses global challenges through transnational cooperation and subscribes to an understanding of sustainable development that – as guidance, inspiration and reference – applies to all people, everywhere.

At the same time, IDOS is aware of its trajectory, institutional setup and comparative advantage in the German, European as well as global research, policy advice and training landscapes. Originally established as an institute focussing on development policy, IDOS builds on decades of engaging issues related to and with people from so-called "developing" countries, of which a rough state-based proxy is the list of countries eligible to receive Official Development Assistance (ODA). The distinction between "developing" countries (i.e. ODA recipients) in the so-called Global South and "developed" countries (i.e. ODA providers) in the so-called Global North – and between high-, middle- and low-income countries – has long been a visible feature of IDOS' work. However, binary classifications such as North and South have always been porous and are understood differently from diverse perspectives within and across continents. They are interwoven with and reflect (post-)colonial trajectories and, like recipient-provider and income classifications, continue to evolve. IDOS' work engages with these categorisation and framing practices from an analytical perspective in an attempt to make sense of empirical observations and – based on the empirical realities – shape conceptual debates.

Our work is driven by a thematic focus – such as democratisation, economic development or environmental governance – related to empirical dynamics across the globe. A central comparative advantage of IDOS' work is a long-standing expertise on German, European and global development institutions as well as the dynamics covering different – and evolving – sets of spaces and places across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean and networks between different world regions. Although the institute does not define strict geographic criteria for designing and implementing projects, it is encouraged that IDOS' research on Northern settings be embedded into reflections on the evolving relations between and across different income categories, for example through comparative work or transregional collaboration.

In order to develop lasting research partnerships, which are often a prerequisite for transformative work, IDOS' research might want to place an additional focus on selected research sites for systematic long-term engagement. As we recognise the manifold opportunities for learning across global divides, knowledge exchange and peer learning are central and integral components of our work. Partner networks – including those from IDOS' training and knowledge cooperation formats and long-standing research partnerships with institutions across the globe – play an important role in shaping how we understand and conduct research.

1.4 Our strategic outlook 2025-2031

The structural frame and focus of IDOS' institutional strategy 2025-2031 is comprised of six vantage points that define our subject matter: Through three lenses we define "What we work on", and through three additional lenses we reflect on "How we do this". Together these six lenses shed light on the structural frame and foci of the institute's strategy 2025-2031.

"What": thematic areas, policy fields and levels of analysis

1. Thematic focus: Since the early 2000s, the increasing interdependencies of global challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss as well as poverty, social inequalities and polarisation have led to a broadening of the focus beyond poverty reduction. Today, we observe a shift from "poverty reduction and global challenges" to a "new urgency" for systemic changes, the need for profound social-ecological and political transformations – increasingly being summarised in policy circles as "just transitions" – and a reordering of the institutional landscape of global governance (exemplified for instance by the expansion of BRICS to BRICS+). Mitigating the multitude of global challenges as far as possible, while at the same time preparing societies globally as best as possible, now lies at the heart of decision-making for our common future. This is further fuelled by discussions about justice gaps between different societal groups within a given society, as well as between those societies that bear more responsibility for causing these crises (such as global warming) and those societal groups that are heavily affected by them (above all in tropical and (semi-)arid regions). The socially just, ecologically sustainable and climate-stabilising restructuring of production systems in all regions is increasingly gaining importance for rebuilding trust as a foundational basis of cooperation and sustainable development in a fragmented world. Finding solutions to these systemic problems has become more difficult due to an increasing number of disagreements about the political rules and institutional foundations that should enable peaceful transformations. IDOS acknowledges this increased urgency by specifically addressing those thematic areas where our research and cooperative exchanges on long-term global processes of change (e.g. "Mega Trends"), such as climate change, demographic change, digitalisation, urbanisation and social inequalities, suggest that new opportunities and risks are emerging. This entails bringing our work on social cohesion, autocratisation, violent conflict, the changing geopolitical context and economic policies into dialogue with, for example, our work on the intensification of multiple interconnected environmental crises: climate change, biodiversity loss, degradation and pollution of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and the acidification of oceans and their governance. The work on decarbonisation, circular economy, alternative growth pathways and post-growth meets a particular focus on gender, transformative feminism and social movements. Research on innovation systems, "just transition" and the risks and opportunities of digitalisation is linked with questions of geopolitics and the role of the "Global South" in cooperation architectures. Discussions on "beyond ODA" emerge from postcolonial studies and jointly enrich the work on fragile states, conflict, forced displacement and migration. These discussions entail the need to engage with research partners across various world regions, bringing different perspectives and degrees of affectedness into joint sense-making and policy engagement.

In addition to these deepened foci in the different departments of IDOS, cross-departmental and interdisciplinary exchange is fostered through **cross-cutting thematic engagements**, which range from short-term agile task forces that bring expertise on particular topics

together across the different departments to long-term cross-departmental work under the topic “Sustainable Futures”. These cross-cutting topics and cooperation formats are sketched out below.

- 2. Policy fields:** The socially just transformation of production systems and consumption patterns with the aim of securing a future within our planetary boundaries requires promoting the political will, politics and policy coherence for sustainable futures, both within and between all relevant policy fields. This entails fostering synergies across economic, social and environmental policy areas; identifying and managing trade-offs as well as reconciling domestic and international objectives; and addressing the spillovers of domestic policies on other countries and future generations. IDOS supports these searches for finding ways to strengthen policy coherence and manage the interfaces between policy fields by analysing synergies and trade-offs among policy goals and instruments within and across policy fields – from the global to sub-national levels – as well as the politics related to this. The policy fields in focus range from development policy and other traditional development-related sectors (e.g. food, energy, water, health, education) to environment, science, economic, foreign and security policies. In addition to analysing the substantive policy decisions made in these and other policy fields, our research will focus on the decision-making processes through which these are adopted at the national and regional levels (e.g. EU and African Union (AU)), in international fora (UN, international financial institutes (IFIs)), and critically accompany club governance formats (e.g. G20, G7, BRICS) and the politics behind these decision-making processes.

The shift in our attention lies *first* in the focus on the spillover effects of decision-making from one country and region to another (e.g. via supply chains, standard-setting procedures, diffusion, transnationalism). *Second*, three policy fields that have been a part of IDOS’ work, albeit less studied, are moving into sharper focus: science and education, health, and agriculture – all of which will now receive more attention. These policy fields act as crucial mid- to long-term levers of societal change that have spillover effects into other sectors and between different transformative fields (e.g. energy, transport, and nutrition) while substantially contributing to the shaping of international cooperation. Consequently, IDOS will strengthen its work on and in these fields.

- 3. Multi-level governance and politics of scale:** With the growth of the institute, a further differentiation is taking place with regard to the scales and levels at the centre of analyses and advice, as well as their interactions. As such, IDOS connects the research on external policy fields, including their respective logics, institutional landscapes and instruments. We also link research on the system of global governance and cooperation as a whole with local-level research in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and selectively in Europe (i.e. implementation of the 2030 Agenda, see box on p. 7) regarding empirical realities on the ground. By doing so, IDOS is building on a strong tradition in multi-level approaches, purposefully pursuing thematic research fields from, for example, the level of a village or community in a catchment area in eastern Jordan to national, regional or UN-level water management negotiations, and vice versa. This includes a more explicit pursuit of dynamic research designs and methodologies (e.g. multi-sited ethnographies, follow the innovation, follow the migrant approaches) as well as the ambition to integrate micro data with macro data for the production of system knowledge. As such, IDOS increasingly practises an amalgam of “bottom up” development and transregional cooperation research plus empirical policy research in Germany and Europe, as well as on the level of regional bodies

(e.g. EU, AU, Mercosur) and multilateral organisations – the pursuit of the latter often taking place within transnational consortia.

“How”: in partnership, moving target and futuring

- 4. In partnership:** Partnership-based approaches in research, policy advice and training will systematically be developed further, as they should form the core of knowledge-generating approaches at IDOS and its extended networks. Our approach focusses on reciprocal exchanges and agenda-setting for joint research, policy advice and training. It also includes longer-term research cooperation – including stays at partner institutes in Africa, Asia and Latin America – and acting as a host institution for partners conducting research within the German and European policy-making spheres, on questions prevalent for the transformational processes required for sustainable futures. Furthermore, partnership – in our understanding – includes jointly implemented research, which can help to prevent knowledge from being produced in disciplinary or geographic isolation. This joint knowledge production is the basis for the development of cooperation strategies for sustainable futures and respective policy advisory activities.
- 5. Moving target research:** The global challenges characterising our world today and the urgencies to deal with them lead to accelerated social change. Hartmut Rosa speaks of “social acceleration”. Many of the societal, political, economic and ecological situations that we study a) are characterised by a high degree of dynamism and b) change during the course of a research project, sometimes to such a degree that there is a risk for possible “solutions” and “insights” to not apply by the time the research project comes to an end. We study highly dynamic contexts. This requires equally dynamic and adaptive research designs and methodologies, as well as active public communication and engagement. Inspired by respective discussions in development studies and social constructivist innovation research, here we speak of “moving target research” – research that has to adapt its design and methodologies to the ways in which the research question (the “target”) is changing throughout the course of the research. This “moving target research” calls for a reflection of the research designs and methods of data collection and analysis. Methods that allow for the in-depth study of a situation at a given point in time – one might speak of “static” methods – have to be combined with more agile approaches. These range from multi-sited research designs and “follow the ...” approaches (e.g. follow the water, follow the innovation, follow the migrant) documenting, for instance, how the outlook on life of a migrant changes during and as part of the process of migrating, to the assessment of the dynamics that unfold between different types of global change processes (e.g. climate change and state fragility).
- 6. Future studies:** Advising political decision-making and building a science–policy–society interface today to shape the world of tomorrow require an understanding of long-term trends. They will allow us to better recognise the structures that create path dependencies for the future and to identify alternative pathways. This also includes the analysis of shocks that alter possible pathways. It is a task that requires immense analytical capacities and intellectual agility in a world characterised by the speeds of change that we are encountering today. In close collaboration with partner institutes, IDOS will continue to build its capacities for inter- and transdisciplinary scenario analysis and development, including cooperation with natural sciences. Our focus lies on political scenarios and the interaction of developments such as regime change (autocracy-democracy), institutional and governance quality as well as inequalities with the effects of climate change, natural resource overuse and

related policies. We aim to extend our work on building sustainability scenarios while drawing upon our previous work on, for example, the future of multilateralism and continuing to develop our methodological skills for futuring.

This evolution of IDOS' research scope entails an increasingly interdisciplinary and partner-based multi-perspective approach. Our research addresses important gaps in the state of the art of particular thematic areas that are of relevance in order to tackle key sustainable development challenges. This also entails that our empirical research approach emphasises long-term engagement and interaction with and in the studied context and further strengthening of regional, area studies and language expertise for several regions. Moreover, we see value in using different methodologies – with all of their strengths and weaknesses – as they are essential for gaining the necessary insights to advance our knowledge. Along this line, we apply, welcome and aim to combine the knowledge created by more factor-centric and more outcome-centric research designs in order to be able to assess the causal relationships between factors, but also to understand the diversity of factors explaining an outcome or phenomenon. Furthermore, we invest in our research skills and data-management infrastructure. The aim is to make our empirical research more widely available and to more explicitly build upon and complement previous quantitative and qualitative research efforts. We do this in order to create databases that go beyond one-time efforts and ensure that we and others have the opportunity to build advisory services around long-term data series at different scales and levels. The transdisciplinary exchange processes for policy-making that is geared towards the common good are – today and even more so in the future – being systematically sought with international organisations (e.g. UN, World Trade Organization (WTO)), regional bodies such as the EU and AU, as well as club governance formats (G7, G20, BRICS).

In the following, IDOS' institutional strategy 2025-2031, "Sustainable Futures: Research, Policy Advice and Training for a Collaborative Multipolar World", gives insights into these shifts in – and further developments of – foci in our research programme, our knowledge cooperation and training programmes, our doctoral programme, as well as our conceptualisation of research-based policy advice in practice.

2 RESEARCH

At IDOS, we examine the dialectical and potentially productive relationships between “sustainability” and “development” and develop research-based approaches to sustainable development. Through our research-based policy advisory work and postgraduate training programmes, we help to reflect upon – and offer ways forward for – the collective and inclusive making of future. This one planetary future is here understood as an amalgam and interplay of many different sustainable futures, each a contextualised version of the necessary foundations for human life on Earth and within our planetary ecological, social, political and economic boundaries. Sustainable futures are increasingly contested in an often geopolitically and geo-economically dominated world.

Our research programme studies the dialectic relationship between “sustainability” and “development” by placing the focus on core areas undergoing transformational change (e.g. energy, transport, agriculture and natural resources, demography, health) and the political foundations of this change. The research is application-oriented and directed by our normative compass to find practicable pathways to and solutions for sustainable futures. The core areas of change are studied with a focus on actors and everyday practices of livelihood provision, on the (formal/informal) structures and institutional landscapes crucially shaping change processes (e.g. (sub-)national governments, regional organisations, IFIs, the UN, club governance formats), or on the transformational levers of change, policy and financial instruments shaping global trade and financial systems. The strategies of IDOS’ four research departments are specified in the following sections.

2.1 Inter- and Transnational Cooperation

Global policies for sustainable futures rely on cross-border cooperation to address fundamental risks such as poverty and inequality, violent conflicts, public health challenges and the consequences of climate change. This necessitates a combination of inter- and transnational cooperation. *International cooperation* – that is, cooperation between governments, including through inter-governmental organisations and platforms (such as the UN, G20, and others) – is vitally important for solving problems effectively. In order to successfully address shared challenges, the promotion of sustainable futures also requires *transnational cooperation*. The inclusion of non-governmental and non-public actors – such as parliaments, civil society organisations, the private sector or research communities – across governance levels and regions is another crucial feature of joint action towards sustainable futures.

The profound changes in the international system over the last years, including fundamental geopolitical shifts and conflicts, have provided countries in the Global South and Southern platforms such as the G77 and the BRICS grouping with a renewed sense of common identity. Alliances of the so-called West have experienced a similar level of reinvigoration. For member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the relevance of mixed partnerships based on interests and/or values – and thus also relations with (groups across) the Global South – is likely to increase. At the same time, European and more generally Western perceptions of international cooperation have moved from viewing ongoing power shifts as a “multipolar” moment towards seeing them through the lens of geopolitical competition and systemic rivalry.

Against this backdrop, the department analyses inter- and transnational cooperation – including South-North, North-South, South-South, triangular and (sub-)regional cooperation – and the structural, institutional and thematic factors influencing these relations. The main focus is directed at the political economy of cooperation structures and actors in external decision-making, with a particular focus on development policy. We thus reflect on and unpack fundamental concepts such as “Global South”, “cooperation” and “development”. Examples going beyond the traditional framework of development policy research include, for instance, analysing inter-urban cooperation between Arctic countries. Although development policy is not the only instrument of OECD countries for shaping relations with partners in the Global South, it continues to act as a key source of public finance for sustainable development and as external proof of the credibility of the OECD countries’ contributions to global development, notably regarding the internationally recognised commitments of providing ODA. In addition, development cooperation offers concrete tools for working with partners to jointly tackle local and global challenges (from public health to accelerating the transition to renewable energy). At the same time, there is an academic debate on the need for changes to the development policy system, whether they be of an incremental or fundamental nature. Development policy is increasingly coming under structural pressure to justify itself as a consequence of contestation and politicisation due to domestic political changes and the rise of right-wing and populist parties in Europe and large parts of the OECD. In addition, there is a need for reform with regard to the question of how socio-economic development in countries of the Global South can be supported, while at the same time more resources are needed for the provision of global public goods.

Future research and policy advice activities in the department will increasingly pay attention to the geopolitical and geo-economic context of cooperation – such as the changing context for global agendas in support of sustainable development – and the ways in which different forms of inter- and transnational cooperation affect alliances and the prospects for globally shared agendas.

The department and its projects are set to be guided by the three research clusters that structure its current and future projects. Most projects contribute to more than one cluster:

Norms, standards and conceptual foundations

How and through which decision-making processes are norms and standards developed in inter- and transnational cooperation? What is the substance of norms and standards that different (groups of) actors and institutions can agree on, and to what extent are they ambitious enough to address global challenges? How can fundamental concepts and the implicit or explicit categories that our research engages with be defined and further developed (such as “Global South”, “development” and “cooperation”)?

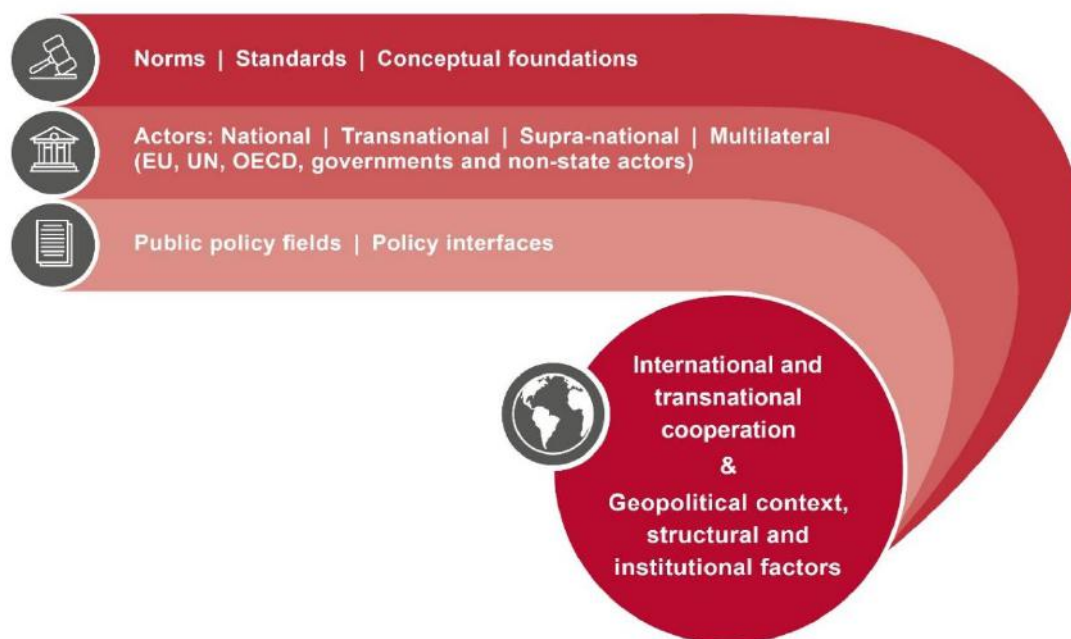
National, transnational, supra-national and multilateral actors

What are the objectives and interests of different actors and/or organisations such as the EU, the UN, the OECD, as well as public and non-public actors? To what extent and under what conditions are they effective in reaching their goals? To what extent do they contribute towards sustainable futures?

Research on public policy fields and policy interfaces

How are the substance and the instruments of policies in support of global sustainable development framed, and what are the implications of extant framings? How are linkages between development policy and other areas (such as security, foreign affairs and climate policies) managed? Where does inter- and transnational cooperation need to be reformed in order to more effectively contribute towards sustainable futures?

Figure: Department Inter- and Transnational Cooperation



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The department's research is based on public policy research in our respective policy fields (development policy and others), international political economy concepts and international relations as well as international organisations theories. Projects use qualitative and quantitative methods – often in joint application – in order to conduct theory-driven and empirical research, usually with a focus on actors (e.g. states, multilateral and EU institutions, bilateral development agencies, informal international platforms) and/or cooperation patterns (e.g. evidence-based statements on development effectiveness; interface management between different policy fields). Empirical research is conducted on all country groups at different levels (local, national, regional, international/global).

The individual research projects of the department typically aim to be of direct relevance for policy- and decision-makers. This is why executive, legislative and other policy-oriented networks are highly relevant for the department's work. Several projects and topics across the department have a strong cross-departmental orientation to all other research and training departments, such as cooperation patterns in different regional settings (sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa (MENA)), in different country context situations (e.g. different governance approaches of partner countries for development policy) or linkages between different policy fields (e.g. development and climate finance).

Finally, the department's research, advisory and teaching activities are conducted in collaboration with international partner institutions, such as universities, think tanks and other research bodies. In the Global South, for instance, they include member institutions of the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST). European and international partners include the European Think Tank Group (ETTg) as well as other national and international think tanks and universities.

Innovations vis-à-vis strategy 2018-2024

Since the 2018-2024 strategy came into force, geopolitical tensions have become an increasingly visible reference for international cooperation efforts. As a consequence, commitments to global sustainable development now play a less important role for how cooperation is thought about and practiced. Instead, processes and debates that operate at the intersection of development-related themes and geopolitical considerations have increased in relevance. The expansion of China's South-South cooperation, for instance, is considered by some as a popular offer driven by developing-country solidarity, whereas others perceive it as a tool for geo-economic influence. At the same time, actors across the developing world have seen their "Southern" identities become much more pronounced, not least because all major global players have been trying to step up partnerships and alliances for economic and geopolitical purposes. These trends also have a significant impact on other development cooperation actors – including Western states, the EU, the OECD and the UN system – and their policies, thereby informing the department's research and policy advisory work. As part of this ongoing effort to address the drivers shaping international cooperation prospects, the department has set up a project on "Geopolitics and the Global South" and now emphasises perspectives that combine development-related concerns and geopolitical dynamics across its portfolio.

2.2 Transformation of Economic and Social Systems

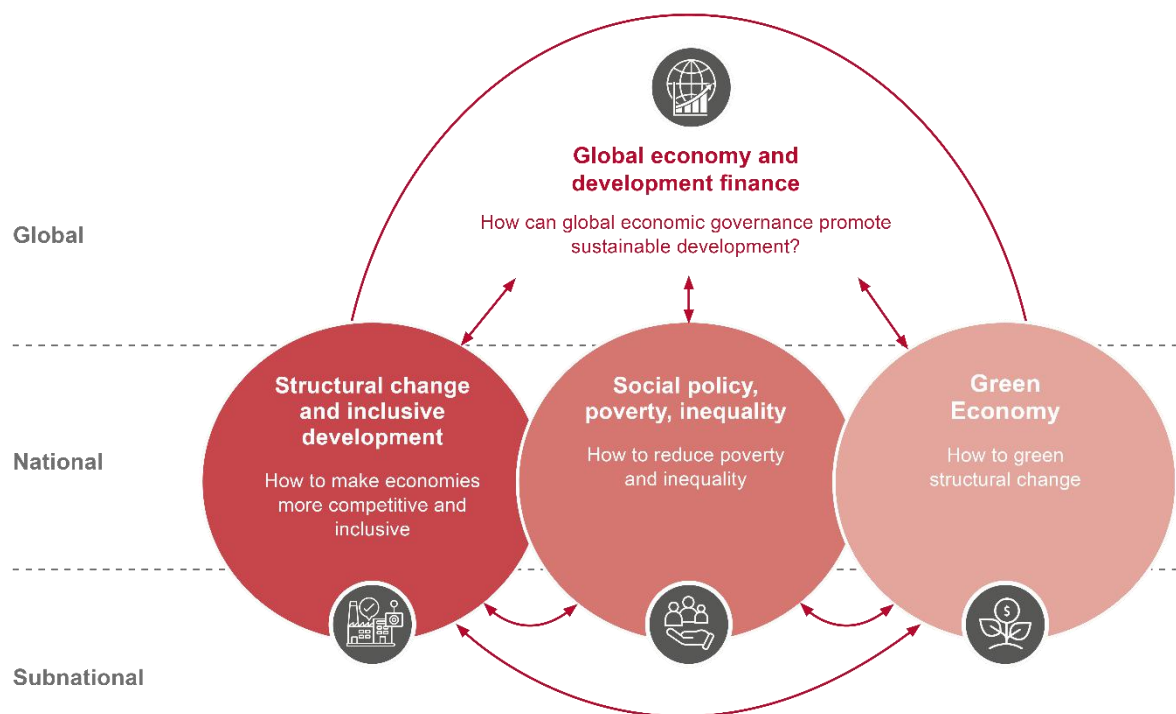
The global economic system is misaligned with the objectives set in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Economic and social developments are unbalanced, as large segments of the global population are unable to escape poverty and malnutrition, many national economies are falling further behind in productivity, and inequality is rising in many parts of the world, while unprecedented amounts of wealth are being accumulated by the super-rich. At the same time, the world economy is transgressing our planetary boundaries. Economic systems need to decarbonise and shift towards resource-saving circular systems. Multiple crises are exacerbating the challenges, for example through the geopolitical fragmentation of international markets, supply chain disruptions and unsustainable debt levels.

The department on "Transformation of Economic and Social Systems" focusses on the design of policies to promote the economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. The department examines the impact of global economic dynamics on low- and middle-income countries, with a particular focus on the effects of global megatrends such as climate change, increasing geopolitical rivalries, and the erosion of many institutions of global governance. In so doing, this research department systematically investigates the interaction of globalisation and global governance with national economic and social policy strategies and measures to promote the global common good. This multi-level perspective combined with the systematic reflection of interdependencies between sustainability dimensions offer comparative advantages vis-à-vis other research institutes.

The key question of our research is therefore: Which strategies are suitable for shaping economic structural change in low- and middle-income countries, such that productivity increases broadly and sustainably, and poverty, malnutrition and inequality decrease within our planetary boundaries?

The research is organised in four clusters. The first three clusters focus on the economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development, respectively. This allows us to forge strong relationships with specialised experts in the respective fields. At the same time, essentially all research projects address specific interfaces between sustainability dimensions. At the centre of the fourth cluster is the global regulatory framework, which sets incentives, or disincentives, for the transformation towards sustainability. In the four complementary research clusters, we thus analyse the design of socio-economic policies and develop solution strategies, taking the interdependence of national policies and the global regulatory framework into account. Overall, the combination of a) accumulated experience of policy research in low- and middle-income countries with b) research on reforms of global economic governance mechanisms enables our department to better understand multi-level interdependencies and offer policy advice on that account for international regulatory requirements as well as national development imperatives.

Figure: Department Transformation of Economic and Social Systems



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Structural change and inclusive development

The main research question in this cluster is: How can societies advance their economic structural transformation in a way that makes them more productive and competitive, and at the same time socially more inclusive? We pay particular attention to economic opportunities of less privileged groups, such as small-scale producers, informal workers and women. The strategies for successful structural change in this sense must tackle climate change and environmental degradation, technological change, and the rising geopolitical fragmentation of international markets in ways that create more and better economic opportunities while ensuring that dwindling parts of the economy, such as smallholder agriculture, can gradually be transformed as new opportunities arise. We explore appropriate industrial policies, for example making the best use of foreign direct investment and global value chains for technological learning and upgrading. We also investigate the future of work in an era of increasing digitalisation and automation as well as the effects of the shift towards ecologically sustainable production and consumption practices on labour markets. Regarding agriculture, we seek to identify strategies for the environmentally sustainable intensification that improve the livelihoods of smallholders and farm workers and gradually transform the agricultural sector from subsistence- and survival-oriented to business-oriented while contributing to food security. All of these strategies look different according to levels of economic and institutional development. In low-income countries, the main challenges are to increase agricultural productivity in an ecologically sustainable manner; to diversify industry and services for domestic and regional markets; and to gain access to expanded markets via international value chains. In middle-income countries, the focus is increasingly on developing more complex production networks, strengthening technological absorption capacity and advancing into areas of higher value-added in global value chains. Moreover, economic structures and processes, opportunities and threats vary greatly across countries, and therefore call for research at the country level.

Green economy

Current levels of economic activity systematically exceed ecological limits. This holds for the emission of greenhouse gases, the overuse of resources, the threat to biodiversity and the introduction of too much nitrogen and phosphorus into the soil and water bodies. The transformation towards a climate-neutral and circular economy and the associated structural change poses enormous challenges for both the financial sector and the real economy. It is important to target ecological goals in such a way that direct economic and social improvements (“co-benefits”) are achieved for each economy at the same time – also because this is the only way to ensure social acceptance for reforms. The central concept of the research cluster is “green industrial policy”. This includes measures for the real economy and the financial sector. Ongoing research work is dedicated to the following topics, among others: How can local value-added, employment and technological capabilities be increased in newly emerging green sectors? Here, one focus is on renewable energy and green hydrogen. Also, given the rapid rise of middle classes that are emulating unsustainable consumption patterns, the research looks at incentives and business models for sustainable consumption, including for sustainable buildings, mobility solutions and circular economy solutions. In the domain of green finance, a focus is on financial system reforms to redirect capital flows into, and mobilise capital for, ecologically sustainable activities. Moreover, we explore how eco-fiscal reforms that tax pollution and reduce fossil fuel subsidies can be designed to keep the burden for low-income groups to a minimum and channel revenues into pro-poor spending. Researchers also

ask how decarbonisation impacts financial markets and the global economy. Although solutions for low- and middle-income countries are at the centre of the research interest, the research group is also concerned with European policies, as Europe is one of the trendsetters of green industrial policy in many fields.

Social policy, poverty, inequality

Social policy – defined here as social protection, health, education and labour market policy – is important for cushioning the possible negative effects of structural change and making it more inclusive. Firstly, it supports people in multidimensional poverty, protects others from impoverishment due to risks such as unemployment, illness, old age, drought and/or economic crises, and is essential for reducing excessive inequalities, including gender inequalities. Secondly, social policy strengthens the willingness of people with low incomes to invest in physical or human capital, thereby improving their income opportunities. In this way, it promotes economic growth, which primarily takes place among poorer social groups (pro-poor growth). Thirdly, social policy promotes social cohesion and the social contract between government and society, thus reducing the risk of states falling apart when structural change leads to social upheaval. Social policy is therefore not only essential for achieving the “social SDGs” (SDGs 1-6 and 10), but also the economic SDGs (SDGs 8-9) and the political goal of peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) (which establishes links with department “Transformation of Political (Dis-)order”), and can contribute to the realisation of the ecological goals (SDGs 11-15) (which establishes links with department “Environmental Governance”). Our guiding question is how social policy must be designed in order to accompany (ecological) structural change, reduce multidimensional poverty and inequality, as well as strengthen citizens’ willingness to invest and promote social cohesion and social contracts? More specifically, we ask what a coherent and adaptive social policy system looks like, for example how various social policy measures can be combined with economic policies such as tax policy, green and digital economic policy, or agricultural policy to pave the way out of poverty for the poor (and also contribute to food security). In addition, we develop improved measurements of multidimensional poverty and inequality and test the effectiveness of social policy measures in different contexts. We investigate how social policy affects social cohesion and national social contracts and how it can enhance resilience to covariant shocks such as pandemics or the effects of climate change.

World economy and development finance

Global economic governance, that is, the global regulatory framework for trade, investment and financial markets, sets incentives (or disincentives) for achieving the target systems in the three clusters above. The focus lies on the following research question: How can global economic governance be designed to promote the economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development, while also considering current global crises (including debt crises) and current political-economic room for manoeuvre? The spotlight is on the following aspects: a) how to design trade and investment policies to promote sustainable development (WTO reform, preferential trade agreements, unilateral measures such as border carbon adjustments, sectoral approaches such as for green steel) and b) how to make the international and national financial systems more sustainable in order to enable a fair and resilient economy (e.g. Global Debt Governance system and IFIs, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, sustainable finance governance architecture, financial market development). This results in synergetic links within the department, particularly with the “Green Economy”

cluster in the area of sustainable finance and trade and environment, and the “Structural Change and Inclusive Development” cluster on export-based growth paths in the context of global value chains, but also across department boundaries through joint research interests on climate finance (department “Environmental Governance”) and international, bilateral and multilateral development finance (department “Inter- and Transnational Cooperation”).

Methodologies and networks

The research department draws on the methodological and conceptual instruments of economics, but it also uses other disciplines, including those of political science and geography, and often works across disciplines. Our research systematically considers political economy perspectives and frequently goes beyond conventional economic approaches. Research in the department combines quantitative and qualitative methods and designs, including econometric analyses, modelling, behavioural economic experiments and qualitative social science. We frequently generate large databases to be able to answer pressing research questions on economic and social policies, for example, data on environmental provisions in trade agreements (TRade and ENvironment Database, TREND), the Investment Facilitation Index and a new multidimensional and gender-specific poverty index.

Researchers cooperate with internationally leading universities (such as Oxford and Berkeley), and very often work with those in emerging economies (such as the University of Cape Town). In addition to IDOS’ networks (Managing Global Governance (MGG) and Shaping Futures (SF)), researchers in this department engage in academic and policy-oriented networks such as the African Economic Research Consortium, the Economic Research Forum and the Research Network Sustainable Global Supply Chains. The department also has strong ties with international organisations such as the WTO, UNIDO, UNCTAD, IRENA, UNECA, UN-ECLAC and the World Bank.

Innovations vis-à-vis strategy 2018-2024

Over the last years, the department has developed some new research priorities. Following the pandemic, health research has become a prominent topic within the department, extending the existing expertise on social protection to an increasingly relevant policy field. Gender research has been strengthened in several projects, with a focus on labour markets, social protection and poverty profiles. With regard to green economy trends, considerable efforts are now being devoted to the development implications of the emerging hydrogen economy. Moreover, links have been, and will further be, strengthened between research on global economic governance (Cluster “World Economy and Development Finance” above) and on trends in national economic development (Clusters “Structural Change and Inclusive Development” and “Green Economy”). This entails the integration of econometric cross-country studies on trade and global value chains with specific sector deep-dives into specific value chains; as well as how geopolitical changes – rivalries among superpowers, rising protectionism, the erosion of rule-setting institutions – affect national policy spaces in low- and middle-income countries.

2.3 Environmental Governance

Despite multiple international environmental agreements and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, humanity is not on track for meeting climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation and environmental goals. The failure to transform societies and economic systems at sufficient speed has led to rapidly aggravating interconnected crises related to climate change, biodiversity, water, oceans and planetary health. These crises pose threats to human well-being – especially in low- and middle-income countries and for marginalised social groups – and aggravate “glocal” environmental injustices. Inequalities, geopolitical tensions and authoritarianism further strain environmental governance from global to local levels.

The department asks how governance and institutions, power constellations and justice considerations promote or hinder transformations to sustainability based on equity and recognition. With a focus on climate, biodiversity, water and oceans, the department analyses multi-level environmental governance strategies, their effectiveness and legitimacy, the power dynamics and contested knowledge associated with them, and their social and environmental justice implications. The work takes into account that certain climate change mitigation measures may further aggravate conflicts concerning natural resources and environmental injustices. The inter- and transdisciplinary research seeks to support transformations to a good life for all within our planetary boundaries and better cooperation on global and regional environmental public goods in an increasingly multipolar world. Cluster 1 takes global environmental governance and cluster 2 resource conflicts and place-based social-ecological transformations as starting points. The clusters differ in their theoretical contributions, main methods and policy audiences.

Global environmental governance and (sub-)national transformation strategies

This cluster analyses how global environmental governance evolves and how it translates into national and subnational transformation strategies. It seeks to give answers on how the implementation of the Rio Conventions and the 2030 Agenda can be accelerated in a just manner. Key research questions include: What are the lessons from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Global Biodiversity Framework for the negotiation and design of a post-2030 Agenda and global environmental governance (collaboration with department “Inter- and Transnational Cooperation”)? What do transformations to sustainability and just transitions entail, what are the priorities and differences across actor groups and regions, and how do specific approaches play out in terms of environmental sustainability and social justice (collaboration with department “Transformation of Economic and Social Systems”)? How do global, national and sub-national governance and finance mechanisms for adaptation, the response to residual loss and damage, and human (im-)mobility evolve, under which conditions do they enable effective and just local adaptation, and how can they be strengthened? What is the role of national sustainability institutions in the implementation of the Rio Conventions and the 2030 Agenda? What strategies help close the implementation gap between urban climate pledges and policy outputs and accelerate urban transformations (collaboration across departments)?

Natural resources governance for the common good

This cluster takes specific natural resource-use conflicts and place-based transformations (e.g. in river basins or in coastal regions) as a starting point and asks how they can be co-governed in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner to serve the common good. Key research questions include: What drives selected place-based, social-ecological transformations and natural resource conflicts (environmental change, multi-level governance, multi-level politics, infrastructural development), and what are their justice and environmental implications? How do contested epistemologies and different ontologies shape resource-use (conflicts) and related policy processes? How do environmental paradigms travel and influence social justice, local resilience and environmental sustainability? Which conditions and institutions support coordination and cooperation to manage resource-use and use conflicts in an inclusive, just and sustainable manner (collaboration with department “Transformation of Political (Dis-)order”)? Which governance mechanisms allow to better account for interlinkages between different policy fields (e.g. related to the water–energy–food nexus, One Health or Nature-based Solutions) (collaboration with department “Transformation of Economic and Social Systems” and department “Transformation of Political (Dis-)order”)? Application fields range from water, nature conservation and restoration, ocean and coastal, energy to planetary health governance.

Research in the department on “Environmental Governance” is inter- and partly trans-disciplinary, drawing upon contributions from political science, institutional economics, human geography, sociology and anthropology, and in some projects in cooperation with natural sciences. Researchers primarily conduct their work at the global level and in and with the Global South, but increasingly also in the Global North to advance comparisons and foster mutual learning. The department aims to strengthen inter- and transdisciplinary research partnerships with partners from the Global South, inter alia by establishing selected long-term research sites. The “Global Environmental Governance and (Sub-)national Transformation Strategies” cluster primarily contributes to the literatures on global environmental and sustainability governance (e.g. Earth System Governance network), policy implementation and climate adaptation and resilience. It strongly draws on document analyses studying strategies, commitments, institutions and partnerships, complemented by surveys and qualitative interviews as well as the compilation and analysis of databases (e.g. on national sustainability institutions). Policy advice is geared towards German and EU development cooperation, the UN system in the fields of climate and biodiversity governance (e.g. through COP side events), G20 and transnational networks (e.g. C40, ICLEI). In the natural resources governance cluster, researchers contribute to political ecology (e.g. Political Ecology Network, POLLEN), environmental justice research (e.g. Enjust network) and the Ostrom school (e.g. International Association for the Study of the Commons), seeking to bring related insights on the roles of power and institutions into a productive dialogue. The work primarily draws on field research, applying different methods – including moving target research and (multi-sited) ethnography – and is geared towards case study comparisons. The researchers seek to develop evidence-based recommendations for the legitimate governance of place-based transformations and natural resources. They advise decision-makers and sometimes also non-governmental and community-based organisations or public media in partner countries as well as German ministries and implementation agencies active in supporting environmental and resource governance in the Global South.

Figure: Department Environmental Governance



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Innovations vis-à-vis strategy 2018-2024

Given the failure to meet environmental goals on a global scale, next to a focus on governance and institutions for transformations to sustainability, the new strategy puts “glocal” environmental justice struggles and associated power dynamics at its centre. The distinct theoretical contributions, methods and policy audiences of both clusters have been sharpened. Cluster “Global environmental governance” transcends previous research by drawing lessons for the post-2030 Agenda, critically engaging with transformation and justice concepts and strengthening research on the multi-level governance of adaptation, residual risks and resilience. Next to studying resource conflicts, Cluster “Natural resource governance” adds research on place-based social-ecological transformations, strengthens environmental justice research, furthers the dialogue between institutionalist and power-based approaches, and takes new research lines forward on restoration, coastlines and One Health.

2.4 Transformation of Political (Dis-)order

Political challenges hinder collective action for the common good and question the ability of political leaders and societies to act collectively in a fundamental way at all levels of governance. Sustainable futures are thus at stake. Democracy and peace are particularly at stake: The autocratisation of political orders goes hand in hand with the polarisation of societies and poses a clear threat to peaceful decision-making. The growing number of violent conflicts and wars with global consequences is an indicator that more actors consider the use of violence a legitimate means of international relations. Among other outcomes, this forces people to leave their home countries. Continued autocratisation and increasing violence indicate that political institutions and administrations are failing to temper normative and distributive conflicts. In particular, democracy, which is designed to process conflict, is decreasingly fit for purpose. With increasing divides in society over its constitutive values, it also becomes more difficult to mobilise material and non-material resources for the common good.

The research department “Transformation of Political (Dis-)order” aims to understand and explain how to overcome the normative and institutional barriers that hinder political decision-making for sustainable futures. The overarching question that guides our work is: What political, normative and institutional preconditions enable action that is oriented towards the common good? In particular, we seek to identify generalisable models of political order and forms of statehood that foster social cohesion and promote the common good, and to learn how these can be created, reformed or consolidated as well as what role (can) international actors play in these processes.

A multi-level approach serves as a common analytical vanishing point for addressing the overarching research question in three intertwined clusters.

Democracy in a polarized world

This cluster focusses on how democratic political orders emerge and change through the interactions between different domestic actors, as well as the influence of inter- and transnational actors. It is particularly interested in the interplay between autocratisation and polarisation as well as anti-pluralist trends. What is the relevance of political attitudes, norms and values in polarisation, and how does this interact with democratisation and autocratisation? How can inter- and transnational cooperation promote democracy and protect it against democratic erosion and autocracy promotion? It cooperates with Department “Inter- and Transnational Cooperation” in this area.

Conflict, displacement and fragility

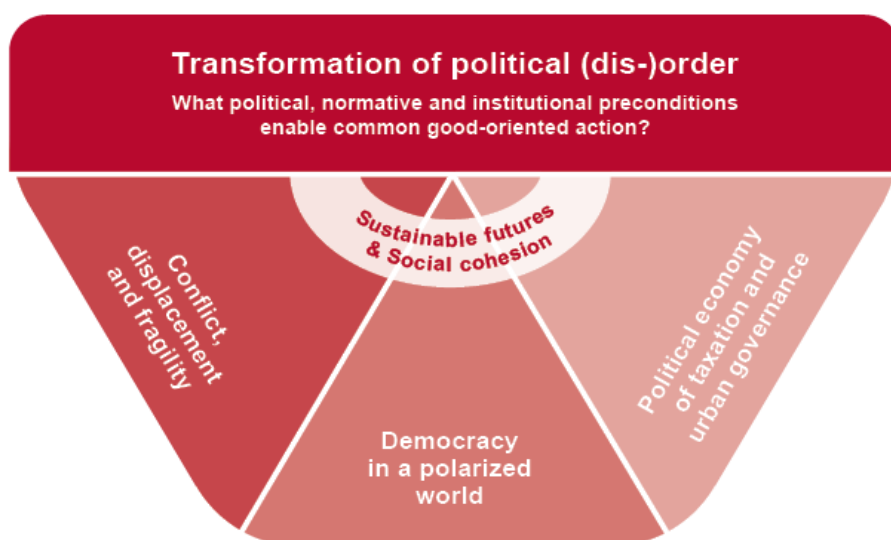
There is a need to understand better what makes for stable, cohesive and peaceful states and societies. The work in this cluster aims at better understanding the dynamics and identifying the institutions, policies and actors that help overcome the challenges that conflict, fragility and displacement pose, as well as what role external engagement can play in this. It asks: How can societal peace be strengthened in conflict, fragile and displacement contexts? What role can international actors play to support social cohesion and prevent conflict (recurrence)? What are the dynamics between political transformation, fragility and political violence? It cooperates with Department “Inter- and Transnational Cooperation” in this area.

Political economy of taxation and urban governance

This cluster focusses on the interaction between society and state institutions. Most prominently, we work on two enablers of policies oriented towards the common good: the capacity of societies to engage in collective action and their ability to mobilise resources for that purpose. With regard to the former, we focus on urban governance as the primary location of state-society interactions. Regarding the latter, we concentrate on taxation as a main element of the fiscal contract. Based on a multi-level approach to governance (local to global), we ask how international cooperation shapes national and global policies in these fields that are oriented towards the common good.

Two cross-cutting themes facilitate knowledge creation across clusters. First, the issue concerning how to foster and sustain social cohesion is a common research interest of all clusters. The main aim is to identify which strategies for tempering polarisation and political challenges by building social cohesion have worked in different societies and across sectors. We co-create knowledge on this topic with colleagues from the “Transformation of Economic and Social Systems” and “Environmental Governance” departments, who bring in measurement capability, insights on migration and a regional focus (MENA). Second, current political developments threaten the social cohesion of societies and create tremendous uncertainties for the political future of societies and their pathways to sustainability. We therefore use our knowledge on political institutions and reforms to co-create inter-disciplinary scenarios, which often do not include quantified political factors.

Figure: Department Transformation of Political (Dis-)order



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The conceptual and methodological aspects of our work contribute towards the further development of empirical country groupings. They serve both as a starting point for cross-country analyses and for the selection of policy instruments in specific country contexts, such as social cohesion, fragile states or tax expenditures. Part of the research strategy entails the development of databases based on primary and/or secondary data coding, such as the disaggregated peacebuilding and democracy promotion database. This also includes the generation of hard-to-access data in low- and middle-income countries. We use mixed-method

approaches, which integrate quantitative and qualitative methods systematically (as opposed to a parallel implementation of different methods). A diverse range of methods are used for data analysis and are geared to the respective substantive issues. We combine quantitative methods such as survival analysis, event history modelling, (Bayesian) regression analysis or inferential network analysis with methods of qualitative social research such as theory-based process tracing and qualitative comparison, or we work at the interface of both through qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). A flagship for mixed methods is the approach of “Impact-oriented accompanying research”, which combines experimental or quasi-experimental designs geared to isolate the impact of international cooperation interventions with qualitative methodological approaches to understand why associated intended and unintended effects did (or did not) materialise.

This empirical research is anchored in political science, political economy and political sociology. It is based on theories at the intersection of comparative politics and international relations, in particular comparative neo-institutionalism, historical institutionalism, behavioural approaches, political sociology and psychology, and public choice and political economy theories. Knowledge is created through national and international collaborations with universities and research institutions in all regions of the world. Institutional cooperations include Afrobarometer, Jigjiga University in Ethiopia, and Maseno University in Kenya.

Innovations vis-à-vis strategy 2018-2024

Our research on political transformations will be – in line with our empirical subject matter – more problem-oriented in the coming years. But the objective remains to work in a solutions-oriented way that helps to overcome the analysed problems. We study the interaction of autocratisation, polarisation and violent conflicts in online and offline spaces, conditions of flight in low- and middle-income countries, fiscal policy problems in resource mobilisation and the challenges of rapid urbanisation. We analyse the patterns and interlinkages of these problems in order to better understand how international and domestic actors can address them and how they can contribute to sustainable futures through democracy, peace and social cohesion. The cross-cutting work on integrating political development into sustainability scenarios will help us to illustrate feasible and constructive political futures.

2.5 Cross-cutting: sustainable futures as a collaborative research effort

“Sustainable futures”: a definition

We define sustainable futures as futures in which human life on Earth and within our planetary boundaries are ensured. Social, political and economic systems have been transformed in such a way that the needs of present generations are met, while the planetary foundations of human life on Earth are protected and the abilities of future generations, human life and cultures are given. As such, the notion of sustainable futures acts as an empirical, conceptual, methodological and normative compass for our research, training and policy advice.

Empirically, we ask how sustainable futures are envisioned in different societies around the globe and how the transformational pathways towards these futures are created. We argue that our world is characterised by a state in which “future” is immensely diverse and non-existent at the same time.

Conceptually, sustainable futures guide us by drawing on scholarly thought on “sustainable development” as well as discussions on “futuring” in Future Studies, Scenario Research, Knowledge Sociology and inter- and transdisciplinary scenario development. These debates have in common the conceptual reflection and search for how to envision and construct futures.

Methodologically, the joint search for sustainable futures guides us to – in the majority of our work – work in partnerships: in trans- and interdisciplinary formats as well as in partnerships across the globe and across sectors.

Normatively, sustainable futures guide us to contribute with our research, training and policy advisory activities to the transformation of our social, economic, political and cultural systems in ways that will indeed secure human life within our planetary boundaries.

IDOS research and policy work is organised in the four research departments outlined above, each comprising a number of research clusters, which are worked on in project teams representing the smallest organisational unit. In addition, our knowledge cooperation and training programmes as well as our PhD programme are located in our fifth scientific department, “Knowledge Cooperation and Training”, which is outlined below.

In many of the research projects, conceptual and empirical insights are generated on how sustainable futures can be envisaged and actively shaped. We aim at synthesising this work through the collaborative research efforts of the IDOS team on sustainable futures. This collaborative effort is guided by the following two questions:

1. Which type of science – and more importantly what type of science systems – are required for enabling sustainable futures?
2. What kind of global cooperation system is needed for sustainable futures?

Science and science systems for sustainable futures

Knowledge is one of the most important determinants of social, economic, political and ecological change processes, which build on formalised knowledge production and experiences as well as skills on how to apply various forms of (scientific and non-scientific everyday)

knowledge. Yet, there is not one global science system but multiple, largely nationally funded and organised science systems. Resources to support and fund research vary substantially across countries. Moreover, national science systems substantially differ with regard to basic versus application-oriented foci, thematic versus disciplinary or inter- and transdisciplinary organisation, freedom and independence of research, as well as performance orientation and standards, to name a few. In general, there is a substantial discrepancy between those well-resourced science systems that systematically study global challenges and their impacts and the science systems of those countries often disproportionately affected by global challenges. A key way to tackle this challenge is to increase international science and knowledge cooperation as a means to overcome resource constraints, work across disciplines and support joint knowledge production in order to jointly design transformational pathways into sustainable futures.

In the cross-cutting theme of “Science and Science Systems for Sustainable Futures”, IDOS engages in a cross-departmental, systematic examination of the political economies of globally diverse science systems, reflects on their respective socio-politically transformative potential and, together with partners, develops approaches to structurally strengthen this form of application-oriented excellence. In doing so, it places the work within projects and initiatives that are in continuous dialogue with each other, thus enabling analyses at a higher aggregation level than those developed in the individual studies and allowing for reflection of the institute’s position in a broader knowledge context.

Science and science systems for sustainable futures encompasses the following three areas:

- a. *Globalised science and local representation*: Global science-based institutions have gained relevance particularly by increasing networking and through the consolidation of top international research on topics such as climate change, species extinction and air pollution. The work of bodies such as the IPCC, IPBES and various UN decades are examples. Yet, it is the differences in the representation of scientific systems, regional contexts and country types that characterise this science and its impact in a multilateral context. At the centre of this interest area are structurally determined power asymmetries, with effects on scientific practice and on socio-politically transformative potential, as well as on how science actors navigate the international system (science diplomacy).
- b. *Science policy and national innovation systems*: Science policy and the design of national science and innovation systems differ globally in terms of financial and human resources, funding structures, the logics and interests that determine them, actor dynamics and degrees of implementation. The migration of qualified scientists from less resourced systems to science hubs remains a central problem. Low- and middle-income societies need to increasingly be positioned so as to keep track of technological progress in order to recognise relevant innovations at an early stage, assess their opportunities and risks, and make use of this information in national innovation systems (technology assessment).
- c. *Science-to-Policy*: This field of analysis focusses on the mobility, impact and effectiveness of knowledge, as well as the actor structures that enable knowledge diffusion. The question is how certain bodies of knowledge and scientific findings travel from one subsystem (science) to another (politics, private sector, society) and to what extent the processing of knowledge changes as part of the journey. Specifically, it is about the role of discourses (as cognitive structures for society as a whole) and narratives (as vehicles of knowledge transfer) in counselling processes between science

and other social subsystems, and exploring variations and similarities between different settings.

The work around these three issues will be synthesised in an international scientific conference in 2026. The aim is to use the insights of the conference to produce a special issue. This work is co-led by the Directorate and the Department “Knowledge Cooperation and Training”.

Global cooperation for sustainable futures

Sustainable development requires high-quality cooperation of state and non-state actors on a global scale. Although measures for sustainable development are primarily implemented at the local level, public, private and civil society actors need access to international financial markets, global value chains and institutions focussed on peaceful dispute resolution in order to achieve sustainable development, as for instance laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs. Global cooperation is also necessary if there is supposed to be a universally applicable target system beyond 2030, including indicator, monitoring and implementation frameworks. As important as global cooperation is for sustainable development – especially in view of the lack of achievements with regard to the SDGs – it is currently under pressure as a result of global power shifts, contestation of global governance structures, geopolitical rivalries, wars and weaknesses of multilateral regimes. The question therefore arises as to how global cooperation for sustainable development can be achieved in times of geopolitical crisis.

IDOS has been researching the implementation of sustainable development for many years, particularly with regard to trade-offs and conflicting goals at the local level, the necessary cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation at and across various governance levels, and the roles of relevant multilateral regimes and options for reform. In this cross-departmental initiative, the institute will bundle research insights both from the work produced at IDOS as well as from international research partners.

A particular focus will be placed on the further development of the global system of goals and implementation mechanisms set out in the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs. While political and other actors must currently focus on accelerating the implementation of the SDGs, research institutes and think tanks can lay the conceptual foundations for the further development of the global framework for sustainable development with a view to the 2027 SDG Summit, which is critical to lay the foundations for negotiating a post-2030 framework. IDOS will pool its expertise and invite international experts to a regular lecture series on the future of global cooperation towards sustainability.

This initiative is co-led by the Directorate and Department “Inter- and Transnational Cooperation” and Department “Environmental Governance”.

Cross-departmental, time-bound and application-oriented cooperation

In addition to the collaborative research and synthesising efforts around sustainable futures, cross-departmental collaboration and interdisciplinary team research is consciously incentivised and nurtured. IDOS’ research and policy advisory work addresses the contemporary challenges of policy-making, which calls for a flexible organisation that allows us to combine sets of thematic, regional and policy expertise that may be located within different research departments. IDOS therefore encourages a flexible organisation, whereby

teams are formed to jointly tackle research and policy challenges. Where expertise spans across departments, different forms of cross-cutting collaboration are encouraged. These include three forms of collaboration with different degrees of institutionalisation:

1. We organise research projects addressing cross-cutting issues that are composed of researchers from two or more research departments with complementary expertise. These create a context for medium-term (three years or more) in-depth research with a clearly defined project frame that includes joint terms of references, own budget, clearly defined leadership and an explicit Pathways to Impact strategy.
2. We encourage ad hoc group formation for clearly defined time-bound tasks. These are either established to provide timely research-based inputs addressing unexpected developments (e.g. to provide assessments on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on low- and middle-income countries or the reconstruction of Ukraine) or to address specific requests from policy-makers (e.g. providing inputs for an important new policy document, such as the National Security Strategy or the BMZ Africa Strategy).
3. Researchers engage in bottom-up initiatives for exchange to explore new research or discuss pertinent issues (current topical foci include, among others, Urbanisation, Decolonising Development research, Artificial Intelligence). They can be more or less formalised and may have a shorter life cycle. Some may be limited to informal exchange, whereas others aim for specific outcomes, such as a joint paper, a conference or a project proposal. IDOS deliberately keeps this format flexible but strongly encourages new initiatives. Several mechanisms have been established to systematically support thematic innovations. These include:
 - Regular Innovation Labs where emerging research challenges are discussed in pre-structured workshops;
 - Brown Bag Lunches discuss emerging research policy challenges;
 - Regular Research Seminars are used to present new research ideas and projects;
 - Department Heads periodically screen where research gaps emerge at the interface of their thematic fields and initiate Innovation Labs, Brown Bag Lunches, Research Seminars or project groups to pursue promising themes;
 - Non-financial support to apply for small grant-preparing funds (e.g. from the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia esp. dedicated to research institutes belonging to the Johannes-Rau-Forschungsgemeinschaft, Volkswagen Foundation) or direct seed money for workshops are provided;
 - Special recognition is given in staff appraisals.

Current topical foci include: Urbanisation, Decolonising Development (research), Degrowth, Artificial Intelligence, Research Ethics and Sustainability at IDOS.

3 KNOWLEDGE COOPERATION AND TRAINING, INCLUDING EARLY RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT

Our training programmes are meeting places for future leaders. In our global knowledge cooperation and training formats, participants and partners jointly formulate questions and design transformative action towards sustainable futures.

Collaboration with and among political decision-makers and scientists from key countries of the Global South – including a dedicated programme for African participants – allows for the acquisition of technical expertise, management and leadership skills for collective futuring. Global power shifts are experienced very differently across the globe. Due to increasing diversity and quality (of partner institutions and individual training levels), cooperation has become more feasible and more necessary – and yet more difficult at the same time, with heightened (geo-)political polarisation. We see academic research, or science, as a cooperative endeavour of continuous learning and the sharing of perspectives and experiences. These activities contribute directly towards the global transformation to sustainability, as well as to network-building for research. Specifically Managing Global Governance (MGG) Academy and Shaping Futures (SF) have made – and continue to make – significant contributions to the internationalisation of IDOS and its debates. With the awareness that our cooperation engages with elites, in a number of our formats we operate in the broad traditions of action research.

3.1 IDOS' programmes for knowledge cooperation and training

IDOS operates annual academies as “learning labs” for cooperation and as entry points to networks. With these labs, we establish practice and mechanisms for cooperation, particularly with early- and mid-career researchers and (future) decision-makers, bridging different backgrounds and systemic asymmetries in personal and institutional interactions. Selected elements in these labs include early career researchers at IDOS.

Our programmes target institutions within specific countries, and thus select participants based on their countries of residence and personal qualifications (as well as their home institutions in the cases of MGG and SF).

- The Postgraduate Programme for Sustainability Cooperation targets participant who wish to (and are highly suitable for) work in German and European organisations of international cooperation for sustainable development, thereby contributing towards capacity development for European cooperation.
- MGG comprises a group of rising powers, with individuals and institutions from China, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa as well as Europe.
- Shaping Futures works with partners from Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, Togo and Zambia as well as European countries (“EUplus”), that is, the department focusses on key countries of German cooperation on the African continent.

In our programmes, we aspire to live reciprocal relations in cooperation based on equality, while remaining cognisant of resource differences and differing power structures.

Figure: Training Programmes at IDOS



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3.2 Training: competencies for cooperation

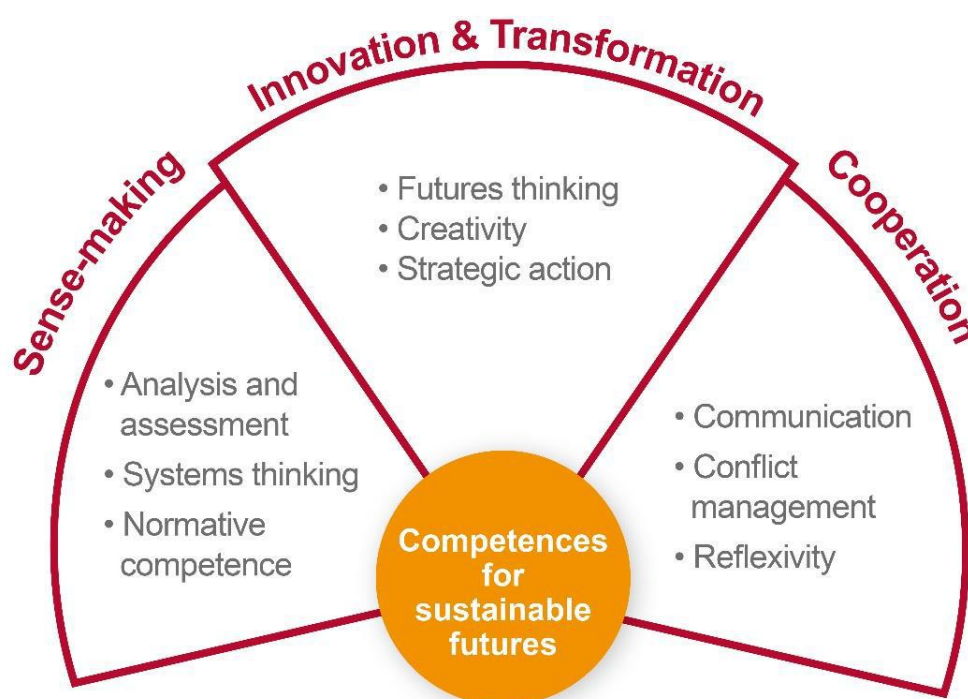
We empower individuals to see and collectively use spaces for engaging in transformative change in the spirit of human cooperation and respecting human dignity. Competent and committed *individuals* are key in cooperation, as they will be the ones who engage, build and maintain bridges around the globe. Increased complexity and urgency require a high degree of systemic overview alongside technical expertise. At the same time, interpersonal skills are in high demand for living cooperation and engaging with various actors in diverse contexts, seeking common ground for cooperation beyond persisting differences.

IDOS' training programmes establish practices for multi-directional learning on sustainable futures, for working with illustrative examples across different dimensions of sustainability (political, social, economic and environmental) and for equipping participants with methods to address sustainable development from diverse perspectives. Our trainings are designed as laboratories for jointly experimenting with collaborative, inclusive global governance and sustainability policy, thereby enabling practice-oriented experiential learning. IDOS trainings use activating didactics that are based on participatory methods and interactions between participants and the institute and promote active learning by doing. The task of including and further developing digital elements in knowledge cooperation and training programmes is ongoing. Digital formats do not replace face-to-face contacts; however, they offer a number of

advantages, for instance reducing CO₂ footprints and allowing for more immediate anchorage of our international participants in their work contexts.

The competencies model (see figure below) provides orientation for desired learning outcomes in our programmes, drawing on the latest debates in fields such as Development and Future Studies, Peace & Conflict, and Gender Studies in addition to negotiations literature. Their emphasis on different competencies in our training and learning activities is regularly adjusted according to changing global conditions. For instance, normative competencies – the competency to reflect on and question the norms that guide us – gain relevance for actors in international cooperation with a more contested international order and consequently more conflictual debates.

Figure: Competencies Model



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3.3 Knowledge cooperation: networks for systemic change

In its knowledge cooperation, IDOS fosters open and constructive exchanges on systemic changes for collective well-being while remaining cognisant of natural boundaries in human activities. We nurture networks as the core infrastructure for cooperation and as partners in, sounding boards for and drivers of innovation for IDOS research. Networks built by IDOS' knowledge cooperation and training are the core infrastructure of the institute.

Working on sustainable futures requires a flexible, trust-based group of partners – individuals and their institutions – that spans different contexts and regions, as imaging and creating futures raises closely intertwined policy questions. Cooperation within joint work strands continues the dialogue and joint research in areas of common interest, thereby continually

renewing connections and networks by bringing in new people and institutions, and thus staying meaningful for our alumni beyond a reminiscing phase of their respective training.

We consciously span different regional perspectives and systems of government while aiming at fostering dialogue with and between actors in academia, government and administration as well as with civil society actors. Although their respective countries are not necessarily like-minded, participants and their institutions are brought together in cooperation in order to contribute to global debates and seek innovative solution on development and sustainability. Democratic change is a process of generating and debating ideas, winning over decision-makers, and working towards (often in small steps) changing things for the better. This, in combination, allows for experiencing individual agency in transformations towards sustainable development.

Networks shape and promote IDOS' profile and its practice-oriented policy advice at the global level. In global discussions and policy processes, IDOS tries to bring different communities together, also across networks – as was initiated with the T20 Africa Group – or connect EU debates with those taking place in African countries or with key global partners.

3.4 Cooperation partners

Focussing on key partner countries allows for more profound engagement with national contexts and developments while developing a positive reputation within contexts and building trust. Despite the relative stability of the selected countries for MGG and SF,³ the choosing of partners within them is meant to be flexible. This allows for adjustments that address shifting priorities in institutions and discourses in countries, as well as the integration of partners of choice from across IDOS work streams. At the same time, the role of countries in global governance and their engagement on sustainable development need to be continually reflected upon, and the observations on cooperation should be included in discussions within German and European structures of inter- and transnational cooperation.

Certain regional and global organisations (AU, EU, UN organisations) are both partners and policy advice addressees in policy-relevant activities. In formats of knowledge cooperation and dialogue, additional expertise or policy input is sought from other settings, too, irrespective of geography or associations with international organisation. Within the German and European education cooperation and science management setting, linkages are sought specifically with organisations of transnational academic and science cooperation, inter alia DAAD, AvH and others. Specifically for the postgraduate programme, an increasing number of programmes on sustainability and/or development training offered by Germany-based institutions is of interest, not least the Centre for Rural Development (SLE).

³ Adjustments have happened in the past: MGG had Egypt and Pakistan among its partner countries for a limited period of time. Both were excluded again due to a perceived insufficient presence of global perspectives in these settings. Based on these experiences, the expansion of the group of Germany's global partners with Vietnam and Peru in 2021 has not led to their immediate inclusion in the programme. In 2023, the then African-German Leadership Academy (Shaping Futures) has included Kenya and Zambia into its group of partner countries, and since 2024 the Shaping Futures Academy has explicitly also targeted participants from European countries beyond Germany.

Innovations vis-à-vis strategy 2018-2024

IDOS will build the combined potential of its academies. In building the IDOS training brand, we aim to bring different groups into dialogue on selected topics (e.g. South-South cooperation, institutions of global governance).

While knowledge cooperation systematically builds on interactions with partners, we will *further expand our partner cooperation also in the area of training* within all three programmes. Positive experiences in our programmes are regarded as pilots and will be expanded. Partners also have a role to play in curriculum development and co-shaping content in academic modules, as well as in co-conceptualising and co-conducting specific training activities.

All knowledge cooperation and training programmes will expand their European dimension. For German cooperation perspectives, global governance, the challenges in sustainable development and crisis-reaction capacities require more joint European cooperation with other world regions. IDOS is well-situated to foster exchanges within the political space of the EU and will target European post-graduates or early- to mid-career practitioners in its academies and networks.

3.5 Early researcher development – dual PhD programme

We invest in early researcher development (*Nachwuchsförderung*), focussing on competencies for research cooperation and policy advice among our doctoral and (new at IDOS) post-doctoral researchers. Our doctoral researchers are included in IDOS' research projects and either directly supervised by IDOS staff or in collaboration with colleagues from the degree-holding university that the respective researcher is attached to or other partner institutes.

IDOS offers a dual and semi-structured PhD programme that combines a focus on both research and policy advice and offers a blend of a) group mentoring and training activities, b) self-organised peer mentoring and c) one-on-one mentoring with the PhD supervisors and mentors at IDOS. The programme is based on activities from all areas of the institute. In addition, the doctoral students contribute to the programme using their own initiative.

Group and peer mentoring focusses on regular academic exchanges in colloquium formats, reading groups, competency trainings and – prospectively – a mentorship programme with a focus on policy advice. Training units consist of a mix of “safe-space formats” (predominantly for peer learning, joint reflection, internal feedback) and exposure to settings in which IDOS' specific blend of research, policy advice and training comes to bear. Engagement on content takes place in modular formats. Professional social skills training, such as writing workshops, presentation skills and other activities, are organised by the PhD group and by IDOS training and are accessible to PhD candidates and others.

Training also takes place in formats dedicated to the PhD group, at times in collaboration with partner institutions or the universities and faculties that partner with IDOS in the co-supervision. We closely collaborate with structured doctoral programmes in the Bonn region and cooperate with other universities for enabling wider peer mentoring and learning in batches for our PhDs. Namely we partner with the Bonn International Graduate School for Development Research at the Centre for Development Research (ZEF) and the Bonn Graduate School of Economics in the Department of Economics at Bonn University. Further collaborations exist with universities across Germany and Europe (e.g. University of Heidelberg, Hertie School, ETH Zürich, Sussex

University) and selected ones in Asia and Africa (Ewha Womans University, Korea; Stellenbosch University, South Africa).

In the one-on-one mentoring at IDOS, doctoral researchers are encouraged to – in close collaboration with their direct mentor at IDOS – develop their personal career ambitions. Depending on the individual researcher's choice in leaning towards a more academic, think tank or practice-oriented career path, the focus will be put on policy advisory processes, proposal writing or academic publishing versus more public media-related publishing.

Lastly, and in addition to the one-on-one mentoring and group mentoring offered via the semi-structured doctoral programme, peer mentoring among the PhD researchers is encouraged within the group to foster connections across IDOS training formats.

We are proud to have built our doctoral and early researcher development programmes at IDOS over the years. PhD researchers are often at the forefront in representing IDOS in various international conferences, workshops, scientific consortiums and working groups. While currently around ten of IDOS' senior staff hold doctoral supervision rights at a degree-awarding institution (i.e. university), we envision that this number will increase in the coming years. Already now, doctoral research ensures that many projects are well-grounded and focussed on in-depth empirical or theory-led research. The most common constellation of co-supervision – with one supervisor being an IDOS staff member and one located at a partner university – ensures inter-institutional collaboration and the regular reciprocal reflection of scientific standards applied. Although this adds perspectives and contributes to innovation in the institute's debates, it is also an important instrument of quality assurance at IDOS.

The strengthening of our doctoral programme also incentivises IDOS' conscious design of research projects in ways that the knowledge products (incl. publishing) emerging from the different areas of research are further professionalised, partly as the division of roles is further enabled. More extensive and systematic field research is often carried out in our training formats and as part of PhD to post-doc research, whereas senior colleagues are often more likely to be engaged in theory development, policy advisory activities at a high political level or long-term modelling exercises. We thus ensure a diverse set-up of our project teams, systematically bringing senior researchers, post-doc and doctoral researchers and supervision capacities together while also co-supervising the PhD research jointly with university colleagues. The institutionalised bridges into the university system and co-supervision with colleagues from other non-university research institutes increases the possibilities for research collaboration as well as regular reflections on and adjustments of standards in research, knowledge cooperation, supervision practices and policy advice. PhD researchers are often at the forefront in representing IDOS in various international conferences, workshops, scientific consortiums, working groups and other fora. Similarly to the inclusion in policy advisory processes, we include doctoral researchers in proposal-writing processes. Early researcher development can also be an element in third-party funds acquisition, including in international consortia.

For the coming seven years, we aim to pursue this pluralisation of knowledge production, supervision and training achieved via the growth of our dual doctoral programme and strengthen the institutional collaborations and supervisory processes together with our doctoral researchers.

Furthermore, we aim to redesign our structured process of onboarding early career researchers for the policy advisory and think tank work of the institute. A regular internal training

format will be established to share information and experience on the available tools for policy advice, best practices and exchanges on successful and difficult advisory processes. This format will also serve to involve mid-career and senior colleagues, and thus serve as a platform for all IDOS colleagues to share their experiences.

Specifically, IDOS will organise one internal onboarding and exchange workshop approximately every six months. The workshop will provide an overview of policy advice work, a selection of tools, discussions about our target groups in Germany and beyond, reflections on possible training opportunities outside IDOS as well as various examples from our policy advice work that can provide insights into “best practices”, what to avoid and experiences from different contexts.

4 POLICY ADVICE AT THE SCIENCE–POLICY–SOCIETY INTERFACE

IDOS initiates, supports and sustains change in inter- and transnational cooperation for sustainable futures. For this purpose, IDOS co-produces knowledge with decision-makers and societal actors. Our strategic policy advice builds on the theory-led, empirical, and inter- and transdisciplinary research outlined above as well as networking activities and training.

IDOS understands good policy advice to be 1) scientifically sound, 2) (politically) independent, 3) effective, in the sense that it informs decision-making and societal processes and 4) impactful, including contributing to agenda-setting. It furthermore needs to be grounded in the institute's ethical guidelines (Oliver & Cairney, 2019; Shaxson, 2019).

In the future, IDOS aims at increasing its ability to shape the science–policy–society interface and provide cooperative policy advice in several ways:

- *Competitive advantages:* Building on our competitive advantages, we will strengthen our abilities to develop and formulate policy advice with partners from different parts of the world. From an institutional perspective, IDOS' policy advice aims to interact more with organisations shaped by Southern actors (often jointly with other actors) within the UN and with regional organisations such as the AU, CEPAL and ASEAN. This also implies club governance formats (in particular the G20 and G7) and transnational organisations.
- *Impact measurement:* Based on existing tools, IDOS will continue to strengthen its capacity to measure the impact of its advisory work. This includes assessing which outputs are relevant – and when – for policy advice offered to public decision-makers, civil society organisations and the general public (see section “Shaping sustainable futures: our impact” below).
- *Onboarding and capacity-development of (new) staff:* We aim at strengthening our policy advice capacity in our structured process of onboarding research staff. A regular in-house training format will be established to share information and experiences regarding available policy advice tools, good practices and the sharing of successful and challenging advisory processes. This format will also be used to foster exchange between mid-career and senior colleagues.
- *Agility:* Against the background of a highly dynamic international context, IDOS needs to pay more attention to its agility potential. There is a need to speed up advisory inputs in those cases where short-term expertise is required. Thus, speed, flexible op-ed products and ad-hoc advisory formats (e.g. background briefings, international e-workshops/(e-)brainstormings) will be more systematically encouraged and supported.

4.1 Self-understanding and goals

Policy advice is a substantial part of IDOS' mandate. The public and policy relevance of our research determines that we conceive research and knowledge diffusion as societal tasks. IDOS therefore works at and shapes the science–policy–society interface.

Our work is based on the definition of policy advice given by the German Council of Science and Humanities (*Wissenschaftsrat*). According to the Council, it is important in this context to work on the basis of “a more comprehensive understanding of the common good” and that “[knowledge] transfer must operate not as a one-way transmission of knowledge, but rather as

a feedback process between the scientific system and other function systems". For example, findings such as those on the limitations of our ecosystems or increasing autocratisation are calls for "research that promotes societal transformation towards new models of prosperity and progress in a socio-environmental context" (Wissenschaftsrat, 2022).

Beyond the analysis of and actionable recommendations for transformation processes (transformation research), the institute fosters close exchanges with decision-makers to address timely as well as future issues (transformative research). Transformative research is the co-creation of knowledge with partners and societal actors from countries in all income groups and across all continents throughout the research process (co-design and co-production of knowledge). It generates system knowledge (understanding of an issue to provide a systemic understanding for policy-makers and societal actors) as well as orientation knowledge (on the opportunities and limits of decision-making) and knowledge about the transformation process itself (transformation knowledge), while researchers reflect critically on the role of this research.

IDOS seeks to publish its research and advisory work. This is based on the conviction that public communication is – with limitations in confidential cases – significant and important in a democratic society. This is also the guiding principle for IDOS' advisory work in non-democratic states and/or in networks with partners from those states. We are aware that this becomes more challenging in the context of the current global wave of autocratisation, and we look after the security of our local partners and employees.

The institute considers research to be essential to good policy advice, as development policy can only be placed on a solid footing through systematic learning processes. IDOS also sees itself as a facilitator of such processes. Whereas decision-makers, practitioners and societal actors tend to base their arguments on informed experience and their institutional goals, IDOS' core task is to feed academic knowledge and new empirical evidence into the communication process with the decision-makers and societal actors.

IDOS is a learning institution. Open-ended, theory-led and empirical research forms the basis for our advisory work. There is often a need for a particular and ongoing investment in "translation" activities between the societal sub-systems of research and policy-making in order to leverage the potential for problem-solving. IDOS helps to dismantle barriers between research and development policy as well as other policy fields. In addition, it increasingly bridges social and natural science perspectives to ensure adequate policy advice.

Through work at the science–policy–society interface IDOS' policy advice has the following aims:

- *Creating scientific foundations:* Generating policy-related expertise over longer periods of time to provide decision-makers with sound information, for example building on evidence databases, in the run-up to major events and decisions or in the context of forthcoming agenda-setting and dealing with possible future challenges (e.g. scenarios, foresight methods);
- *Providing strategic policy advice:* Creating perspectives, concepts and strategies based on our own research, which can be used to inform global development policy and other policy areas. Effective advisory work also requires (and generates) knowledge on the success factors for political changes (orientation knowledge);
- *Disentangling complex matters:* Addressing complex issues on an interdisciplinary basis in order to take account of the interactions between development, security, environment

and international trade as well as policies related to these fields, including the synergies and trade-offs between them. IDOS thus aims to contribute to policy coherence in the external relations of Germany and the EU and to strengthen inter-departmental concepts and approaches;

- *Promoting a long-term focus in policy-making through agenda-setting:* Providing incentives by identifying and addressing futures that are not yet at the heart of decision-making in order to perform the function of an agenda-setter;
- *Generating orientation knowledge:* Processing and categorising discourses and controversies for decision-makers.

4.2 Inherent tensions in research-based policy advice

IDOS' role faces inherent tensions that the institute takes into account in its research and advisory work. From a research perspective, the following insights into the processes of overlapping and complex interactions between the decision-makers and researchers providing policy advice give rise to the ongoing task of drawing the line between research, policy and society. This implies safeguarding the independence of our advisory work while at the same time avoiding any negative effects on the communication and interaction between the two systems.

- IDOS operates within the reference systems of research and policy advice, which shall enable it to provide excellent policy advice. The links to the two reference systems are specified and institutionalised in IDOS' institutional agreement.
- IDOS' theory-led, empirical and solution-oriented research implies ambitious research strategies that rarely provide simple answers to increasingly complex questions. For political actors in search of quick and easy solutions, this is often unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, offering unprincipled policy advice not meeting the institutes standards.
- Consequently, the balance between research and advice as well as the time inputs into both processes need to be continually readjusted. Intensive communication with our counterparts – also with regard to uncertainty in our research insights – is key in order to facilitate the mutual understanding of different types of action logics by the decision-makers and researchers. This also involves developing a joint understanding of the role that the provisioning of advice has within the institute.

4.3 Target groups: policy advice for whom?

IDOS' policy advice is aimed at the actors influencing and helping to shape sustainable development and international cooperation in policy-making, business, society (e.g. NGOs, media) and research. Engaging in advice often takes place in complex actor constellations, which is why it is necessary to carefully consider the advisory levels and mutual influencing of target groups. At the same time, offering a forum for dialogue between a range of actors may already constitute an element of advice provision in complex constellations. IDOS' substantial commitment to relevant international and national advisory councils is a complementary structural element that allows IDOS to shape and contribute to the science–policy–society interface.

Target groups primarily include institutions, platforms and networks in all world regions, in particular in Germany and the EU as well as international organisations and societal actors.

To meet our aim of providing strategic policy advice on a global scale, we work within a multi-level system. Working on different levels simultaneously is therefore a common feature of our policy advice, for example engaging in inter-active advice in global fora (such as the UN) and with regional organisations (such as ASEAN and the AU) and national actors such as ministries and parliaments. At the same time, we offer advice and exchange with societal actors such as civil society organisations that inform or contest political processes.

Other target groups that help to inform such processes are international and national advisory boards (e.g. WBGU, SDSN Germany) as well as scientific networks and research funding agencies. Policy advice with and in the research community itself is an important pillar of our work. Through our involvement in (specialist) debates, academic advisory councils, editorial boards and expert committees, we provide input in a range of academic contexts at the national and international levels.

4.4 Formats: policy advice how?

IDOS uses a range of formats to provide research support to political and societal decision-makers and relevant institutions. From unidirectional to inter-active policy advice, it is important that we deliver it in direct contact with decision-makers. In our capacity as external advisors, we draw upon our research-based knowledge to provide information to decision-makers, whether in written or verbal form, in bilateral talks or within groups of experts. However, advice often goes beyond this transmitter–receiver model in order to provide process support. The ideal scenario would see advisors in close dialogue with those they are advising, who contribute their knowledge proactively from their respective contexts.

Collective policy advice: IDOS' researchers are members of numerous German and international advisory bodies (e.g. on the level of the EU as well as in UN institutions, the G20 and G7), which are comprised of academics from a range of disciplines and, in many cases, actors from civil society and the private sector. They work together to develop policy recommendations (collective policy advice). Cooperation with other German and international think tanks (Think20/Think7) as well as with the UN and other multilateral (e.g. World Bank, OECD) and regional institutions (e.g. AU, ASEAN, EU) serves to promote joint learning, the incorporation of different perspectives and ultimately – and by extension – the expansion of our impact at the European and international levels.

Educational policy advice: Our national and international training and dialogue programmes for decision-makers and young professionals in institutions involved in international cooperation for sustainable development represent a unique format in our advisory work.

Public policy advice: Having a public presence and tailoring our communication to different sectors of the public is part of our work. We use event formats, publications and media to reach actors from different spheres and, where possible, engage in dialogue with them individually and collectively. We use the media appearances and social media work of IDOS to provide background and contextualise facts, which serve as central elements in the formation of opinions in the public and political spheres.

Science communication: IDOS also communicates its research content and recommendations for action on digital and/or cross-media platforms, which are often directed towards specific target groups via social media. Science communication is carried out collectively via institutional channels and individually in our own networks of researchers (via social media),

as well as by means of the work among specialist groups and individual media activities (op-eds, interviews).

Publications are also key instruments for communicating action-oriented advice. They range from 1) confidential advisory papers, 2) policy briefs, 3) op-eds on the IDOS website (columns) or elsewhere (blogs, newspaper articles) to 4) contributions to flagship reports of international organisations such as the Human Development Report.

5 SHAPING SUSTAINABLE FUTURES: OUR IMPACT

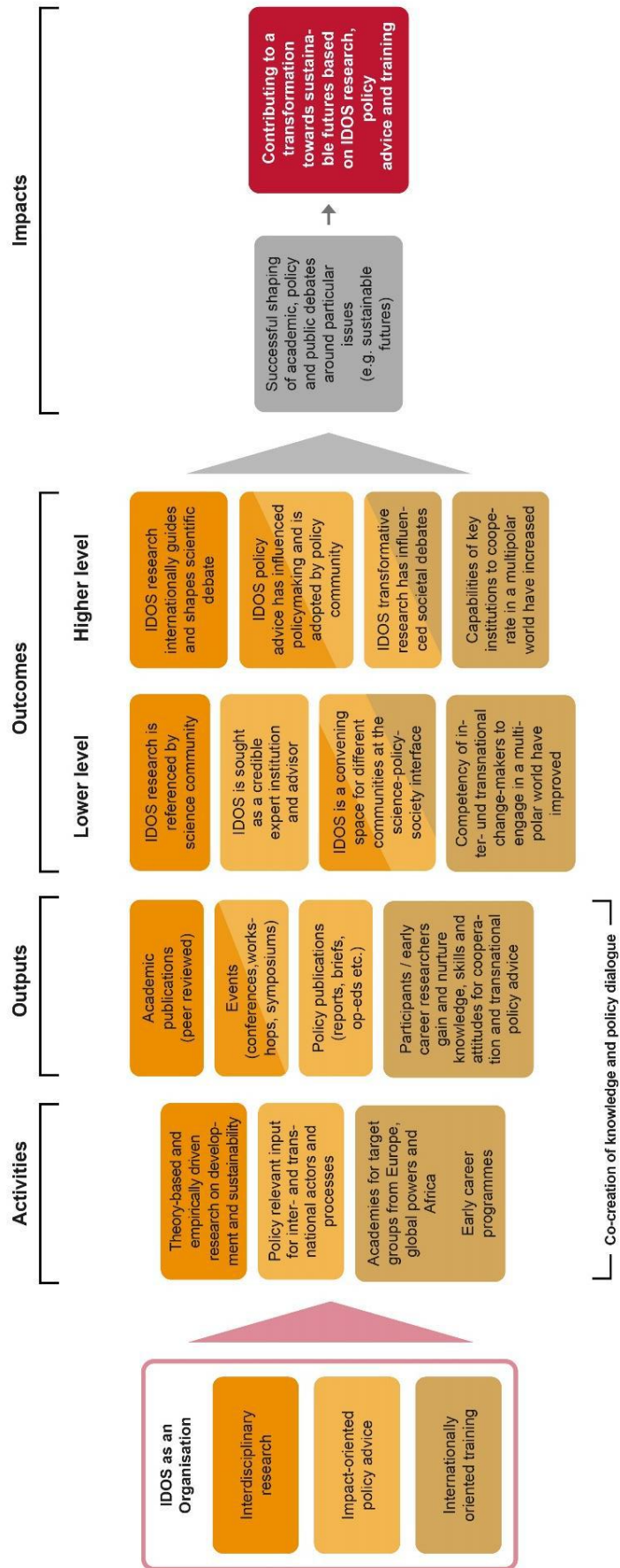
IDOS' work ultimately has one expected impact, namely the co-shaping of sustainable futures. The mechanisms and impact chains contributing to this goal range from high-quality research to policy advice, knowledge cooperation, training and early researcher development. Given the diversity of activities and arenas that IDOS works within, we apply different theories of change to impact decision-makers in policy, science and society, as well as offer exposure to the diverse participants in our academies.

Drawing on the work of Bressan and Hoxtell (2023) on how think tanks measure their impact, IDOS monitors how the institute as a whole and its different organisational units (departments, clusters and projects) contribute to sustainable futures through its activities, outputs and eventual outcomes. It does so via research, policy advisory activities and knowledge cooperation and training. Each strand is driven by its own theory of change. These strands are then consciously interwoven together in order to contribute to the overall performance of the institute.

Impact assessments in a social sciences context defy "measuring" in the sense of a unidirectional input-output rationale. Due to the diversity of target groups, publication strategies and pathways to impact, there are no simple indicators of impact measurement. Instead, our theories of change bring together the quantitative outputs and outcomes produced as well as the most significant impact stories that allow us to trace the qualitative impact of our work.

We assess the impact of our work while taking into account the three realms that we interact with and address in our research, policy advice and contributions to public discourse, as well as our training and knowledge cooperation: academia, policy and the public.

Theory of Change



5.1 Research and academia

A key impact measurement in science is citations. Search engines and platforms such as Google Scholar create data about which publications are cited within their pool, how often and by whom. The tool helps to determine the citations of an author and provides the h-index, which links the number of publications and its citations. A similar metric for academics is provided by the impact factor of an academic journal: It is a scientometric index calculated by Clarivate that reflects the yearly mean number of citations from articles published in the last two years in a given journal, as indexed by Clarivate's Web of Science.

Although the impact factors of citations, the h-index and journals are often viewed in the academic system as an indication of performance, there are also important limitations to measuring impact. Methods are not always clearly communicated, and the data pools are often not comprehensive. The number of citations indicates little about the quality of the research, and instead only about how well-received it has been (whether positively or negatively). Therefore, they are to a certain extent a measure of the topicality of the publication but, as mentioned, clear caveats apply. Furthermore, journals with high impact factors are not always the most suitable journals for IDOS to assess its own results, depending on the topic and type of inquiry. This is also because we want to publish with publishers in the countries where we do research (see Publication Strategy). Given the limitations of citation numbers, impact factors are one of several criteria to assess the work of IDOS researchers. Criteria are listed in staff appraisal forms to evaluate research outcomes, with the number of peer-reviewed publications as well as policy and media outputs being the only "hard" criteria.

5.2 Policy advice

Political decision-making processes are dynamic and combine formality and informality. The influences are manifold. Although the influence gained through informal meetings, knowledge-sharing and advisory boards often builds on trustful relationships, this is not suitable to measure interactions and their impact. Instead, we use proxies to trace our influence. Policy briefs, columns and other publications intended for specific target groups feed into decision-making and are by definition rarely cited in policy documents, similar to special reports with a policy advisory function. Furthermore, our publication portfolio also includes unpublished statements and background papers for international organisations, ministries and implementing organisations. These policy papers are partly confidential and thus elude any quantitative impact measurement.

Quantitative indicators to measure our outputs include the number of policy advice outputs (e.g. papers, comments, presentations, meetings) of events and the appointment of IDOS researchers to advisory boards, expert committees and parliamentary hearings. In order to work towards sustainable and inclusive development, we also assess the gender and regional diversity of contributors to our publications and events, as well as our ability to respond in a timely manner to current events and dynamics in politics, the economy and society (agility).

In order to assess the impact on agenda-setting, decision-making and forming the public's opinion of our work, we trace causal chains and capture dynamics by looking at qualitative factors such as:

- the demand for IDOS' advisory services or training programmes,
- invitations to high-profile international conferences or to contribute to international flagship reports,
- feedback from specialist groups in Germany and abroad,
- extent and vibrancy of high-quality research networks, and
- public (media) demand for IDOS' expertise and media appearance.

In order to attribute a change in knowledge, decision-making, opinion or strategy, among other elements, to our advisory inputs, we define the targets of policy advice on a project basis in advance. We define proxy indicators to observe whether targets were achieved. These include formulating objectives in policy influence as well as related strategies and processes targeting public decision-makers, academia, other societal actors and the general public. We aim at securing impact assessments, including qualitative aspects before, during and at the end of projects, to enable reflection on lessons learnt and improved outcomes. A "Pathways to Impact" documentation is a key instrument in this respect.

5.3 Knowledge cooperation and training

IDOS' goals in the area of knowledge cooperation and training operate on three levels: We build competencies in individuals, engaging them as change agents in their home organisations, which are well-positioned in the institutional landscapes to carry the systems of sustainability cooperation. The assessments of our impact on individuals remain complex. The same holds true for the impact of networks, which are increasingly being operated in a decentralised manner and ideally are self-sustained, that is, they will not require facilitation by IDOS in the long run. The attribution of success to our qualification elements or the network are thus difficult. Logical chains are long and multifaceted, with IDOS playing only one part that is often hard to quantify.

As "numerical" measuring, we systematically include external evaluations and continuous feedback processes with partner organisations, participants and alumni. All learning modules are subject to the structured written and anonymised feedback of participants. Tracer studies, that is, the pre- and post-programme questionnaires of participants and their employers, are additional sources of feedback. One indicator of a programme's success – its attractiveness – is the number of applicants. For the postgraduate training programme, an additional key indicator traditionally is the number of alumni who are employed by institutions in the development sector within a year after completion of the programme. Additionally, we receive feedback from alumni (sometimes after years in the sector) and the employer organisations. The anecdotal evidence provides input for reflections and adjustments or innovations – and consequently continual reinventions – in the programme, yet additional information is needed.

The value in knowledge cooperation and training is in the quality rather than the numbers. Therefore, we track the narratives of individual and institutional developments and changes:

- **High-level policy interactions:** Which partnering institutions do our participants come from, which positions did they hold (for MGG and SF) and where are they going next? Which individuals, institutions and communities do we connect with? How do we interact with decision-makers outside of the programmes?
- **Use of the network in policy-relevant activities:** We always offer access to and ask for support from the different networks as well as within the respective alumni networks of MGG and SF. Who engages with the results of our knowledge cooperation?

- **External advice for quality assurance:** An international advisory board for SF discusses curricular foci and activities of the programme, both in retrospect and with regard to the planning of the next academy. For MGG, structured planning meetings were organised with the participation of partners on several occasions.
- **Innovations in the training programmes as piloting activities:** This is done in order to spread good practice across the institute, such as ethical appraisals (spearheaded by the research teams of the Postgraduate Training Programme in 2019).

This variety of measures and sources form the basis for IDOS to assess successes in individual learnings and appreciation, which lead to institutionalised linkages, changes in institutions, and further collaboration on projects and training activities. Thorough planning increases the likeliness of success.

We aim to further operationalise our theories of change so that we can regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of our work on decision-making in the sectors where we operate in order to contribute to sustainability futuring.

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