TRANSDISCIPLINARITY IN, AND AS UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

SWEAFUN Trans-Thematic Workshop for Vice-Chancellors and University Management

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Presented in cooperation with the Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITD Alliance).

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21.08.2025

Outline

- Progress towards achieving the SDGs
- Transdisciplinarity
- Co-creating Knowledge for impact
- Case study
- The ITD Alliance

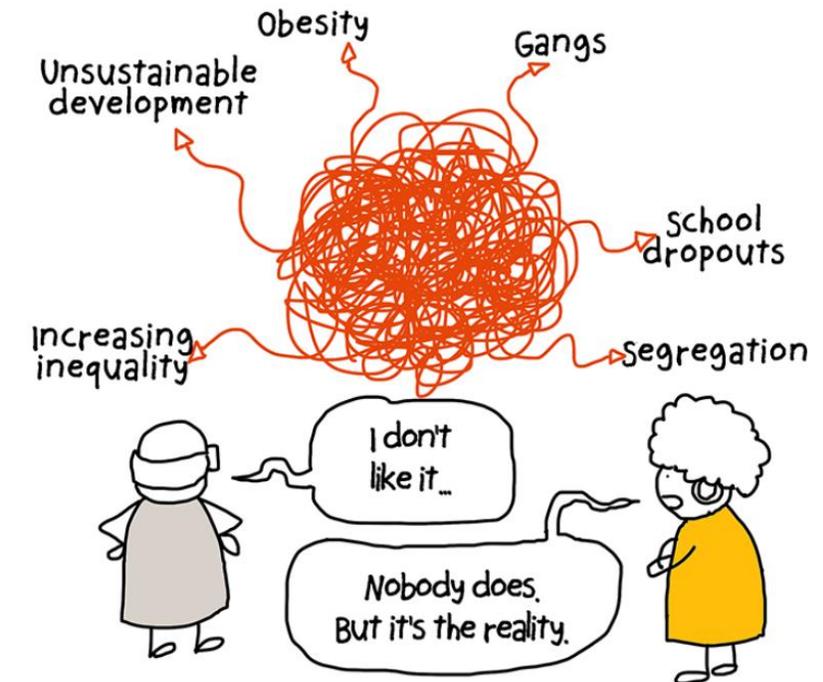# Progress towards Sustainable Development and Agenda 2030

- As at 2024, only 17% of SDGs targets are on track to be achieved,
- Nearly 50% are showing minimal or moderate progress,
- Progress on over a third has stalled or even regressed.
- The COVID-19 pandemic
- Conflicts
- Geopolitical and trade tensions
- Effects of climate change
- Weak financial systems
- Historical injustices
- Weakening of global solidarity
- Push factors for regional and international migration
- Threat of technology
- Social media, activism and populism
- Industrialisation and clean production
- Human trafficking and child endangerment

Even though connected, all of these have impacted national priorities towards achieving the SDGs

Universities as Problem Solvers

- The SDGs represents a distinctive set of challenges experienced at local, national, regional and global levels

- Our local environments as universities and research institutes situate us within these seemingly intractable and complex, wicked problems with connected root causes

- 'Wicked Problems' demand approaches that are sustainably impactful

- Solutions demand collaborative approaches: the coming together of science and society

- With our physical infrastructure, intellectual capital in the different faculties and geographical locations with proximity to these problems, African Universities stand in a strategic position to co-create impactful solutions to these problems.

Unlike simple problems, wicked problems don't have one root cause.

Obesity
Gangs
Unsustainable development
School dropouts
Increasing inequality
Segregation

I don't like it...

Nobody does. But it's the reality.

source

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Transdisciplinarity

- the process of transformation that occurs when collaborative research is decentralised to include the engagement of both academic and non-academic experts on equal terms in seeking solutions to complex societal problems
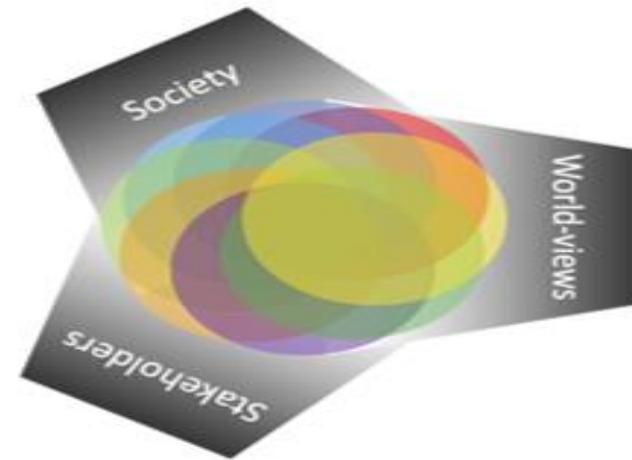
Transdisciplinarity

Multi- ⇨ Inter- ⇨ Transdisciplinary
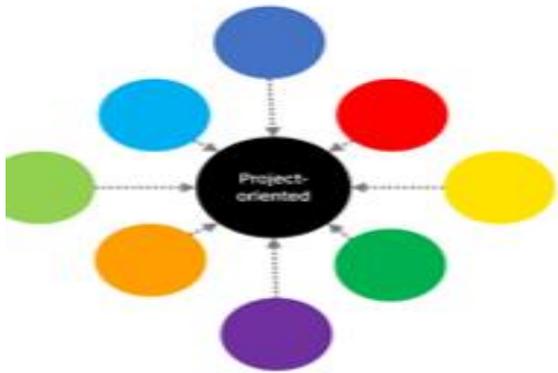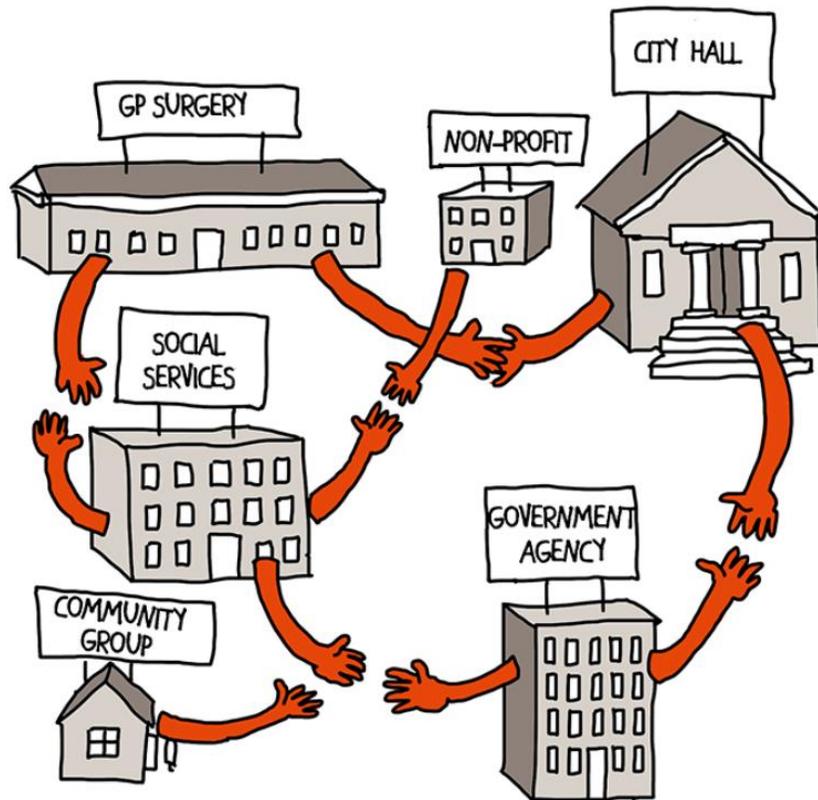
Multidisciplinary

Interdisciplinary

Transdisciplinary

Integration: Separated → Integrated → « Become One »
Perspective: Several disciplines → Across disciplines → Include stakeholders & society
Team's goal: Project-oriented → Learning, New ideas → Problem-oriented

Co-creating and Advancing Knowledge for Impact

Bammer (2021) identifies stakeholders:
- those made vulnerable by the problem (e.g.communities, ordinary citizens of various cultures, and socio-economic groups),
- those who have the capacity to solve the problem (e.g., government, researchers, and communities),
- Those who bring awareness to the problem (e.g., researchers, media, civil society, and advocacy groups),
- and those who establish capacities to address the problem (e.g., advocacy groups, researchers) and
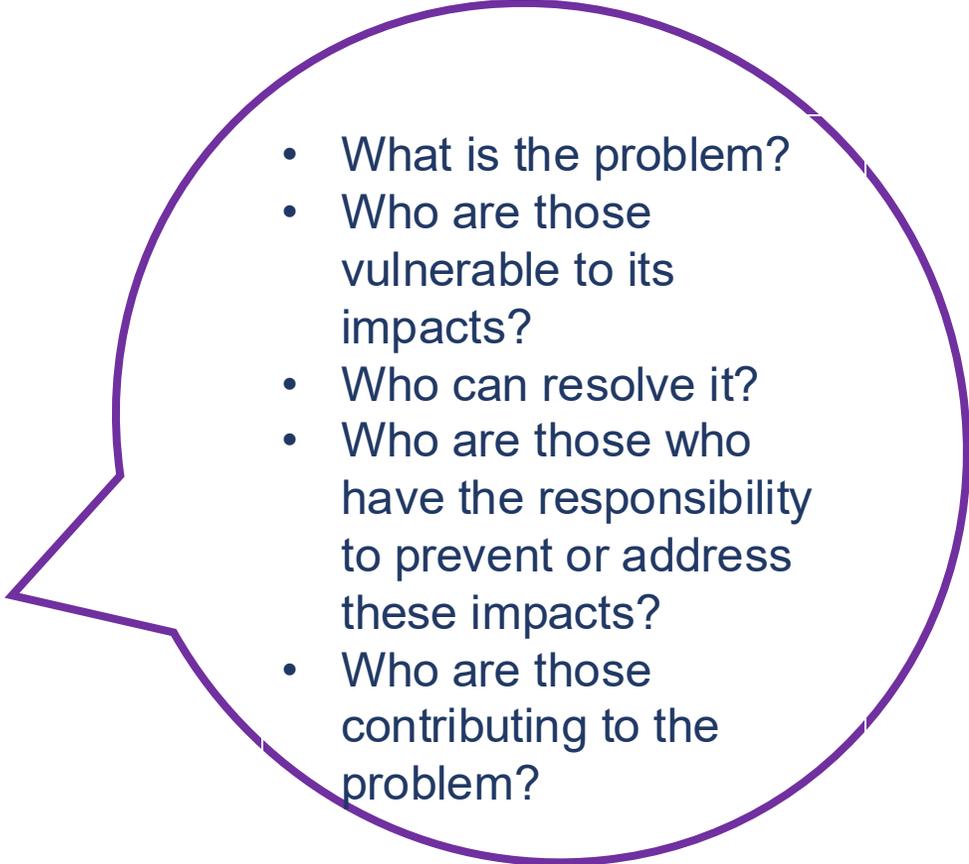- provide legal backing for solutions (e.g., government), among others.

Citizen Science Example:

From studying the impact of COVID 19 on domestic violence to co-creating a community resilience action plan.

AJEGUNLE - IKORODU COMMUNITY
RESILIENCE ACTION PLAN

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
ABUJA
Nigeria

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
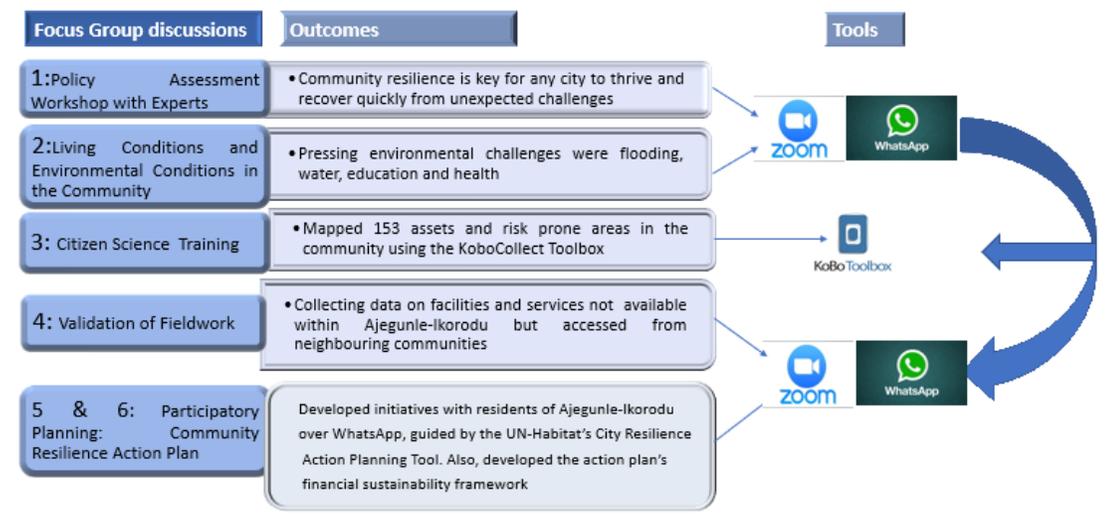
Partners

Ajegunle Ikorodu
Community, Lagos

LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT
LAGOS STATE RESILIENCE OFFICE (LASRO)

RESILIENT LAGOS

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
CENTRE FOR HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
NIGERIA

LOTS charity foundation.

Available at:
https://ng.boell.org/en/2021/03/01/ajegunle-ikorodu-community-resilient-action-plan

Case study
- Selected as one of 27 case studies presented at the UNHABITAT Global Stakeholder Forum, evidencing implementation of the New Urban Agenda. (April 2022)

- Case-study: Urban reform database of the African Cities Research Consortium (2024)

- Urban Climate Change Research Network (UCCRN) Third Assessment Report Case-study (2024)

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
CENTRE FOR HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A UK ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL (AHRC) URGENCY GRANT PROJECT (June-December, 2020)

PROJECT TITLE:

Adaptation Strategies in Infectious Disease Management for Residents of Multi-Family Housing in African cities.

- Nigerian Federation of Slums and Informal Settlements
- FESADEB Communications

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator:
Professor T.G Nubi, Director of Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development, University of Lagos

Research Co-Investigators:
Prof Michael Crang: Director of the Centre for Visual Arts and Cultures, University of Durham

Dr Taibat Lawanson (Associate Professor): Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Lagos

Dr Basirat Oyalowo: Department of Estate Management, University of Lagos

Dr Lola Akande: Department of English, University of Lagos

Dr Florence Nweke: Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos

Dr Frances Odueme: Department of English, University of Lagos

Dr. Felix Ajiola: Department of History and Strategic Arts, University of Lagos

Work Packages

Work Package	Objective
Work Package1: Historical Investigation	Inferences were drawn from earlier epidemics through archival sources, including colonial, post-colonial and more recent government papers, ordinances and reports on epidemics, diseases, health care initiatives and housing policies
Work Package 2: Role of the Creative Arts	Audio-visual arts was employed as an instrument of participant engagement, research outcome and dissemination tool
Work Package 3: Review of Fictional Literary Works	Two literary works were reviewed to provide insights into two issues that are integral to this research
Work Package 4: Existing Coping Strategy	Residents' perception and response to current health services and media-based 'state-led' public health messages were assessed. It established the current coping strategies of residents as well.

Outputs

✓ Jingles on COVID-19 prevention were aired via 7 radio stations (Cool FM, Metro FM, Bond FM, UNILAG FM, Women FM, Nigeria Info FM, Wazobia FM) in Lagos State in English, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Pidgin over a period of 3 months.

✓ 2 animated videos were produced in English and Pidgin languages, and were shared widely across social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp Status).

✓ A newspaper article titled 'Public Advisory on COVID-19 Management for Residents of Multi-Tenanted Housing in Nigerian Cities' was published in 3 Newspapers (The Guardian, The Nation, kakaaki).

✓ 23 Communities within the COVID-19 hotspots in Lagos State (Surulere, Ajeromi, Mushin, Eti-Osa LGAs) were visited by our community partners to raise awareness and hang the graphic banners (140 banners).

✓ A Peer-reviewed Book Chapter based on various aspects of the research will be published.
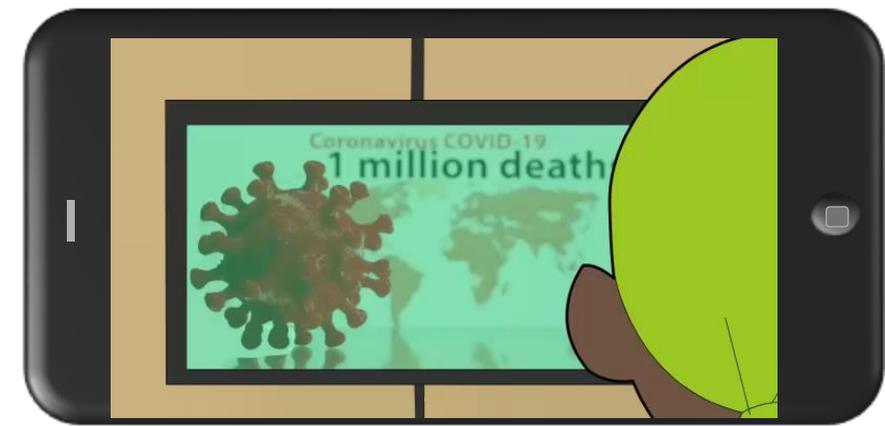
Co-creating Mindsets from Within

- Dismantling epistemic injustices
- Foster interdisciplinarity
- Trust
- Acknowledging not ignoring differences
- Balancing the power roles
- Institutional change: support and reward Transdisciplinarity across research cadre
- Learning the 'tools of the trade'
- Seeking support

source

Institutional Change: Transdisciplinarity in University Strategy

- **Teaching**
  - **Local knowledge**
  - **Curriculum**
  - **Pedagogies and assessments**

- **Research and Innovation**
  - **Local problems**
  - **Inter-faculty partnerships**
  - **Local and global partnerships**

- **Society**
  - **Local communities**
  - **Government Institutions**
  - **SMEs**
  - **Industry**
  - **Professional groups**

- **Undergraduates**
- **Post-graduates**
- **Early Career Researchers**
- **Mid-level Researchers**
- **Senior Researchers**
- **Professional Staff**
- **Committees**
- **University Management**
- **University Councils**

- **Appoint institutional transdisciplinary change agents**
- **Recognise and support transdisciplinary roles**
- **Facilitate, support and reward acquisition and use of transdisciplinary skills**
- **Recognise and reward impact**
- **Invest in transdisciplinary partnerships**
- **Rethink disciplinary hegemonies**
- **Repurpose existing activities: eg conferences to deliver impact**
- **Research communication**
- **Localised international university rankings**

A Note of Caution

- ID/TD projects explicitly foster not only scientific pluralism but also require the integration of social and societal actors, their interests, norms and values. The end goal is change and impact.

- Despite this, runs a risk of centralizing power in one direction: the convenor, the holder of resources, the voice that disseminates= the researchers.

- Complicity in making these societal actors voiceless because their experiences are not seen as credible or authoritative, a manifestation of testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2007).

- This could run throughout the entire process of research agenda, data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings.

- Resistance in adopting findings and hence the impact of IT/TD project outcomes

ITD Alliance

The Global Alliance for Inter- and Transdisciplinarity (ITD Alliance) **strengthens and promotes the global capacity and the calibre** of collaborative modes of boundary-crossing research and practice.

| Addressing complex problems and societal needs | Connecting actors and scales to advance collaborative modes of research and education | Increasing visibility and coalescing work currently dispersed across continents | Building capacity for inter- and transdisciplinary research and education |

Join us, we welcome individual and institutional members

ITD Conference. Working Groups. Regional Networks. Resources. International Cooperation. Professional Opportunities.

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Thank You !

Read more/ References

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