

The grand global challenges and the transformation to sustainable societies

A Communiqué

This statement is the product of a global dialogue and discussion process hosted by the Living Knowledge Network. It wants to be understood as a means to facilitate the embedding of Social Responsibility and Community Based Research into the Research and Higher Education System. It is an initiative of the Big Tent Group¹ of international networks which includes:

- Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI),
- Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research (GACER),
- Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA),
- Living Knowledge Network,
- PASCAL International Observatory,
- Talloires Network
- Community Network for Research Equity & Impact
- Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA).
- Asia Pacific University Community Engagement Network,
- Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios,
- Community Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH),
- Service Learning Asia Network (SLAN), and
- The South African Research Chairs Initiative in Development Education- UNISA



The Talloires Network



¹ Groups of university and community networks have been coming together since 2010 to share information and call for further action to enhance community-university engagement. These discussions have been framed as 'Big Tent' dialogues.

The Grand Challenges and the imperative of transformation

Many countries have used the so-called grand or global challenges (Poverty and Inequality, Climate Change, Energy, Global Health and healthy aging, Agriculture and Food Security) as a means of orienting public investments in Science, Technology and Innovation.

As global challenges they cannot be adequately addressed by single actors. Coordination and collective action are needed to mobilize the necessary resources.

With their social, cultural, economic and psychological implications, they represent a shift towards a new era, which concerns all levels of the global community: with important social and environmental problems, markets and mindsets, global cooperation and democracy.

Democracy should not only be understood as a form of governance but as a support for the idea of knowledge co-creation: from scientific knowledge to people and from people to scientific knowledge.

Many different stakeholders have to be involved as the problems are multidimensional, trans-disciplinary, and systemic. It requires new ways of thinking which goes beyond traditional frameworks and disciplines and has to lead to a re-thinking of research and innovation policies.

The broad societal risks and problems represented by the challenges are at the same time also providing opportunities for new activities, goods and services and for moving towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy.

The way politics, business and society deal with the grand challenges will strongly affect economy and society, globally, in Africa, the Asian Pacific, Europe and the Americas.

We need new policies, new governance models, new innovation solutions and strategies, and new investment models to solve the problems.

The forthcoming (great) transformation towards sustainable societies requires forward-looking and knowledge-based management.

Let's build transformative knowledge to drive social change

Scientists are an integral part of society, their linkages and interdependencies with other social groups; their facilitation of conversations and dialogues to create new knowledge is recognized and appreciated.

However Civil Society has its own requests towards Science and Research Policy and has the impression that the science system does not effectively take on the pressing societal challenges.

Science and its enterprises need to be 'supervised' by society, embedded in its moral and ethical compass, and engaged with human concerns of the next civilization.

There is evidence for a shift towards a challenge driven research and innovation approach

Community based organizations have special role to play, they have the expertise and specialized knowledge to be the voice of the voiceless.

Education should help to create problem awareness and promote systemic thinking, thus empowering people to participate in and shape the transformation process.

Transdisciplinarity in this context means to learn the different languages for the dialogue, taking into account the multiple and layered identities of citizens, including race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, and ability, among others.

Universities need to move beyond the rhetoric by reaching out to help society, its communities and small businesses. We need a richer and deeper engagement between academics and the people they serve. The change of direction must be towards 'action'.

Research funding agencies must make meaningful financial investments to ensure that community leaders participate on national advisory councils, grant review panels and policy-making bodies related to research and that their voices are heard.

Research and Higher Education Institutions must be held accountable for equitable partnerships with community-based organizations through clearly articulated memoranda of understanding that describe the principles and a plan for how these will be monitored and evaluated.

A call to action

Why now? We are calling for an ambitious set of actions now for two reasons: First, negative effects of the grand challenges are intensifying. Second, perhaps most important, there is a critical mass of leaders and institutions in every part of the world who are prepared to animate the transformation process to better futures.

We call for action to:

1. Recognize that knowledge is both diverse and plural,
2. Increase the capacity for imagination because creativity initiates change,
3. Encourage creative solutions at the interface between differing epistemological frameworks and the links between knowledge production and actions for social change,
4. Establish a transparent process for priorities setting for public research funding,
5. Integrate Civil Society in formulation of research questions, through mobilization of practical, traditional and indigenous knowledge in research programs and projects,
6. Ensure representation of civil society in bodies of publicly funded scientific institutions on eye level,
7. Establish a science forum with a civil society research fund, strongly focusing on research on behalf of and the benefit for CSOs,
8. Foster capacity building of CSOs in science policy,
9. Promote transdisciplinary sustainability research that has clear links to the grand challenges,
10. Establish developmental monitoring and assessment of the progress in addressing the grand challenges,
11. Strengthen the establishment of community-based, participatory institutions such as Science Shops, Community Based Research Centers or other structures of Community-Campus Partnerships,
12. Give free access to research results,
13. Ensure adequate support for the start-up and continued operations of community-based research ethics review boards,
14. Advocate for administrative changes in research funding and policy for the benefit of community leaders, community-based organizations and their allies.

Finally let's commit to create a "Global Social Contract with Society" to build transformative knowledge to drive social change