The Future Of, bringing together open innovation, Southern inclusion and sustainability science

Alexandre Bisquerra,
Department for the Mobilisation of Research and Innovation for Development,
IRD, Marseille, France
Yoann Malinge,
SoScience, France

Background

Research practices, funding agencies and international development institutions suggest that research to address sustainability challenges is most effective when it is "co-produced" by academic and non-academic stakeholders. This co-production has the potential to improve how we respond to the complex nature of contemporary sustainability challenges compared with more traditional scientific approaches. IRD and SoScience have worked together since 2016, implementing open innovation programmes that bring together scientists, industries, start-ups and civil society stakeholders all over the world. These The Future Of programmes involve a multi-stakeholder community working on a transdisciplinary theme or societal challenge and give this community a platform to propose projects in response.

Contact
alexandre.bisquerra@ird.fr

Further reading
https://www.soscience.org/thefutureof

A recognised methodology

The Future Of (TFO) programmes bring together 30 to 50 international experts (researchers, social entrepreneurs, start-ups, companies and industries, NGOs and non-profit organisations, etc.) through a call for projects, with the aim of generating collaborative research projects. Each programme is divided into three phases:

Phase 1

Defining a specific issue around a transdisciplinary research theme or societal challenge:

- definition of the issue, co-constructed with researchers, partners and civil society representatives
- launch of the call for projects and receipt of applications.

Phase 2

To create synergies and develop multi-stakeholder collaborative projects that focus on the issue defined:

- selection of 30 to 50 participants from among all the applications received
- organisation and facilitation of a meeting to develop collaborative projects.

Phase 3

Structuring and driving/implementing the projects developed:

- selection of the winning projects with the organisational committee
- support provided by SoScience during the first six months of each project.

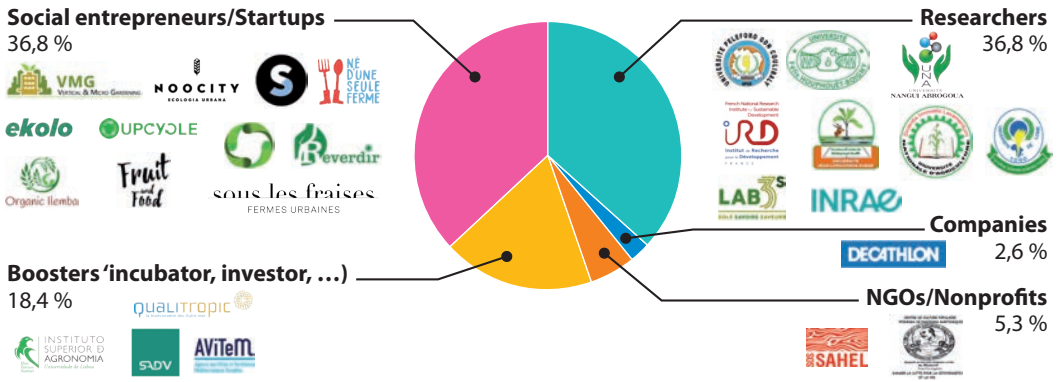
Since 2016, nine TFO programmes have been completed, including four in partnership with IRD on water, soil quality, urban agriculture and, in the Seychelles, on plastic pollution in the oceans.

The Future Of Urban Agriculture (TFOUA)

TFOUA launched in September 2020 with the "Sustainable Cities" interdisciplinary structuring and partnership programme and was supported by a committee of 14 experts including several IRD laboratories (iEES-Paris, Eco&Sols, Mivegec, G-Eau), French scientific partners (AgroParisTech, INRAE) and Southern partners (University of Lomé), non-profit organisations (SOS Sahel, SFR Racines, LAB3S, Reverdir), along with Qualitropic, a tropical bioeconomy competitiveness cluster. A call for contributions was launched in the autumn of 2020 on the issue of "What solutions and services should be developed with urban farmers to feed the local population while contributing to a sustainable city?" Of the 70 applications received, 27 were selected to join the panel of 13 experts on the organising committee. At the Partnership Days held online on 28 and 29 January 2021, 56% of the 38 participants came from Europe, 40% from Africa and 4% from South America, with the following diversity across sectors.

As a result of the meeting, three projects are currently being supported:

- a participatory research project for developing an urban farm on a polluted site in Martinique;



Exemple de diversité sectorielle des participants à un programme TFO, ici TFO *Urban Agriculture*.

- a research consortium carrying out a pioneering study to provide sub-Saharan cities with a method, tools and good practices to support urban tree planting;
- an R&D project to develop a grey water treatment module and a digital model to measure the benefits.

The ambassador programme: The Future Of Plastic Waste

TFO programmes are also being deployed in spin-off mode through the ambassador programme, which allows partners from the Global South to be trained in the methodology and then supported remotely by SoScience when they implement their first TFO programme. This is the case with The Future Of Plastic Waste programme in the Seychelles, within the framework of DiDEM (Science-Decision-Makers' Dialogue for Integrated Management of Coastal and Marine Environments) and in partnership with Monaco Explorations and the Seychellois Department of the Blue Economy. The Future Of Plastic Waste Partnership Days was held online in May 2021 and brought together 38 stakeholders, more than half of whom were from the Western Indian Ocean region (18% scientific stakeholders, 24% entrepreneurs, 13% companies, 21% NGOs and 24% boosters, such as consultants to blue economy departments, communicators, etc.).

KEY POINTS

After five years of partnership, IRD and SoScience have been able to enhance and optimise the methodology to make it easier for scientists to get involved, to open up the programmes more widely to the international community and to the entire "IRD planet", and to introduce a spin-off model to meet the demands of partners in the Global South who wish to deploy this type of programme. The upcoming challenges will be to strengthen the support given to winning projects, increase the momentum behind international and Southern spin-offs, and make it easier to share best practices between the partners and stakeholders involved in the various TFO programmes. The Future Of methodology was one of the models used to develop European public policies on open innovation (European MOSAIC project 2021-2023) and was internationally recognised by the UN in 2021 as an SDG good practice.

SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE

UNDERSTAND, CO-CONSTRUCT, TRANSFORM

Collective thinking coordinated
by Olivier Dangles and Claire Fréour

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