

# ENGAGED EXCELLENCE

for Global Development

Strategy 2015–20





**OUR VISION** is of equal and sustainable societies, locally and globally, where everyone can live secure, fulfilling lives free from poverty and injustice.



## How we will make a difference

At IDS, we believe passionately that cutting-edge research, knowledge and evidence are crucial in shaping the changes needed for our broader vision to be realised, and to support people, societies and institutions to navigate the challenges ahead. But dynamic global contexts and challenges require new kinds of research and knowledge, developed and shared in new ways.

*“Progressive economic, social and political change for everyone, everywhere in a rapidly-changing world needs new kinds of action and relationships, shaped by new kinds of research and engagement. Together with partners, IDS can help develop the networks and knowledge necessary to make these positive transformations a reality.”*

**Professor Melissa Leach**  
IDS Director

## OUR GOALS

Over the next five years, we will:

- 1 Contribute to transformations that reduce inequalities, accelerate sustainability and build inclusive, secure societies.
- 2 Embed engaged excellence and its four pillars across all that we do.
- 3 Work locally and globally within a universal framing of development.
- 4 Create an institute that is thriving financially and organisationally, and living its values.

## What is engaged excellence?

This is IDS' distinctive approach to constructing and mobilising knowledge, and to teaching and mutual learning for development. Engaged excellence means that the high quality of our work (excellence) is dependent upon it linking to and involving those who are at the heart of the change we wish to see (engaged).



*We are committed to an open knowledge agenda that harnesses digital innovation to connect evidence to real change.*

*We define impact not only as producing evidence to inform policy and practice but also as providing new ways of learning and knowing which can affect the practices, behaviours and values that make transformations possible.*

## Four pillars of engaged excellence

### 1. Deliver high-quality research

Rigorous, relevant and robust research draws on multiple forms of knowledge, links diverse social science disciplines with natural sciences and professions as well as with local knowledge, in order to develop the evidence, insights and understanding that will help address highly complex contemporary challenges.

### 2. Co-construct knowledge

Through the co-construction of research and learning with others whose lives and futures are affected by the issues, we address communities, local researchers, scholars, civil society organisations and policy actors to bring their own experiences and knowledge to bear on shaping research and learning agendas, gathering evidence, or interpreting research findings. We pursue a democratic approach to the construction and sharing of research and knowledge, promoting cognitive justice.

### 3. Mobilise evidence for impact

By generating, communicating and mobilising research in partnerships we seek to produce and share practical knowledge and create scalable solutions to poverty and inequality. Learning partnerships enable us to better understand the environment in which development happens and map out desired changes, key stakeholders and policy processes. Achieving impact means not just producing evidence, but engaging with the politics of knowledge – who it is produced by and for, and whose voice counts.

### 4. Build enduring partnerships

Extending the quality, relevance and impact of our work relies on extensive collaboration with partners and networks around the world. We are committed to the belief that through enduring partnerships with others in our research, mutual learning and communication we can collectively make an impact at local, national and global levels.

## Working in partnership to address global challenges



Reducing inequalities



Accelerating sustainability



Building more inclusive and secure societies

- Our emphasis on reducing inequalities, accelerating sustainability and building more inclusive and secure societies reflects our conviction that these are the defining challenges of our era. We will develop and apply our engaged excellence approach, including strengthened global partnerships, to ensure our work contributes substantially to meeting these challenges.

## Reducing inequalities

Our focus on reducing inequalities recognises that rising inequalities present growing and related challenges. Countries experiencing rapid economic growth – such as China and India – have also seen growing inequality. Apparent economic growth successes in some of the lowest-income countries in Africa have been very unevenly distributed, with benefits accruing to elite, privileged people and places, and failing to contribute to broader livelihoods and wellbeing. Gaps between the top 20 per cent and bottom 20 per cent are growing in all countries. Economic inequalities intersect with social and political inequalities whether associated with gender or age, identity or ethnicity, place or (dis)ability. Cognitive injustices – that privilege some people’s knowledge over others – intersect with, and often support, material ones. We will focus more of our work in this area over the next five years, untangling interactions between economic, political, social and cognitive mechanisms, and seeking routes for transformative change.



## Accelerating sustainability

Our focus on accelerating sustainability derives from the growing urgency of environmental and climate change challenges. Recent social and economic advances have come at increasing cost to the environment. Environmental scientists have defined a set of 'planetary boundaries', and provided evidence on which of these have been transgressed, suggesting the need for development to steer within a 'safe space for humanity' and build resilience, or be undone through greater exposure to shocks, stresses and resource constraints. At the same time, people's experiences around the world reveal environmental change is already contributing to droughts, floods, depleted resources, unhealthy cities and devastated livelihoods.

There is remarkably little systematic understanding of how to tackle these problems: how to get from dangerous to safe situations, and the political, institutional, social and economic requirements for such journeys. In this strategic period we will focus more of our work on ensuring that development is truly sustainable, and on creating and maintaining green transformations – recognising that the urgency of the challenge means that such changes must be accelerated.



## Building more inclusive and secure societies

Our focus on building more inclusive and secure societies acknowledges the appalling dangers and lasting harms to people's lives and livelihoods from everyday conflict and violence, but also from risks associated with the environment, health and the economy. Being and feeling unsafe and insecure is devastating to individuals, families, communities and societies. Resilience to shocks and heading-off their magnification into crises requires inclusive institutions. Where people feel excluded from or distrust state or outside agencies, it is difficult to build acceptable responses and resistance is likely.

We will engage critically with debates, practices and institutions, identifying how security-related ideas, institutions and practices can contribute to peace, freedom and safety for people, but also highlighting and challenging problematic forms of 'securitisation' that uphold repressive regimes and power relations. We will seek to untangle the interactions between inclusion and security, and degrees of equality and sustainability. We will produce a new body of evidence and analysis examining the relationships between inclusion and safety, equality and sustainability, and on how this might best be pursued in different local, national and global settings.



*“The quest for a world without poverty, where social justice is real and sustainable economic growth benefits all, will not happen without dedicated, passionate and enduring efforts in researching, learning, teaching and communicating development challenges and complexities. Over the past 50 years, IDS has continued to demonstrate that this is not a dream, but an achievable objective in a foreseeable future.”*

**Youba Sokona**  
Special Advisor on Sustainable Development, South Centre



Resourceful

Respectful



# *OUR VALUES*

All of our work is underpinned by our values which define who we are, what we stand for and how we behave.

Inclusive

Excellent





## Engaging, learning, transforming since 1966

For half a century IDS has been tackling complex development challenges, contributing the evidence, analysis, theory and facilitated learning that can help communities, practitioners and decision-makers at all levels work together for practical, positive change. Our work also critiques, highlighting where powerful actors, relations and systems are blocking progress, and supporting evidence-based advocacy for alternatives. We do this neither as a university organisation nor a thinktank, but by combining elements of both in a unique mix that is articulated in our engaged excellence approach.



## A community of dedicated development professionals

While IDS is home to researchers, knowledge specialists and professional staff as well as its students, its community extends far beyond, encompassing an extensive worldwide network of partners, alumni and hundreds of former staff.

*“What IDS is offering is a bold invitation for a root and branch redefinition of development in ways that enable us to think and act in more holistic and integrated ways about the key challenges of the times.”*

Professor Adebayo Olukoshi,  
Director, UN Africa Institute for Economic  
Development and Planning



An extensive global  
network of over

**360**  
partners

IDS IS  
HOME TO  
APPROXIMATELY

**65**  
professional  
staff

**100**  
researchers

**70**  
knowledge  
specialists

Our partnership with the University of Sussex supports and accredits our teaching and learning programmes, where in PhD studies and a range of high-level Masters' courses we aim to produce a new generation of development thought, policy and practice leaders. The reach of these pedagogical resources is multiplied through our diverse offerings of professional short courses, summer schools and learning initiatives embedded in our research projects.



About  
**200**\*  
students at  
any one time

\*MA, MSc and PhD students



World Number One for  
Development Studies



Over  
**3,000**  
ALUMNI

# Engage with us

Whether you are taking part in our live-streamed seminars, downloading our research, or signing up to our courses, anyone can learn with IDS.

## Tune in to the IDS community

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