



The 2030 Agenda: IRF's proposal for action

The Independent Research Forum (IRF) is a global collaboration between 10 organisations with diverse research and policy skills, cultural perspectives and networks, combining expertise across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development.

Founded in 2012 following the Rio+20 conference, IRF has provided independent, pragmatic and timely expert analysis around the development of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This has included organising a series of informal retreats for UN delegates and staff on some of the complex issues facing negotiators at the global level in developing the draft SDGs. IRF has also worked through its members to explore how to maximise the impact of the new agenda at a national and regional level.

Having invested our collective effort into achieving a strong outcome in the post-2015 process, we are keen to see Agenda 2030's ambition for universal, integrated and transformative change delivered. To contribute to that aim, we are developing three new areas of work: supporting national and regional engagement; distilling cross-country policy lessons; and raising awareness to influence the international discourse.

IRF has strong links with the governments, regional bodies and civil society organisations that are responsible for implementing the 2030 Agenda. IRF partners in China, India, Japan, Southeast and South Asia, Southern Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe give IRF a global reach, with strong local roots.

IRF is seeking partnerships and funding support for its new programme of work over a three-year period from 2016 to 2018.

The IRF partner organisations are: Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), Chinese Academy for Social Sciences' Research Center for Sustainable Development, Development Alternatives (DA), Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP), Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and World Resources Institute (WRI).

About IRF

The Independent Research Forum (IRF) brings together institutes from across the world with diverse research and policy analysis skills, cultural perspectives and networks, combining expertise across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. IRF has contributed research-based critical thinking and fresh ideas to post-2015 debates, facilitated dialogue among a wide range of stakeholders and provided advice and support to the member states and UN agencies involved in the negotiation process.

IRF's key assets include:

- *legitimacy and credibility* in a range of fields and geographic regions based on our members' strong track records;
- *independence* from the political positions of governments and inter-governmental organisations, and with it the ability to be both a critical observer and a neutral facilitator;
- *a proven transdisciplinary way of working*, combining expertise in research, policy analysis, dialogue facilitation and action on the ground;
- *a well-established and effective partnership* that benefits all partners through shared experience and learning.

IRF has developed a particular niche in facilitating policy-learning processes at national, regional and transnational levels.

IRF's track record

IRF organised and facilitated a series of informal retreats on the theme "Towards a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda" which brought together member state negotiators, ambassadors and UN senior officials for open dialogue. This created a space to share diverse perspectives and find common ground on complex, potentially divisive issues. The original plan for three retreats was expanded to seven in response to demand from member states and the UN system. The series of retreats engaged over 200 participants from 49 member states and 10 UN agencies.

IRF has also undertaken research and facilitated dialogues at national and regional levels. In Southern Africa, OSISA is working with the Pan African Parliament to engage parliamentarians on the 2030 Agenda and promote parliamentary ownership, leadership and co-operation. This platform includes parliamentarians from 10 national parliaments, as well as sub-regional bodies (e.g. East Africa Legislative Assembly and Economic Community of West African States Parliament).

CANARI facilitated dialogues among a range of stakeholders from government agencies, UN missions, academia, civil society and regional organisations to identify the priority issues that the SDGs should address from a Caribbean perspective. Rimisp undertook a participatory case study of the energy sector involving political and business leaders to understand what is required to achieve transformational change towards sustainable development.

Collectively, IRF has produced a number of policy and technical papers around the key principles behind the SDGs – universality, integration and transformation. These documents are available on IRF's website (www.irf2015.org).

IRF's global reach

IRF brings together its partners' impressive networks of collaborators. For example, in the Caribbean, CANARI collaborates with regional institutions ranging from the Caribbean Community and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States to associations of fisherfolk and farmers to facilitate and promote an integrated and inclusive approach to sustainable development policy and action. In Latin America, Rimisp is working with multi-stakeholder policy dialogue groups in Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Mexico, and with similar fora at the sub-regional level for Central America and the Andean area.

IIED has facilitated the creation of an Independent Expert Group on the SDGs comprised of individuals from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) who can provide advice and information to LDCs on a wide range of aspects of sustainable development. And IGES works closely with regional and international organisations in East and Southeast Asia, for example the Global Environmental Outreach Centre.

Looking forward

The challenge

The challenge of the 2030 Agenda is achieving a transformation in the way the world approaches development. As a universal global compact, the 2030 Agenda has begun moving from the old model of development assistance to a new model of international sustainable development cooperation. For that new model to succeed, it must replace top-down decision-making with multi-stakeholder and multi-dimensional development processes.

We need to move towards economic models that reduce rather than increase inequality, and recognise the trade-offs between economic growth, equality and sustainability. Development solutions need to take account of social and environmental considerations, and tackle the systemic barriers to progress, not just their symptoms.

These transformations will not come easily. Governments are already showing signs of resisting those aspects of the 2030 Agenda that could be perceived as politically risky or financially costly. Those with the most to gain from global cooperation on sustainable development, including the poor and marginalised, have little influence, while those who profit from maintaining the status quo often wield considerable political and economic power.

Achieving transformation will require shifting balances of power, overcoming institutional inertia, and understanding and overcoming barriers to change. The 2030 Agenda offers a rough roadmap for moving in this direction, but inevitably it also reflects the complex challenges inherent in achieving consensus on an ambitious, broad and inclusive 15-year global project. We need to respect the dedicated work that went into the Agenda and the new and broader vision of cooperation it sets out, while pushing beyond its weaknesses and compromises.

IRF work streams 2016-2018

IRF is developing three inter-related work streams that aim to nurture and support coalitions of 'change agents' in selected countries and sub-regions who can take ownership of the sustainable development agenda and exercise leadership. At the same time, we will seek to influence the wider discourse and broaden understanding of the democratic, social, economic, and

environmental foundations of sustainable development, the linkages between them and the need for integration. The work will involve:

- (1) Supporting national and regional efforts to adapt the SDG agenda to local contexts through dialogue and capacity-building;
- (2) Cross-country exchange of experience and policy learning to develop knowledge about “what works” for SDG implementation;
- (3) Global awareness-raising to build momentum and political commitment to achieving transformative change in the way the world approaches development.

Our work on **country and regional learning platforms** will be based on developing strategies for long-term engagement with interested stakeholders in a selected set of countries and sub-regions in which IRF members already have strong links.

In the inception phase, IRF will engage national governments, civil society and regional stakeholders as well as donors, philanthropic institutions and the UN system in detailed discussions to determine the specific role that IRF should play in different regional contexts.

We will then select a set of countries and regions to work with based on criteria including high-level commitment and political leadership, diversity of country contexts, willingness to share and learn, and familiarity of IRF members with national issues, actors and institutions. We will seek to support countries in developing integrated approaches to implementing the 2030 Agenda, focusing on goals or cross-sectoral issues identified as key in a given country and where IRF partners have expertise.

Outcomes will be diverse but should include uptake of more collaborative and participatory policy processes leading to broader stakeholder engagement in implementation, greater awareness of the inter-relationships between the dimensions of sustainable development (such as the water-energy-food nexus), and greater integration of those dimensions in policy frameworks and implementation.

Our work at the **cross-country level** will be informed by these processes, and will focus on synthesising, comparing and drawing lessons from national and subnational experience, with case-specific illustration. The aim will be to distil learning through cross-country exchange of experience and comparative analysis involving national stakeholders, which can feed into the national processes and also usefully be shared more widely.

We anticipate that this effort to aggregate and interpret information will help to engage key actors in civil society, the private sector and government through providing a credible synthesis of knowledge and information to facilitate understanding of the SDG framework and identify entry points for their own areas of focus.

This will include regional and international dialogues, working papers summarising lessons learned regarding key implementation topics, and shared methods and frameworks for integrated policy analysis.

IRF will also seek to **raise awareness** by contributing to the global discourse on sustainable development. We will engage with relevant global processes and policy platforms, such as the High Level Political Forum and its Science Advisory Board and UN DESA (which leads on producing the Global Sustainable Development Report) as key target audiences. Secondary

audiences will be national governments and those who can influence them, including civil society, the scientific community and private sector associations.

The central output here will be a periodic IRF “independent review” publication on SDG implementation, focusing not on progress towards individual goals and targets or means of implementation (this is the job of the official UN-driven process), but rather on using case studies to interpret how countries are progressing in terms of the main cross-cutting principles and themes that underpin the global agenda - and which have been the guiding principles for IRF in the past: universality, integration and transformation.

Governance and management model

IRF employs a horizontal model of governance, with all partners sharing coordination responsibilities and having an equal say in decisions. There is no single lead organisation driving the programme. To ensure smooth and effective management, one or more partners assume the operational lead for a defined period of time. WRI has played this role through 2015, and IIED and SEI have taken over the operational lead on an interim basis from January 2016.

Next steps and funding

IRF’s work over the past three years was largely supported through a grant from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. We are now seeking support from international and bilateral donors to implement this strategy over a three-year period, beginning in early 2016.

The total required funding for the three work streams over three years is estimated at **3.8 million USD**.

In the coming months, we will be discussing our ideas with interested country actors, donors and collaborators and developing detailed proposals based on these discussions. We expect that this will entail:

- One-day dialogue meeting to be held in Europe to bring together representatives of interested governments and international agencies, bilateral donor agencies, foundations and IRF representatives to discuss future plans and ways these could be supported, including suggestions on the selection of focal countries and sub-regions.
- Structured exploration of future needs and priorities and information-gathering with intended users of IRF analysis, potential partner organizations, and agencies tasked to lead SDG implementation networks.

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
www.canari.org

Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP)

Santiago, Chile
www.rimisp.org

Development Alternatives (DA)

New Delhi, India
www.devalt.org

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)

Hayama, Japan
www.iges.or.jp

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

London, United Kingdom
www.iied.org

Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA)

Johannesburg, South Africa
www.osisa.org

Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

London, United Kingdom
www.odi.org.uk

Research Centre for Sustainable Development (RCSD)

Beijing, China
www.rcsd.org.cn

Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)

Stockholm, Sweden
www.sei-international.org

World Resources Institute (WRI)

Washington DC, United States
www.wri.org

IRF is an eclectic mix of research institutes, NGOs, think tanks and social innovators, spanning the Global South, North, East and West. We come with different skills and perspectives on sustainable development, but are joined together in a shared vision and value foundation for a universal, transformative and integrated 2030 Agenda