

ARA Webinar

What is needed for more effective TD research to advance climate action?

Fostering transdisciplinary research for equitable and climate resilient development pathways across Africa: what changes are needed?

in our institutions

in our funding systems

in our practice

Sheona Shackleton, et al.

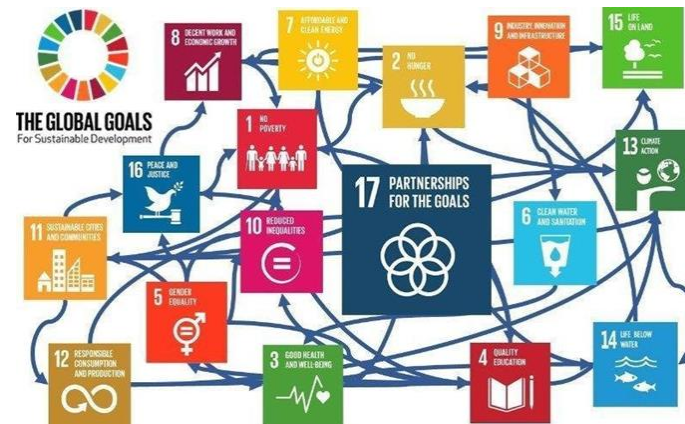
ACDI, UCT



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Why transdisciplinary research and how does it relate to what ARA stands for?

- To achieve the transformations required to realise the **Sustainable Development Goals** and address **Climate Action** demands:
 - new ways of mobilising, weaving together, and applying knowledge
 - linking research, policymaking, planning, and action
 - working with the different needs and interests of a wide variety of societal actors
- **Transdisciplinarity (TD)** offers a **promising, holistic approach** to foster such transformations.



We live in an interconnected world, in an interconnected time, and we need holistic solutions. We have a crisis of inequality, and we need climate solutions that solve that crisis.

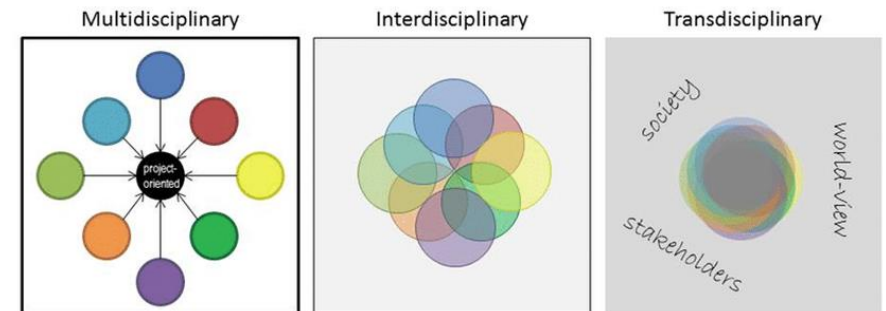
Naomi Klein

What is TD?

- TD is a **problem- and action-orientated, reflexive approach to co-producing knowledge**, that draws from **different disciplines**, as well as the **values, expertise, and know-how** of **non-academic actors** to enable **mutual learning** and **address societal problems** (Jahn et al., 2012 ; Klein 2010; Noström et al., 2020).



Multi- → Inter- → Transdisciplinary



What did we do?

The problem: TD is not yet well embedded in our academic institutions and disciplinary and sectoral silos continue to persist with the result that much of our SDG related research is too narrowly framed and divorced from the action space to be impactful.

What we did: We hosted, and then synthesised the learnings and insights, from **two online social learning processes** with researchers and practitioners to explore avenues to better:

- a) **promote and support TD within academic institutions** across Africa;
- b) **resource TD** for sustainable partnerships, and
- c) **strengthen TD practices** and impacts to support transformation to sustainability across diverse places and contexts.

Paper is in press: Ecosystems and People; part of a Special Issue on “Advancing transdisciplinary research on transformations in social-ecological systems in the Global South”. It is an open access journal.

Summit on SDGs in Africa

Drawing on experiences from existing transdisciplinary initiatives to characterize challenges and identify key levers to pave a way forward for successful transdisciplinary research across Africa in pursuit of meeting the SDGs and Agenda 2063



3 x Pre-summit workshops



Exploring a set of six case studies



In-depth conversations with expert discussants

Berg-Breede Landscape Case Study

Building capacity and partnerships to support long-term transdisciplinary research for equitable and resilient landscapes in the Berg-Breede Landscape in the Western Cape, South Africa



Researchers workshops



Non-academics & practitioner workshops



Educators workshop

1x

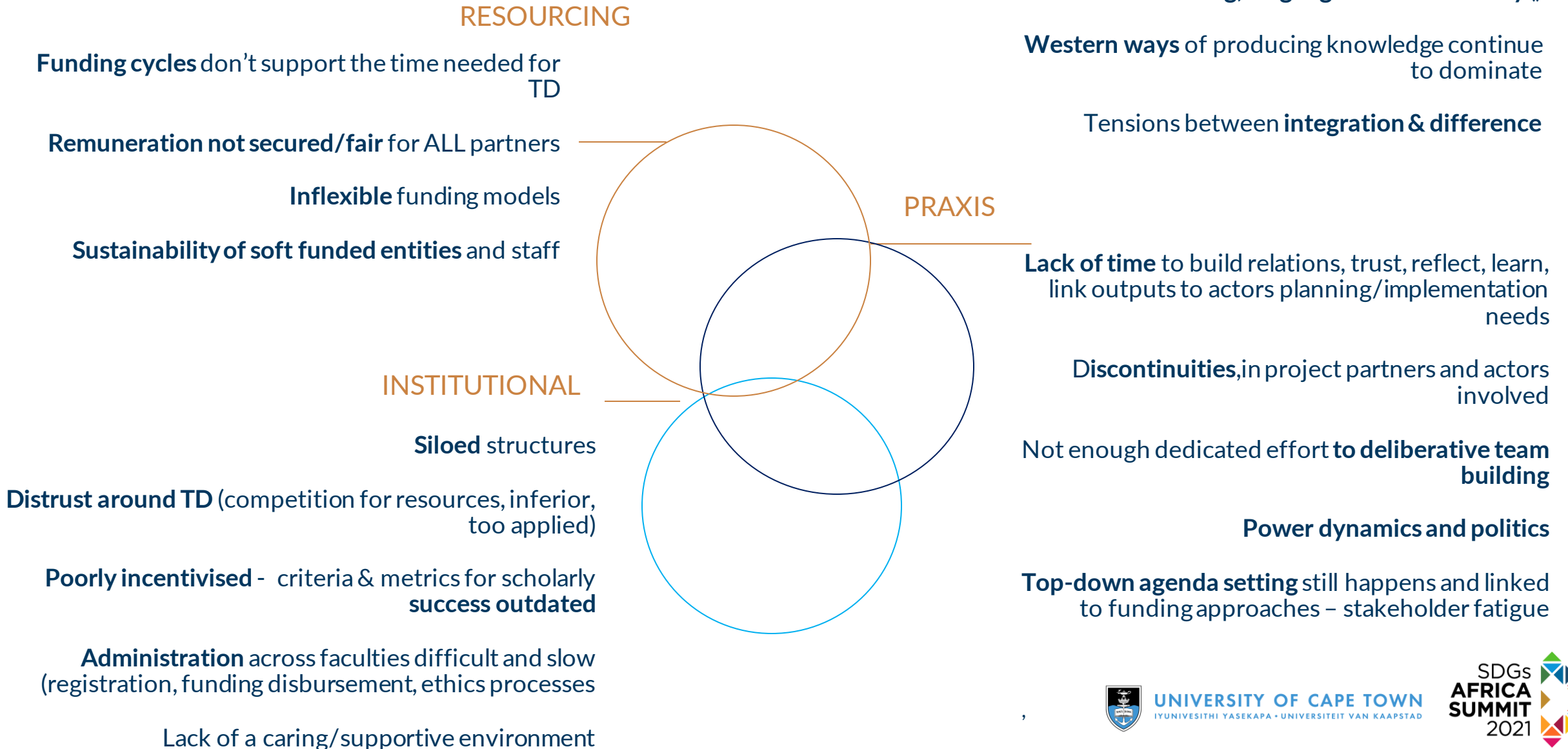


Synthesis workshop with all stakeholders

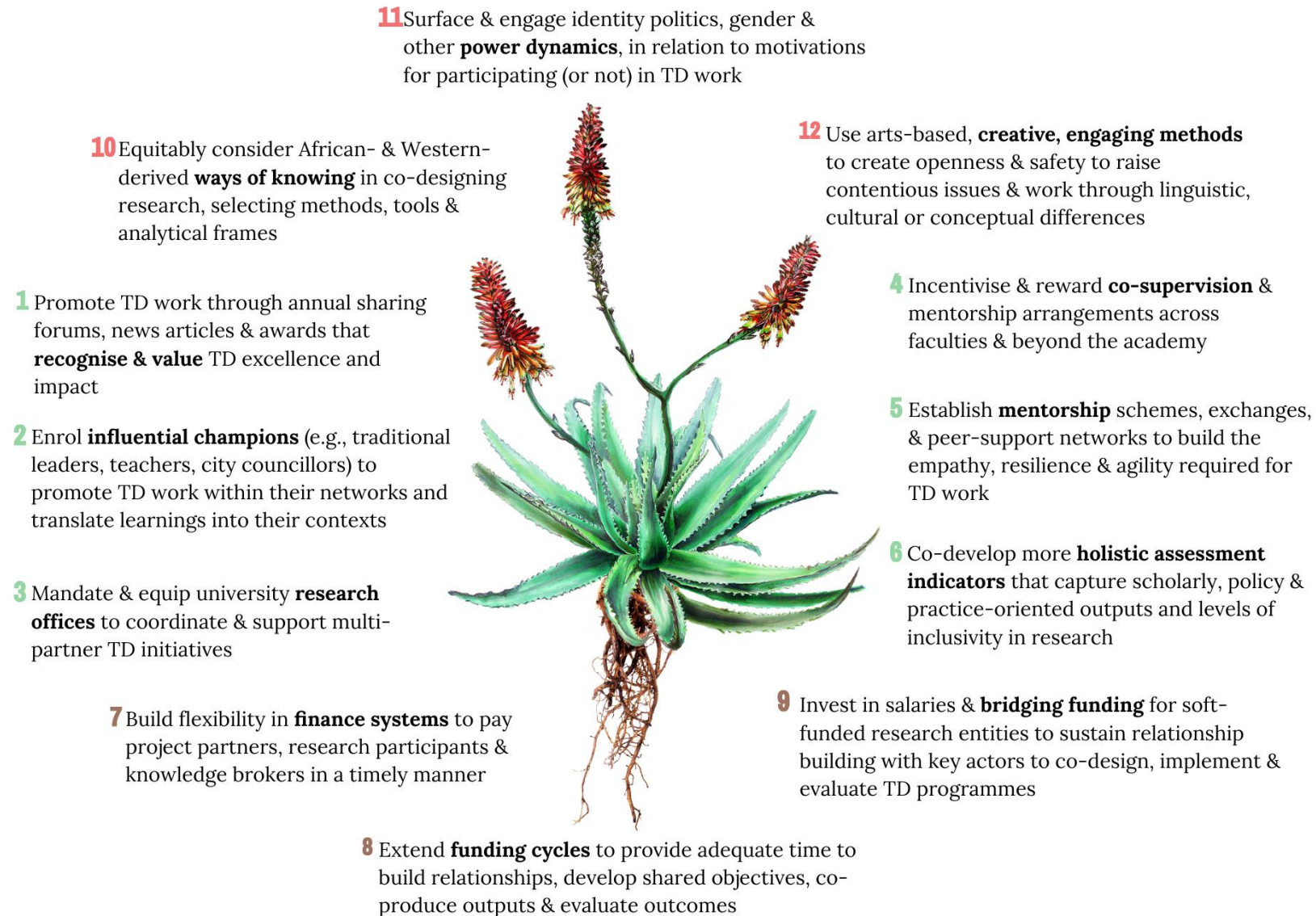


Synthesized learnings and insights

What were some of the key challenges related to improving our TD practice that emerged from our learning processes?



What is needed to improve our practice and to improve transformative impact?



“What we want to do is have Africa contribute to thinking in the world, not just be a place where ideas and concepts from the Global North are implemented. In order to do that, we need to adopt a pluriversal approach which allows us to theorise through Africa instead of theorising only for Africa.”

research, selecting methods, tools & analytical frames

entity politics, gender & ...cs, in relation to motivations (not) in TD work

“Unless we find different vocabularies to begin to make sense of our own experiences, we are actually reproducing the same thing we are actually trying to critique...”.

1 Promote TD work through annual sharing forums, news articles & awards that **recognise & value** impact

2 Enrol **influential** leaders, teachers promote TD work translate learnings into their contexts

“We need to transform institutions to be sufficiently dynamic and relational in order to enable research that responds to conditions that are not controlled, both socially and epistemically by scientists solely”.

4 incentivise & reward **co-supervision** & mentorship arrangements across ... the academy

hip schemes, exchanges, networks to build the e & agility required for

“Together, we need to build solidarity and connectivity to disrupt, and we need to be bold. The moment is now to be bold”.

...s to pay ... pants & ... knowledge brokers in a timely manner



6 Co-develop more **holistic assessment indicators** that capture scholarly, policy & practice-oriented outputs and levels of inclusivity in research

“We need to invest in sustaining the courage, vision, reflexivity and (methodological) agility required to do this work”.

8 Extend **funding cycles** to provide adequate time to build relationships, develop shared objectives, co- ...

Thank you for listening and looking forward to hearing your perspectives

- I would like to acknowledge all my co-authors of the paper as well as the many different people who participated in the two learning processes – what I have shared here is a collective summary of their rich knowledge, experience and wisdom.
- I would like to thank UCT for support for the SDG summit work and the NRF, through the Rhodes University led NRF Community of Practice in Social Learning, for funding the Berg-Breede Catchment process.

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Useful links and resources

- SDG Summit - TT4: TD and engaged research website:
<https://sites.google.com/view/sdgsummit-tt4>; <http://www.sdgsafricasummit.uct.ac.za>
- [How can funders better support transdisciplinary research for equitable and resilient landscapes?](#)
- **Infographic** by Sheona Shackleton, Leigh Cobban, Tali Hoffman, Nadine Methner and Nadia Sitas · February 2022
- [How can funders better support transdisciplinary research for equitable and resilient landscapes?](#)
- **Information brief** by Sheona Shackleton, Leigh Cobban, Tali Hoffman, Nadine Methner and Nadia Sitas · February 2022
- [How enduring partnerships can build sustainable and just landscapes](#)
- **Information brief** by Sheona Shackleton, Leigh Cobban, Tali Hoffman, Nadine Methner and Nadia Sitas · February 2022

Questions

- Please share some your experience of engaged, action or TD research whether as a researcher or a practitioner. What were some of the main challenges?
- What do you believe is needed to overcome these challenges and improve our practice?

We need to see research “as a **social and political process, not just discovery**, this highlights the moral and ethical dimensions of working with people whose lives are affected” (Clarke et al. 2016)