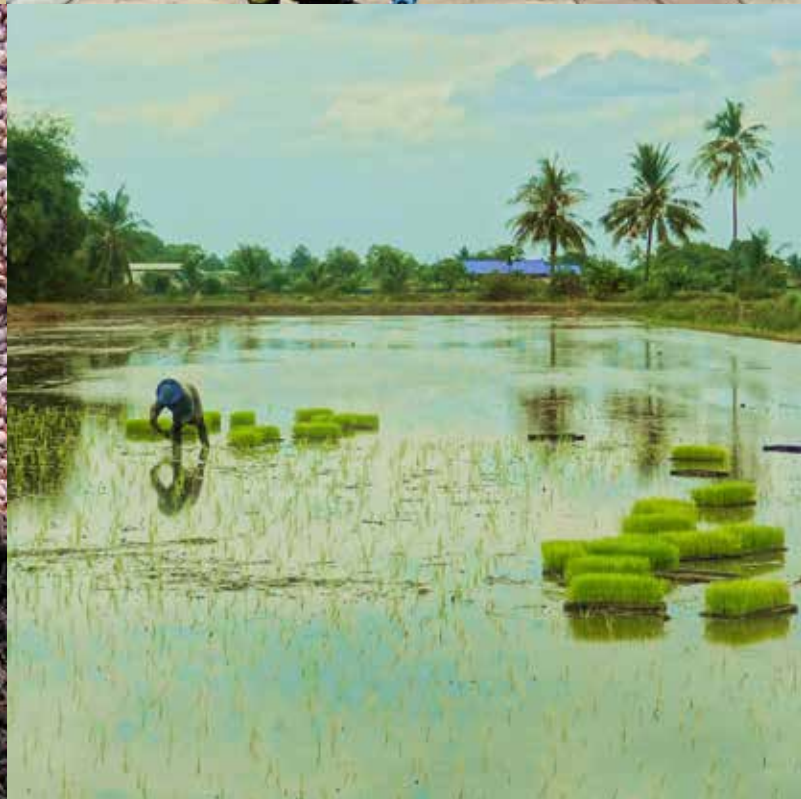


ZEF STRATEGY 2021–2030



SERVING IN NEW LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS



IMPRINT

Publishers:

Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung (ZEF)

Center for Development Research

University of Bonn

Genscherallee 3

53113 Bonn, Germany

Tel: +49 (0)228 / 73 -1865

Fax: +49 (0)228 / 73 -1889

E-mail: presse.zef@uni-bonn.de

Photo credits:

Cover: Asrat Gella, Jochen Dürr,

Simone Kriesemer and Till Stellmacher

Page 5: Jochen Dürr

Page 9: Till Stellmacher

Pages 11,12: Yesim Pacal

Bonn 2020

CONTENTS

1. ABOUT ZEF	4
2. THE CASE FOR THIS STRATEGIC UPDATE	5
3. ZEF'S VISION AND MISSION	5
4. THE BROAD STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS OF ZEF	6
5. EVOLVING ZEF'S RESEARCH	7
6. ZEF'S ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE	10
ENDNOTES	11

1.

ABOUT ZEF

ZEF has evolved over the past two and a half decades, and its strategic orientation has been continuously adjusted due to changing global contexts and innovation opportunities. The adjustments were forward looking and captured in medium-term strategic plans as well as Advisory Board-commissioned external reviews. These adjustments made with foresight are the basis of ZEF's success. ZEF research leaders and teams, the ZEF Advisory Board and research partners were all instrumental in this evolution. Since ZEF's current research strategy ends in 2020, it is now time to develop a new strategic plan for the period 2021-2030. This time the strategic adjustment and scientific reorientation of ZEF coincides with a key period in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a changed landscape at the University of Bonn (UoB). The latter is primarily a consequence of the university's success in the Excellence Initiative and the organizational and research-related changes that result from this. In addition, an updated ZEF strategy must not neglect the deep impacts and global challenges leading to shocks and disruptions caused by climate change, conflicts and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the initial objective that prompted the founding of a Center for Development Research remains valid and unchanged today: A research institute whose portfolio rests on basic empirical studies, embedded in distinct local, national and regional contexts and their respective languages. Such a unique institute was and still is needed in the German research landscape with its research partnerships in Europe and internationally, especially with the so-called Global South, for exchanging knowledge, deepening research insights, innovation, and evidence-informed decision making to engage in transformative action.

A look towards the future is also the right moment to critically assess ZEF's past achievements (between 2010 and 2019, among others; 998 peer-reviewed pu-

blications, 204 accomplished doctoral dissertations, and € 103 million external funds raised) and see if and how they can continue to shape the center in the decade to come. During the evolution of ZEF, a set of assets were built up which need to be considered in our new strategy update. These assets – internal to and affiliated with ZEF – are:

- A strong set of diverse research teams that cooperate multi- and interdisciplinarily across the three areas of disciplinary core expertise at ZEF, i.e. economics, social and natural sciences and that conduct basic empirical research in all world regions.
- A network with more than 100 active and significant partnerships with universities and research institutions around the world, in both high-income and emerging economy countries.
- A growing alumni network of presently around 400 established researchers world-wide who used to work at ZEF as junior or senior researchers and have moved on to research institutes or other organizations, but remain in touch with ZEF, often engaging in joint research, capacity building, and policy advisory activities.
- A considerable portfolio of agencies which fund ZEF's research and capacity building programs that has facilitated the considerable non-core funding of the institute, presently standing at approximately 80% of ZEF's budget.
- A cadre of about 50 affiliated Senior Fellows who are partly engaged as research partners.
- And last but not least, an international Advisory Board composed of eminent researchers, policy makers, and representatives from the private sector and civil society.

2.

THE CASE FOR THIS STRATEGIC UPDATE

These structures, affiliations, and partnerships will continue to be the backbone of ZEF. Yet, the center never operated in isolation but is part of a vibrant, rapidly evolving international research environment as well as with Bonn's university situated in a very strong science landscape in the greater Bonn region that is unique to Germany and beyond.

Hence, these factors as well as new developments in science, policy and development practice are shaping ZEF's new medium-term strategy in general and in particular because of:

1. The international research landscape undergoing dynamic change and getting stronger also in emerging economies of the global South.
2. The success of the UoB's Excellence Initiative, and the establishment of different Transdisciplinary Research Areas (TRAs), to which ZEF's research capacities, priorities and international reach contribute significantly.
3. The strengthening of the bi-directional transfer and translation of research insights, knowledge and technology in politics, culture, business and civil society, i.e. the „Third Mission“ at the UoB, the transformative roles of and needs for innovation and society's increasing demand for improved and extended modeling and foresight.
4. ZEF's longstanding and acknowledged track record in national and international policy advice and higher education programs worldwide which will significantly contribute to the UoB's internationalization of research and education, and
5. ZEF's inter- and transdisciplinary research approaches that perfectly correspond with the UoB's new TRA concept and embeds them in its international science and development network. In this way, ZEF facilitates important links between the UoB and the rapidly evolving research landscapes in low-income and emerging economies.

3.

ZEF'S VISION AND MISSION

ZEF's vision – in innovation and excellence – is to conduct in-depth empirical and inter- and transdisciplinary research and foster academic education for improved and more sustainable livelihoods and environments of rural and urban communities in low-income and emerging economy regions. *In a globalized world, ZEF engages not only with and in developing regions but also addresses development experiences and problems in high income countries. As inequalities widen both globally and locally, ZEF's research and education programs contribute to a better understanding of complex cause-effect relationships in sustainable development.*

ZEF's mission as part of the University of Bonn and its partners and alliances includes activities in the fields of transdisciplinary research, teaching and knowledge exchange and transfer. Accordingly, ZEF works with partners around the world to:

- Understand, anticipate and enable ecological, economic and socio-cultural developments¹ through basic research² and knowledge exchange.
- Strengthen academic teaching and capacities for sustainable development in low-income and emerging economy countries and regions as well as in Germany, and
- support policy and practice through research-based advisory services.



4.

THE BROAD STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS OF ZEF

ZEF's goal for 2021 to 2030 will be the **transformation of ZEF into a center for advanced transdisciplinary research** on global sustainability development. This will be achieved by leveraging alliances within the UoB as well as with ZEF's Bonn based and international partners. The new strategic focus will have meaningful implications for ZEF's research, teaching and transfer activities, for instance through the development of powerful new tools, methodologies and participatory methods to identify and overcome structural implementation bottlenecks thereby also strengthening the center's ability to deliver national and international policy advice.

In 2007 ZEF already adopted a transdisciplinary approach with its "Strategy for the Future", stating that "transdisciplinarity in development research takes a perspective that goes beyond specific disciplines and bridges the gaps between science, politics and practice".³ Accordingly, transdisciplinary research implies that perceptions and demands from the different stakeholders such as policy makers, civil society and target beneficiaries shape the research process, from the conceptualization to the implementation. Thus, stakeholders are not treated as recipients of research results but as active participants in the whole research continuum.

ZEF's even stronger emphasis on transdisciplinarity, now planned for the next strategy period, will also have an impact on its doctoral program, the **Bonn International Graduate School on Development Research** (BIGS-DR). Its lecture portfolio will increasingly encompass contributions from development policy and practice, both nationally and internationally, as well as from UN organizations and NGOs. Envisaged is also an accompanying internship program in such establishments as a transition between academic qualification and professional activity. Furthermore, e-learning activities will be established more syste-

matically and also be offered to ZEF's partner universities and institutes to supplement curricula or fill gaps. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic forced our academic community, particularly teaching offers and obligations to international partner universities and graduate schools, to boost the use of e- and blended learning instruments and to promptly replace face-to-face teaching. The immediate methodological, technical and practical experiences and challenges are extremely valuable for the formulation of future collaborative teaching strategies at an international level. At the same time, newly developed digital teaching instruments need careful examination in order to avoid increasing digital divides in quality higher education. On the long run – both synchronous and asynchronous e-learning is conceivable - depending on content and framework conditions. Blended learning approaches can be realized with partner institutions that are linked to ZEF through their respective doctoral and master programs.

A key element of transdisciplinarity, especially in development research, is the facilitation of the implementation of innovations. Particularly the identification and development of concepts and the support of mechanisms to overcome the hurdles and bottlenecks that hamper the exchange and transfer of research findings into practice – known as **implementation research**, including translational research focusing on public health as well as translational sociology addressing real world problems. An important element in this respect is the communication of science and knowledge in an impartial and transparent manner, conscientious of the different stakeholders and further sources of knowledge production (co-production of knowledge). Pursuing this philosophy will enable ZEF to effectively contribute to the UoB's "Third Mission" by fostering transfer technological, conceptual and methodological innovations into social, economic and ecological development practice.

5.

EVOLVING ZEF'S RESEARCH

Developing a new medium-term strategy offers the opportunity to rethink research priorities but also re-examining how the center operates and is managed and governed. This is particularly true against the backdrop of recent developments at the UoB with regard to the Excellence Initiative. Over the past 10 to 15 years, ZEF has built up considerable expertise in key research areas related to development, and this will continue with innovative research methodologies and with impact orientation in areas including:

- **Agriculture and land use with links to climate change**
- **Water resources and their management**
- **Biodiversity**
- **Food and nutrition**
- **Health (including One Health)**
- **Gender**
- **Migration, mobility and urbanization**
- **Governance and conflict**
- **Markets and services**
- **Innovation and science policy**

This is exemplified by, among others, the center's consistent top ranking as one of the world's leading science and technology think tanks by the University of Pennsylvania. Because of their overarching importance, especially for low-income and emerging economies and regions, these areas will continue to inform ZEF's research portfolio. However, a dynamic field such as development research must be continuously strategically adjusted, since its framework conditions are constantly changing due to changes in socio-cultural, political, economic and ecological conditions as well as technological advances. We therefore anticipate ZEF, in the coming years, to intensify its research activities in the following areas:

1. **Digitization and the future of work, business, and social services** will be addressed in its potential and challenges for sustainable development pathways which are compromised, especially but not only in the rural areas, due to population growth and an increasing demand for food. Particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, this

will lead to a more (land-) consolidated as well as more mechanized and automated and thus higher output-oriented type of agriculture. The technological changes imply structural changes in rural as well as urban areas with millions of small-scale farmers either becoming landless laborers on larger-scale farms or joining the already massively overloaded urban and peri-urban low-productivity services sector.

2. **Bio- and circular economy**, particularly its drivers of innovation and transformation in general and at regional cluster levels to research how biologization and digitalization facilitate the emergence of sustainable regional bio- and circular economies, and identify pathways for North-South and South-South knowledge and innovation transfer.
3. **Sustainable diets**, i.e. working with health, nutrition, and agricultural sciences as well as economics, behavioral research, and psychology. ZEF will assume co-leadership in establishing and hosting a research area that provides evidence-based decision support for the design of sustainable food production and consumption systems. This includes expanding ongoing research on the determinants of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in the globalized market system as well as rigorous assessments and evaluations of sustainability governance measures. In the long term, this area is envisaged to lead to the establishment of a research training group.

In addition to these new research areas, ZEF will emphasize **climate change** and **inequalities** as two highly important cross cutting themes. In terms of climate change, we expect that over the next 10 years basically all research at ZEF will be heavily influenced by adaptation and mitigation efforts, both in the North as well as in the Global South. Especially conflicts and power asymmetries, and their impacts on livelihoods, health and education will be key objectives for development research. Understanding and anticipating inequalities and dependencies in relation to socio-cultural, economic and environmental resources in low-income and emerging eco-

onomy countries and developing approaches that help to reduce social and political exclusion and the lack of equal opportunities and multiple forms of discrimination due to origin, religion, ethnicity or gender, among others, will additionally shape ZEF's research and development agenda in the years to come.

To successfully carry out trans-, inter- or multidisciplinary, but when necessary also disciplinary research in these areas, additional methodological tools and novel conceptual approaches will be required. The addressing of crosscutting methods, theories, concepts and measures will be necessary and are envisaged as follows:

- 1. Development of advanced transdisciplinary research approaches** involving approaches related to science and technology studies, modeling, participatory systems analysis, citizen science, remote data collection (critically important in the times of pandemics and violent conflicts), participatory research approaches and aspects of implementation research (including translational sociology that emerged from actor-network theory).
- 2. Big data-based analyses applying artificial intelligence and machine learning** in the context of modeling concerning foresight, and risk assessment in social, economic, and ecological systems.
- 3. Advanced research data management** including digitization of data and information in social, economic and ecological research activities, automation of data and information transfer (also from field surveys), data storage and backup, data access (data publication) and data policy.
- 4. Engagement with critical debates** on development, postcolonial approaches, "theory from the South" as well as gender and intersectionality aspects.

Successful implementation of ZEF's research areas and crosscutting methods, theories, concepts and measures will only be possible in close cooperation with the **Faculties of the UoB** and their respective research centers and institutes. Accordingly, ZEF will continue to actively engage with the Faculty of Agriculture, the Faculty of Arts as well as the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. The already close linkages are witnessed by the co-optive membership of ZEF's directors in these faculties as well by the formal anchoring of BIGS-DR in the Faculties. In the future, ZEF will strive to horizontally integrate graduate

schools from these three faculties with BIGS-DR, as well as to continue and further facilitate ZEF's teaching activities for staff and ZEF alumni. These include various teaching programs at Master and Doctoral level from for example, the Faculty of Agriculture and the Department of Geography, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and the upcoming teaching programs of the TRAs. In addition, we will further strengthen the cooperation with research centers of the Faculties such as the Center for Advanced Security, Strategic and Integration Studies (CASSIS) by exploring future options for joint research initiatives.

Furthermore, ZEF strives to deepen the already close ties with the Faculty of Medicine, especially in the fields of public health and One Health where an additional focus on development research and practice could broaden the scope of training for junior researchers in medicine and public health. As legal and human rights aspects are intrinsic to sustainability, the collaboration with the legal study centers should be expanded.

Part of ZEF's research interests and those of the Faculties are mutually reflected in the **Transdisciplinary Research Areas (TRA)** of the UoB. This new strategic and organizational landscape offers tremendous synergies, especially for an internationally focused transdisciplinary research and development center like ZEF. Close linkages in research and education, for instance with ZEF's doctoral program BIGS-DR, have already been established with some TRAs and are foreseen for others. In the following, brief and non-exhaustive synergy potentials for two of the TRAs with which ZEF's research agenda is most closely associated are outlined:

TRA-5 Past Worlds and Modern Questions – Cultures Across Time and Space: "Asymmetric dependencies" and global social inequalities have their origin in historical developments and are of multidimensional and multi-causal nature. Still existing colonial structures need to be addressed in the operationalization of inter- and transdisciplinary research questions and concepts considering claims of marginalized populations for the decolonization of methodologies in academia and beyond. The association of historical perspectives and patterns of global social inequalities with reflexive and critical research approaches for example in conflict, migration and urban studies are key areas of ZEF's research and will be complementary to TRA-5.

TRA-6 Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Futures: Assessing and evaluating the sustainability impacts and challenges of technological and institu-

tional innovations across implementation contexts and along development gradients represent key strengths of ZEF, and will form crucial assets for all five thematic areas of this TRA-6, i.e., Modeling, Foresight, and Risk Assessment Capacity; Technology & Digital World Innovations; Institutional Innovation, Behavior and System Transformations; Nutrition and Health; Development and Change.

In addition, there are a number of thematic areas where ZEF's research is highly complementary to the TRA-3 *Life and Health*, particularly in the areas of emerging infectious diseases and One Health. Similarly, considerable synergy potential exist with the TRA-4 *Individuals, Institutions and Societies* research on hierarchical levels (individual, institutional and societal) and how they influence socio-cultural, economic and ecological decisions in social and natural resources utilization.

Finally, building on the successful example of the CRC228 Future Rural Africa, the establishment of **large-scale research consortia** focusing on regional development issues with members from the different Faculties including the TRAs is envisaged.

In view of the ambitious research contents and approaches on the one hand, and the cooperation with and integration of university and other local expertise in development research and practice on the other, a structural basis must be created. The structure must be such that it reflects both the research areas and the cross-cutting methods, theories, concepts and measures of ZEF. Since ZEF cannot provide all expertise in-house, the structure should also allow for the identification of gaps in expertise. Accordingly, a **two-dimensional matrix organization** would be useful for ZEF. One dimension would be the research areas and contents, the other the methods, theories, concepts and measures. Gaps in the matrix that ZEF is unable to fill because of lack of expertise would be covered by experts from the Faculties/TRAs and the greater Bonn science and development environment. The two-dimensional matrix organization would result in a **hub for development research at the UoB**, coordinated by ZEF and its governing bodies, in particular the Steering Committee.



6.

ZEF'S ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

ZEF is a central research institute of the UoB, and thus reports directly to the Rector of the University. The present governance of ZEF is based on the ZEF Directorate and the center's international Advisory Board. The following strategic changes are proposed for redesigning the ZEF governance to reflect the changed landscapes at the UoB but also in the greater Bonn science and development environment (among others, through the establishment of the Bonn Alliance in which ZEF is a founding member):

1. The ZEF Directorate will be transformed and re-configured into a Management Committee (MC), supported by a Science Committee (SC). The SC will consist not only of the directors of ZEF, BICC, DIE, UNU and the Bonn Alliance, but will also include representatives from the UoB's faculties and TRAs, as well as strategic international research partners. The MC, consisting of the three ZEF directors, one representative each from the ZEF senior and junior researchers, a ZEF Senior Research Fellow,⁴ and one representative from the ZEF administration, will meet monthly and will deal with the day-to-day operations of the center. The MC will also prepare the quarterly meetings of the SC.

2. In addition, a high-level set of ZEF Senior Research Fellows will be invited and selected on a competitive basis to join the center and lead or contribute to research programs. This is a transformation and strengthening of the established and effective system of Senior Fellows at ZEF, who play an important role as advisors to the center's research and capacity building programs.

The SC will meet quarterly, either in person or virtually, and will critically accompany and assess the development of the center's research, teaching and transfer activities.

ZEF's international Advisory Board will continue to provide the center with strategic guidance and oversight on an annual basis.

Experienced ZEF senior researchers will be encouraged to establish research groups implementing the new transdisciplinary research foci of the center, thereby replacing the existing rigid departmental structure. Coupled with the forthcoming generational change in ZEF's leadership team, this new structure will assure the core expertise of ZEF in economics, social and natural sciences and the successful implementation of the new research strategy.



ZEF's new governance structure (*BIGS-DR also has its own committees, etc.)

ENDNOTES

¹ The study of development at ZEF is carried forward through study into human and environmental change. Through research, ZEF aims to support and inform local and international efforts to improve human well-being and ecological balance. In striving for a fairer and more equal world, ZEF works to increase understanding of development and contribute to initiatives that build toward sustainability and the enhancement of the livelihoods of people, in particular the poor and marginalized. As a trans-disciplinary research institute, ZEF continually seeks to broaden and challenge leading scientific inquiry into processes of global change. ZEF's views of development are embodied in research areas, strategies and methodologies that evolve from empirical study and academic and inter-cultural exchange.

² The research approaches must also be conceived as South-South, North-South and South-North cause-and-effect relationships.

³ A Strategy for the Future of ZEF – The Next Decade 2007–2017 (June 2007), see: https://www.zef.de/fileadmin/user_upload/zef_strategy_paper_2007.pdf

⁴ Senior Fellows are internationally renowned and experienced scientists who are interested and involved in ZEF's research and development agenda. They contribute to the training of ZEF doctoral students, may give occasional lectures or seminars and supervise students. Senior Fellows are not employees of ZEF, but visit the institute on a regular basis.



ZEF's International Advisory Board Meeting in Bonn, 2019.

