



# CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**«Research and innovation for sustainable development: strengthening partnerships between researchers and implementation partners to accelerate transformation towards global sustainable development» (TRANSFORM) for the period 2020-2025**

**First Phase –selection of pre-proposals**

## 1. Introduction - Background

The 2030 Agenda of the United Nations puts forward a broad and ambitious agenda for global action on sustainable development to address the challenges resulting from adverse social, economic and environmental developments. The scale and ambition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require new ways of thinking and working – across sectors and thematic silos. Achieving the SDGs will also require innovative forms of social and business practice and organization, as well as new or improved technologies, products and processes. In this context, science, research and knowledge-based transformations<sup>1</sup> are key to accelerate and scale up actions.

With the joint SDC-SNSF "Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development" (r4d programme) ending in 2022, SDC is launching a new Research and Innovation programme, which includes two pillars. A first pillar will provide direct support through contributions to big strategic, innovative applied research initiatives (TRANSFORM). A second pillar will continue supporting - on a competitive basis - research partnerships with smaller grants, based on the experiences of the ongoing r4d programme.

The r4d programme ([www.r4d.ch](http://www.r4d.ch)) has been supporting transdisciplinary research, where researchers have been encouraged to engage partners from policy and practice in order to increase the relevance of research and facilitate the dissemination and utilisation of results. So far, the degree and forms of engagement were however very variable, depending on the context, the research questions and researchers' interests and social networks. Beginning of 2019, the SNSF launched a new research promotion instrument (SPIRIT<sup>2</sup>), which supports bottom-up excellent team-oriented cross-border research. With TRANSFORM, SDC intends to support more applied, need-based research conducted by consortia of researchers and implementation partners, who together analyse, develop and test innovative solutions to sustainable development challenges in developing countries. Transdisciplinary research and implementation research, involving policy and practice partners from the onset of the research projects, are examples of promising approaches to address complex global challenges and to facilitate the uptake of research results.

The present Call for proposals takes place within TRANSFORM, the first pillar. SDC is looking for promising research and innovation initiatives, which engage researchers from Switzerland and from the Global South and East and implementation partners from other sectors (government, civil society, private sector). This Call intends to support research initiatives, which directly respond to the needs and interests of implementation partners. It does not set specific thematic orientations. *Impact evaluations*, and other scientific methods, which help assess the impacts of international cooperation, can also be funded. SDC is particularly interested in initiatives which aim to contribute to the four medium-term strategic objectives of Switzerland's international cooperation (IC) (see Annex 4) and addressing emerging issues and opportunities such as e.g. digitalisation, migration and cross sectoral approaches. TRANSFORM wants to avoid duplication with research and innovation already supported by SDC units, including SDC's five global programmes ([link](#)). TRANSFORM will therefore not provide additional support to specific projects already (co)-financed by SDC.

The Subsidy Act<sup>3</sup> and the conditions of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs regarding contributions are applicable.

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<sup>1</sup> Achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs needs fundamental systemic changes in our technological, organizational, economic, institutional, socio-cultural, political, and environmental systems. These future-looking systemic modification have been referred as transformation. Transformation does not merely intends to improve current practices and policies but to envision and implement new ways of thinking and working that distinguish themselves from "business as usual".

<sup>2</sup> Swiss Programme for International Research by Scientific Investigation Teams (SPIRIT): <http://www.snf.ch/en/funding/programmes/spirit/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Bundesgesetz über Finanzhilfen und Abgeltungen, (SR 616.1) – available in German, French and Italian

## 2. Goal of TRANSFORM and guiding principles

### 2.1 Goal and specific objectives

TRANSFORM overarching goal is to promote applied, need-based scientific research conducted by consortia of researchers and implementation partners, who together analyse, develop and test innovative solutions to sustainable development challenges in least developed, low and middle-income countries in the Global South and East. Three specific objectives have been defined for TRANSFORM:

- to generate and validate transformative knowledge and technology that meet the needs of practitioners and contribute to sustainable development in the global South and East;
- to foster and support the utilisation and scaling-up of research-based knowledge, technologies and innovation in development policies and interventions, through engaging implementation partners from the onset of research projects; and
- to enhance scientific skills and know-how in conducting transformative and transdisciplinary research on systemic and complex development challenges.

### 2.2 Guiding principles for the initiatives

- TRANSFORM will support research and innovation initiatives already ongoing or starting in 2020, which contribute to TRANSFORM's goal and three specific objectives as well as to the planned objectives of Switzerland's IC for the period 2021-2024 (see Annex 4)
- It is allowed to pool several existing (research) projects under a single initiative (i.e into one comprehensive proposal); in this case, the projects must contribute to a common overarching goal and to a consolidated and plausible joint theory of change. The overarching initiative must be guided by a single strategic steering mechanism.
- Proposals build on a track record of the consortium partners both in research and implementation work
- Leverage effect: SDC's contribution to initiatives conducted at local level facilitates the replication, validation and scaling-up of results and accelerates transformation towards the realisation of the SDGs.

## 3. Application details

### 3.1 Who can apply

The applying project partners (consortium) bring together the necessary expertise, capacity, network and experience and a good track record in scientific research, innovation, implementation of development projects and policy dialogue for sustainable development.

TRANSFORM will support interdisciplinary consortia that consist of at least a Swiss research institution, a research partner in the Global South/East<sup>4</sup> and a non-research implementation partner of any nature (government, civil society, private sector). Further (research) partners from the global North can also be included in the consortium. A lead organisation, coordinating the initiative, has to be defined. The lead organisation will be the intermediary for all communication between the consortium partners and the SDC and will be responsible for supplying all documents and information to the SDC.

Applicants, which already receive a programme contribution from SDC, are eligible but double financing of activities and/or double financing of overhead costs are not allowed. Such applicants have to prove that there will be no double financing.

### 3.2 What kind of initiatives can be funded

The initiatives should address concrete development challenges as identified by implementation partners from any sector (government, civil society, private sector) and refer to policy frameworks at national/regional/global level. The initiatives shall facilitate the validation of research findings and up scaling of research-based innovation with tangible results in the next three to five years. The initiatives have to address several SDGs, on top of contributing to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals) and SDG 1 (no poverty). There are no specific requirements regarding the strategic steering mechanism of the initiative except a clear description of it in the proposal.

### 3.3 Duration

The maximum duration of SDC's contribution to the initiative is 60 months (5 years). The first disbursement

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<sup>4</sup> any country on the [OECD DAC List of ODA Recipients](#)

from SDC should occur in 2020. The earliest possible start of funding is on 1 October 2020.

### 3.4 Funding

SDC in principle finances up to 50% of the total budget<sup>5</sup>, but can cover up to 70% of the total budget if the type of initiative requires it (e.g. new innovative initiative). SDC's contribution comes under the form of a "contribution to a project". **SDC's contribution will indicatively be around CHF 1 million (m)/year** (i.e. consortium partners match SDC's contribution with approx. CHF 1m/year (50% matching fund); respectively CHF 0.4 m/year (30% matching fund). The consortium should prove that in-cash and in-kind financing is secured for at least half of the duration of the initiative and explain how further funds will be raised. The presented budget (Annex 2) shall include the full cost of the initiative, including in cash and in-kind contributions from each partner, and show all costs and all sources of finances. SDC only funds expenditures related to the initiative (core contribution to an organisation is excluded), which might include reasonable overhead costs.

In the framework of this Call for proposals, SDC might choose up to four proposals for funding. There is no remuneration for the pre-proposal nor proposal.

## 4. Submission procedure

All information about this Call for proposals is publicly available on [SDC's Research Promotion website](#): The evaluation of the proposals is divided into two phases: a pre-proposal phase (first phase) and a full proposal phase (second phase). Only pre-selected applicants in the first phase will be invited to submit a full proposal in the second phase. SDC reserves the right not to select any pre-proposal in the first phase nor full proposal in the second phase. SDC's decision is final.

Pre-proposals must be submitted electronically **by 5 April 2020 8pm** latest to the following email address: [researchdesk@eda.admin.ch](mailto:researchdesk@eda.admin.ch), mentioning "TRANSFORM" in the subject (see time table below).

### 4.1 Intended time frame and target dates

• Call opening	14 February 2020
• <u>Deadline for submitting questions electronically</u> <sup>6</sup>	<u>13 March 2020</u>
• Publication of questions and answers <sup>7</sup>	18 March 2020
• <u>Deadline for submitting pre-proposals</u>	<b>13 April 2020 8:00pm CET</b> (extended!)
• Invitation for submission of full proposals and notification to unsuccessful proponents	May 2020
• Submission of full proposals	July 2020
• Award of funding	August/September 2020

In case of high quality offers with similar scoring after submission of full proposals, SDC reserves the right to invite the concerned organisation for further discussion or request written additional information.

Once the best full proposals have been selected, internal SDC approval will be sought. Funding of the best full proposals is subject to final approval from SDC's Directorate.

### 4.2 Guidelines for the writing of the pre-proposal

The pre-proposal must fulfil the following criteria for a successful submission:

- The pre-proposal is submitted in English
- The document submitted has a maximum total length of 5 pages (see below for details)
- A minimum of point 11 font size must be used

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<sup>5</sup> The total budget includes contribution from all consortium partners and from the SDC.

<sup>6</sup> Questions related to the submission and evaluation procedures shall be submitted by email to:

[researchdesk@eda.admin.ch](mailto:researchdesk@eda.admin.ch) until 13 March. After this date, no additional question related to this Call will be answered

<sup>7</sup> A summary of questions (received until 13 March) and provided answers will be published on [SDC research promotion website](#)

- No Annexes are permitted

Chapter	Description	No. pages max
00	Cover letter (declaration of interest) with signature(s) of all consortium partners	1
01	Filled form “Applicant information” given in Annex 1	-
02	Description of the initiative with the following structure and (non-exhaustive) content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Goal and impact hypothesis:</b> impact hypothesis and/or theory of change/transformation<sup>8</sup>, specific objectives (see Ch. 2.2) and targeted beneficiaries of the initiative. Expected (scientific and development) results to be achieved by the end of the support and, if applicable, results achieved so far.</li> <li>• <b>Approach and Methodology:</b> Brief description of the timeline, the stakeholder engagement and transformation strategy, the research methodology and disciplines involved.<sup>9</sup></li> <li>• <b>Partnership constitution and strategic set-up:</b> Description of the strategic steering mechanism; roles and responsibilities of the consortium partners and other strategic stakeholders (please consult the <a href="#">KFPE Guide</a>); list of all strategic partners/stakeholders</li> <li>• <b>Risk management:</b> assessment of major opportunities and risks and according mitigation measures</li> </ul> <p><b>Gender and conflict sensitivity</b> should be integrated as transversal issues either in the above-mentioned chapters or in a standalone additional paragraph.<sup>10</sup></p>	3
03	Budget including amount and source of co-financing according to the form provided in Annex 2 “Budget project contribution”	-
04	Summary of relevant experience of the consortium partners in transformative scientific research, innovation and policy influencing/technology transfer	1

## 5. Selection of initiatives; evaluation criteria

### 5.1 Eligibility check

The Research Desk at the SDC will check whether the consortium and the (pre-)proposals meet the following formal eligibility criteria:

- (pre-)proposals is written in English and structured according to the description in Chapter 4.2
- The applying consortium consists of:
  - one Swiss public research institution; and
  - one research partner from a least developed, low or middle income country (see [OECD DAC List of ODA Recipient](#)); and
  - one implementation partner that is not a research institution. The implementation partners can be from the public (government, civil society) or private sector, and should contribute to defining research needs/questions and to dissemination and application of results. Partners from the private sector are eligible given they do not meet SDC exclusion criteria (see Annex 5). SDC

<sup>8</sup> see e.g. td-net tool “[Theory of change](#)”

<sup>9</sup> see [td-net toolbox](#) for transdisciplinary methods and tools

<sup>10</sup> Gender: see SDC Gender Equality Network’s Toolbox: <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Gender> ; conflict sensitive research: see a+ [Guidelines for conflict sensitive research](#)

contributions to partners from the private sector are foreseen to cover costs and should not contain profit. SDC reserves the right to assess private sector partners through due diligence and/or other risk assessment procedures and decide on their eligibility.

- Formal inclusion of further partners into the consortium is possible if required by the nature and objectives of the initiative. Further partners can also be included
- Definition of the lead institution with name and contact of the contact person
- Requested contribution from SDC is approx. CHF 1 m/year; contribution from the consortium partners include in-kind and in-cash funding and amounts to at least 30%, resp. 50%, of the total budget.

**Proposals that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be evaluated.**

## 5.2 Evaluation criteria

SDC selection criteria for the pre-proposal, and respective weighing, are:

- Goal and impact (30%): Potential impact of research findings on improving the quality of life of poor people in the global South/East; contribution to the three specific objectives of TRANSFORM and strategic objectives of Switzerland IC (Annex 4). The pathway to impact/theory of change and intended systemic transformation should be concrete and realistic and clearly go beyond knowledge generation and scientific publication.
- Approach and methodology (20%): Balance between scientific and practitioners interests (the initiative should match the needs of the implementation partner(s); originality of the research questions and working methodologies, i.e. inclusion of innovative and transformative approaches and methods. Strong preference given to interdisciplinary applied research methodologies; scaling-up potential.
- Partnership constitution and strategic set-up (20%): constitution of consortium and engagement of partners according to the [KFPE principles](#)<sup>11</sup> (e.g. how does the proposed set-up allow a fair distribution of roles and responsibilities among the consortium partners?); inclusion of different academic disciplines from the natural, social (incl humanities) and engineering sciences. Clear strategic/governance set-up enabling shared responsibilities among partners, strategic guidance of the initiative and flexibility.
- Budget (15%): Plausibility to achieve the set objectives with the proposed budget; balanced division of budget to research, engagement/communication and implementation activities; contribution from each consortium partner according to its own capacity; added value of SDC's engagement and contribution (leverage effect).
- Opportunities and risks (10%): feasibility of the initiative (including realistic timeline); competence and experience of applicants; balance between risk taking and probability to reach impact at scale; risk mitigation measures.
- Gender and conflict sensitivity (5%): integration of gender and conflict as cross-cutting issues.

SDC aims at a balanced mix of partners (including different types of Swiss universities) and topics in its research portfolio. These will also be used as criteria for the final ranking and decision.

Each evaluation criterion will be evaluated according to the following scores: cannot be established (0); very bad fulfilment (1); bad fulfilment (2); average fulfilment (3); good fulfilment (4); very good fulfilment (5)

## 6. Further conditions for the submission of a pre-proposal

### 6.1 SDC decision

The internal SDC Evaluation Committee decides about the preselected initiatives based on the pre-proposals. Successful applicants are invited to submit a full proposal; a notification is sent to non-successful applicants. SDC's decision on pre- and full proposals is final.

### 6.2 Contractual aspects

At the stage of the pre-proposal, the applicants take note of the general conditions for contracts (GCC) concerning federal contributions for projects (Annex 3). When invited to submit a full proposal, it is in

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<sup>11</sup> KFPE's Guide for Transboundary Research Partnerships : [https://naturalsciences.ch/organisations/kfpe/about\\_kfpe/9505-a-guide-for-transboundary-research-partnerships-3rd-edition---2018-](https://naturalsciences.ch/organisations/kfpe/about_kfpe/9505-a-guide-for-transboundary-research-partnerships-3rd-edition---2018-)

principle expected that the applicants accept without reservation the GCC.

### **6.3 Technical and financial progress reporting**

Technical reporting: The lead organisation is required to send technical progress reports to the SDC after 6 months and then on a yearly basis. At the end of the initiative, a report is expected on the overall initiative. All reports inform SDC about the progress, milestones and results achieved in the initiative. SDC encourages adaptive management and delivery of these processes (i.e we expect regular feedback and learning loops with regards to the assumptions in the theory of change). Specific outputs from the initiative should be included in an annex (e.g. link to publications, videos).

Financial reporting: The contracted organisation is required to send financial reports after 6 months, then on a yearly basis and at the end of the initiative, justifying the use of the funds and covering all funds of the initiative, not only SDC funds.

The SDC has to be informed beforehand about any changes affecting the consortium (e.g. moves, changes to employment terms).

### **6.4 Payments**

Payments are made in several instalments including a first advance payment at the signing of the contract; following payments will be released after the reception and acceptance of the technical and financial progress reports; a final payment will be made after receiving and approving the final reports according to the balance.

### **6.5 Publication of results**

SDC expects the publication of learnings and findings in formats tailored to the needs of implementation partners and other stakeholders, e.g. digital content, videos, policy briefs.

In accordance with the Swiss [National Strategy on Open Access of Swiss universities](#)<sup>12</sup>, SDC strongly encourages researchers to publish scientific results in open access publication or database. Publication costs can be included in the budget with a reasonable amount.

Acknowledgement of support: whenever results generated by SDC funded project/initiative are published (for example, in journals, patents, presentations, etc.) the applicants should bring attention to the financial support provided by SDC. This may imply a written acknowledgment, for example by mentioning: "The research leading to these results was co-funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation" and/or visible SDC logos. This also applied to all types of presentations e.g. at scientific conferences or any other event.

SDC may publish information on initiatives and projects, which it supports financially. This could include the name and affiliation of the applicants and host institution, the objectives of the initiatives and projects and the amount of funding awarded.

## **7. Contact person and information**

For questions related to the submission and evaluation procedures, please write an e-mail to [researchdesk@eda.admin.ch](mailto:researchdesk@eda.admin.ch) until 13. March 2020 the latest, mentioning in the subject: 'TRANSFORM'. Please do not expect answers before 24. February 2020.

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<sup>12</sup>Open Access Strategy:

[https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Hochschulpolitik/Open\\_Access/Open\\_Access\\_strategy\\_final\\_e.pdf](https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Hochschulpolitik/Open_Access/Open_Access_strategy_final_e.pdf)

## 8. List of annexes

No.	Annexes
1	Form «Applicant information»
2	Form «Budget Project contribution»
3	General conditions for contracts concerning federal contributions for projects
4	Excerpt of the dispatch on Switzerland's international cooperation 2021-24
5	SDC's exclusion criteria for private sector partners