



# ACDI Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022

Working at the frontier of climate change research and training for a resilient African society



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD



# ACDI STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2022

## Introduction and overview

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The African Climate and Development Initiative (ACDI) was established in 2011 by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town as a strategic initiative, to “facilitate and substantially extend climate change research and education at UCT with the specific context of addressing the development challenges of Africa from an African perspective”. ACDI surpassed this initial mandate and achieved formal status as a university institute in 2018. Simultaneously, the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) awarded 'Centre of Excellence' (CoE) status for 'Climate and Development' to ACDI alongside partners at the Universities of Nairobi and Ghana. Viewed as one of the continent's foremost climate change institutes, ACDI provides a platform for UCT's and ARUA's collective response to the challenge of climate change by coordinating and centralising resources to enable inter- and transdisciplinary research, teaching and learning in the areas of climate change and sustainable development across Africa and beyond.

In this five-year strategic plan, we set out ACDI's agenda for 2018-2022, as well what we would like to achieve under the ARUA Centre of Excellence for Climate and Development (ARUA-CD) banner. We aspire to take UCT's work in climate change and development to new heights and into new spheres of influence to achieve enhanced impact and ensure climate compatible and resilient development pathways into the future.

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We begin by discussing where we are today as an institute and our longer-term aspirations to provide some context for our five-year strategic priorities. We then present these priorities and how we hope to accomplish them.





# Who we are: ACDI's purpose and identity

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ACDI is an inter- and transdisciplinary research and training institute that brings academics and researchers from UCT and other higher education and research institutions together with business, civil society and government actors to co-produce and test new insights, evidence and innovations that will help to solve Africa's climate and development challenges.

## Our Vision

Our vision is of African societies that have transitioned to an equitable, sustainable, low carbon, climate resilient development trajectory.

## Our Mission

Our mission is to catalyse and support this transition through research, education and action in collaboration with society.

## Our Goals

We work towards our vision and mission through a suite of integrated activities framed around three goals.

### Goal 1:

To enable and facilitate innovative inter- and transdisciplinary research on issues at the nexus of climate change and development through partnerships within UCT, and across South Africa, Africa, and globally.

### Goal 2:

To foster a new generation of African researchers and practitioners who have the knowledge, experience and competencies to address complex climate change challenges at multiple scales, and in multiple contexts.

### Goal 3:

To promote well-informed climate response strategies, planning, implementation and decision-making through targeted networking and stakeholder engagements, and proactive communication and dissemination of UCT climate change and development research and expertise.

## Our Core Values

Several core values guide what we work on, how we work and with whom. These are listed below.

- Collegiality, collaboration, diversity.
- Building individual and collective capacity for societal change.
- Engaged, transdisciplinary and reflexive scholarship.
- Decoloniality and transformation.

We have combined the above mission, goals and ambitions visually into an ACDI Theory of Change (ToC) that directs our work and provides us with a means to assess our impact. This ToC is provided in Appendix 1.





# How we work: ACDI's mode of operation

## Members and Associates

In fitting with our role as a coordinating platform for climate change and development work at UCT, ACDI has a membership structure that includes UCT research centres, institutes and departments as formal institutional members (with MoUs), and individuals and research groups as associates (Figure 1).

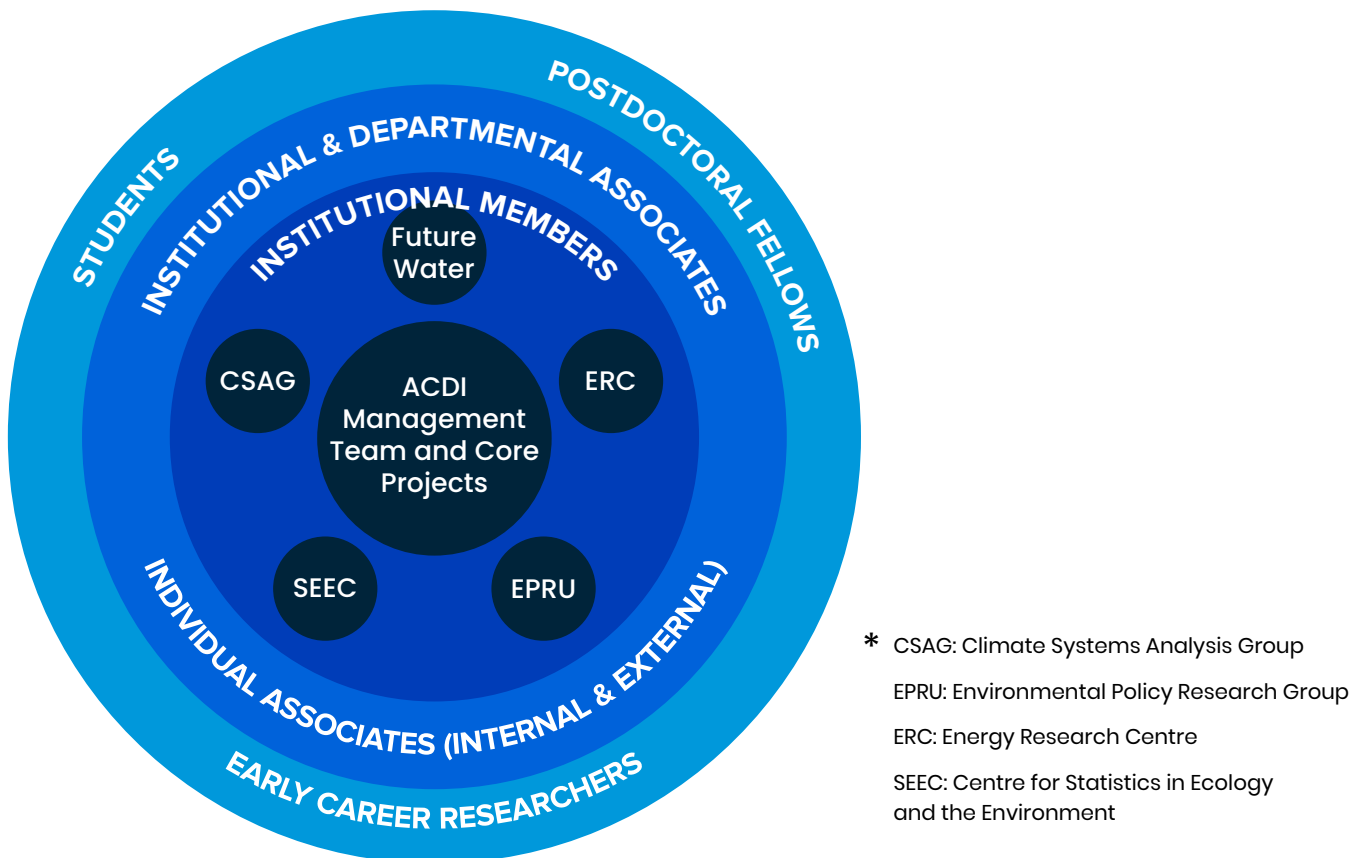
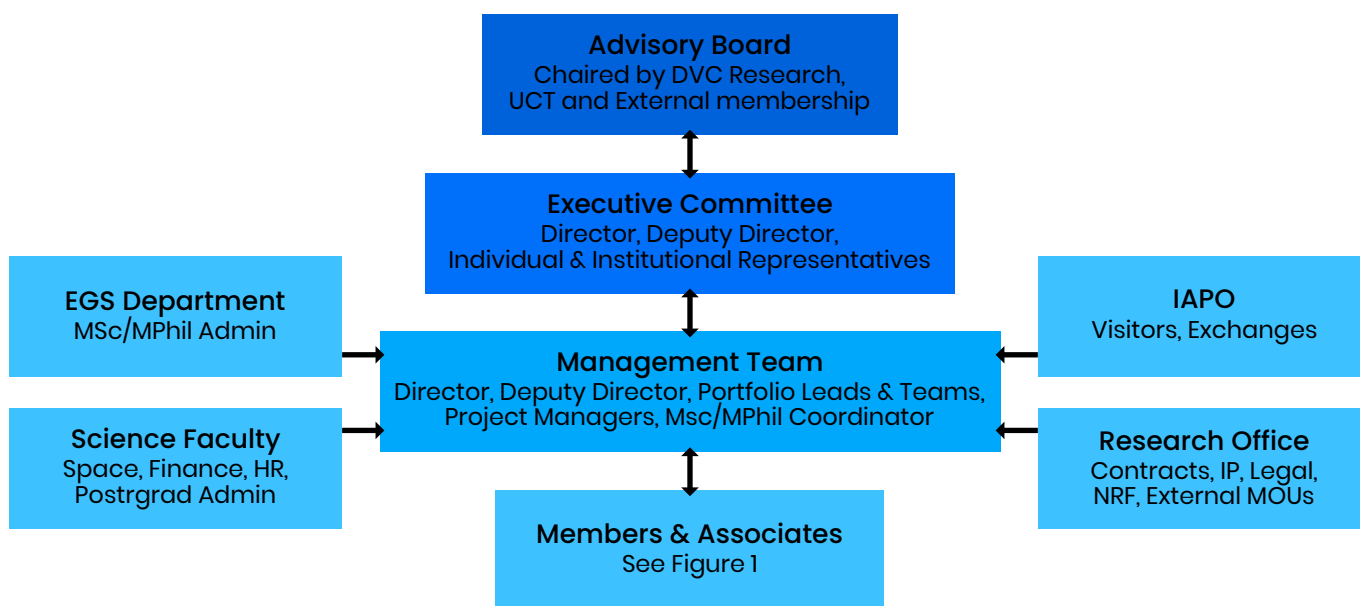


Figure 1: ACDI's membership structure

## Governance Structure

The ACDI is advised by a Board which meets annually and an Executive Committee which meets quarterly (Figure 2). The Board is composed of UCT academics and management, civil society, government and business representatives. The Executive Committee is internal to UCT and includes representatives from ACDI Members, cognitively aligned Departments, the Science Faculty management, and ACDI staff and students. Day to day management is in the hands of the Director, Deputy Director and portfolio managers, who meet collectively once per month. Projects have their own management and governance structures, but are guided and supported by the different portfolio managers.





**Figure 2: ACDI's governance and management structure**

## Operational Portfolios

There are four operational portfolios at ACDI, corresponding to our three main areas of work (research, education and capacity building, and communications and influencing), and a fourth focussed on institute administration and financing. Each portfolio is led by a manager and supported by an assistant coordinator.

### Research:

Our research aims to increase the scientific knowledge and understanding needed to improve human development outcomes in Africa in the face of climate change. It is multi-scale, anchored in South Africa, but extended via collaboration to southern Africa, and the wider African continent, with an additional eye on South-South and South-North collaboration beyond Africa. We aim to be societally relevant, first by responding to stakeholder evidence needs, but also to pose new questions, the answers to which might shift societal perspectives and agendas. ACDI's research approach is founded on the recognition that the development and climate change nexus presents complex, even "wicked", problems that are best answered in an integrative, inter- or transdisciplinary setting. Such a setting has the potential to enable and stimulate cross-fertilisation of diverse viewpoints and the production of new knowledge. Our research framework and themes are presented in the next section. This framework and our research agenda are operationalised through the Research Portfolio, which supports the resourcing and planning of research activities and related working groups. One function of this portfolio is to measure the impact of ACDI's research as an input into theoretical and strategic thinking.

### **Strategic communications:**

ACDI aims to actively enhance the co-generation and use of knowledge by society to address climate change and development problems. Networking activities support the interactions between UCT researchers, building a connected internal UCT climate and development community, and an inter- and transdisciplinary research and teaching environment. In addition, we aim to enhance connections between this community and the wider research and practice community locally, in South Africa, and beyond. Visibility activities serve to raise the profile of UCT as an international hub for knowledge generation and training in Africa; this then enhances our potential to disseminate knowledge and influence change and makes UCT an attractive partner and destination for research and education respectively. Finally, ACDI and the ARUA-CD have the ambition to influence and support key actors across society in responding to climate change, through targeted, proactive, influencing activities.

### **Finances and Administration:**

ACDI is hosted by the Faculty of Science (FSC). As such, it is governed by the policies and procedures of the university. Institutes are primarily funded by research projects and faculty support. Financial sustainability over the long term will require a suite of strategies which encompass funding streams from the host faculty, the university and a variety of external sources.

### **Education and capacity building:**

The shortfall in human capacity for climate and development research and practice in Africa has been well-documented, as has the need for inter- and transdisciplinary skills for dealing with climate change and development questions. ACDI aims to foster a new generation of researchers, practitioners and decision-makers who are equipped to address complex development and climate issues facing African

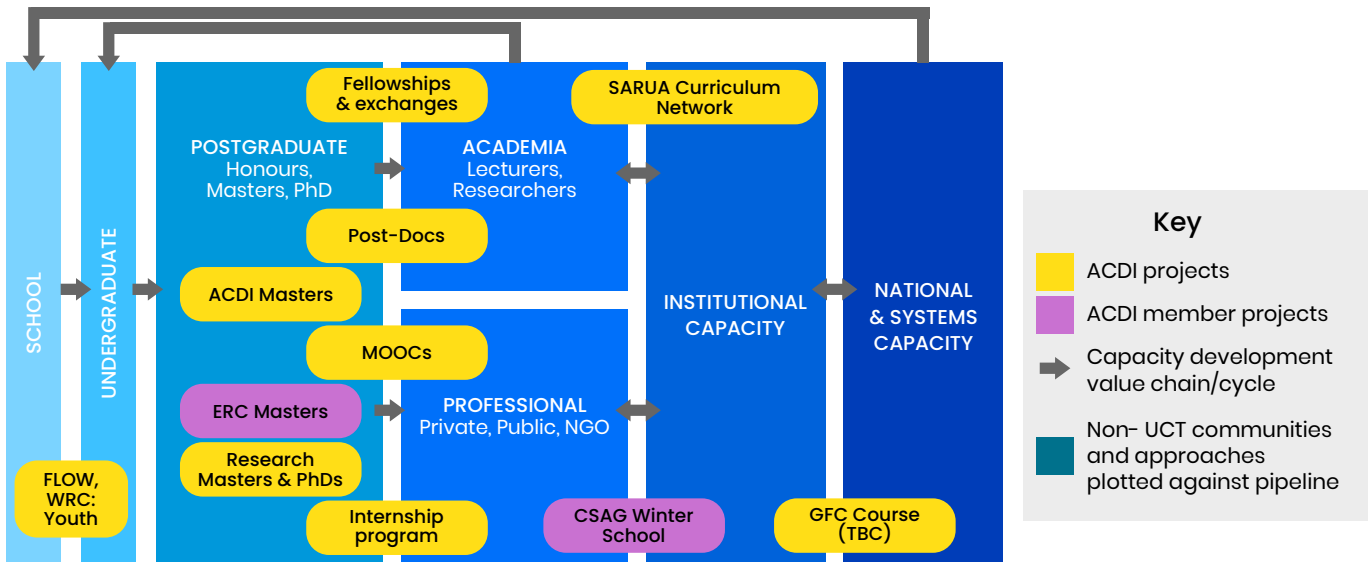




Rhodes ELRC: Environmental education, transformative social learning, learning pathways

Green Skills: Learning pathways & skills development system

PCCB & Durban Forum: National capacity for UNFCCC



**Figure 3: Theory of change (ToC) and activities of Education and Capacity Development Portfolio across the pipeline**

societies. We are, therefore, particularly focused on training that provides the requisite mix of inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge, deeper disciplinary expertise, and a range of competencies at the post-graduate and early career level, and in encouraging student research projects that fit to ACDI's research agenda and contribute beyond academia. Our Education Portfolio was conceptualised to house, develop and learn from ACDI's growing range of education and capacity development projects which span formal education (student) courses and support, work-based learning, professional courses, research in climate change education, and supporting an enabling working environment at ACDI (Figure 3).

Our approach to education projects and programmes is to consider key points of intervention across the pipeline of capacity development (Figure 3), as people move from school into study, and from study into careers in (i) academia, or (ii) policy and practice. Individuals working in different types of institutions (universities, private, public or NGOs) collectively make up the national 'supply and demand' system for climate change capacity, which in turn affects education planning and support. For example, ACDI primarily works with postgraduates, who move into academic or professional careers. However, we also recognise that supporting postgraduates also means developing the capacity of the lecturers who teach and supervise postgraduates.

## ARUA Centre of Excellence in Climate and Development (ARUA-CD)

In 2018, ACDI became the secretariat and Southern African regional hub for the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Centre of Excellence in Climate Change and Development (ARUA-CD). Other partners include the Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies, University of Ghana (West African regional hub), and the Institute for Climate Change Adaptation, University of Nairobi (East African regional hub). This partnership, as well as the opportunity to work with, amongst others, the network of 16 ARUA universities, provides us with both an entry point into the African continent and the opportunity to learn from other African contexts. Partnering with African researchers from East and West Africa can give weight to influencing African and global decision-making and enhancing positive development outcomes on the African continent.

### On ARUA

ARUA was inaugurated in Dakar, Senegal in March 2015. It is a network of African universities from different countries and historical backgrounds, but with a common vision. The network is focussed on expanding and significantly enhancing the quality of research done in Africa by African researchers.

This new network, from inception, was intended to be different from other regional university networks. The difference was expected to come largely from the approach employed; namely bringing together a number of peer African institutions that were willing to work together into Centres of Excellence linked to the sustainable development goals. By pooling limited resources, these Centres of Excellence would be able to generate a critical mass that could more effectively support their growing numbers of researchers.

Underlying this, was the conviction that such collective effort would be able to leverage additional external resources, creating support and momentum for the capacity building and research excellence goals of ARUA and each of its universities.

### On ARUA-CD

ARUA-CD aims to undertake research, training and influencing to substantially contribute to achieving the sustainable development goals in Africa in the face of climate change. Using the framing of climate compatible development, which links adaptation, mitigation and development, we aim to build on the underlying strengths and experiences of the hub partners to work collaboratively on three areas of common interest:

- 1) enhancing knowledge systems for climate resilience;
- 2) sustainable energy for poverty reduction; and
- 3) building the capacity of next generation researchers and practitioners around several thematic areas that link the SDGs and climate change.

The University of Cape Town has provided financial support from 2018-2022 for development of ARUA-CD, with a focus on goal 3. Since the goals of ARUA-CD overlap with those of ACDI, we have included strategic priorities related to the Centre of Excellence in the plan below. A strategic plan and specific set of actions for ARUA-CD will be developed in 2019.







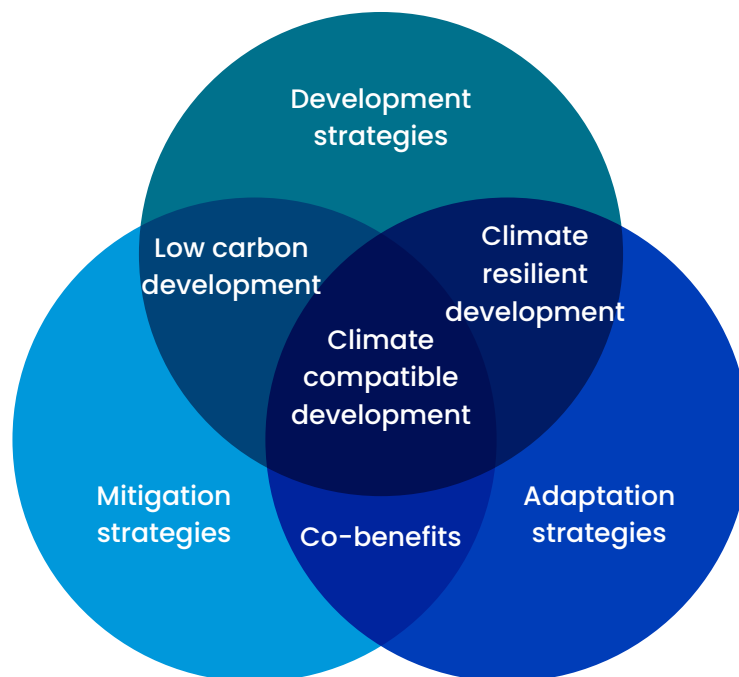
# Our research

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## Overall Framing

Our research seeks to understand how to enable equitable human development, wellbeing and security in Africa in the face of climate change. The fundamental twin challenge in responding to climate change in Africa is to find pathways for development that are (1) resilient to existing and expected climate risks and impacts, (2) low carbon, avoiding substantial African contributions to the amount of global warming in the future and (3) inclusive and just, recognising intergenerational rights and the protection of the most vulnerable (who have contributed least to global warming). Climate compatible development thus provides a suitable overarching framework for the research we do and a pathway into the future that fits with our vision (i.e. a developing world that has transitioned onto an equitable, sustainable, low carbon development trajectory) (Figure 4).

A meta-question underpinning our research (see our Domains of Concern in Appendix 2) and linked to our ToC (Appendix 1) is: how do we affect systemic change that simultaneously and synergistically addresses prosperity, equity, climate resilience, ecological sustainability and energy security, in the context of the broader sustainable development goals? Pragmatically, our research focusses on the key building blocks of this meta-question within and between the low-carbon and climate resilient development domains (Figure 4). The evidence we generate from these building blocks and the thematic areas illustrated in Figure 4 can then contribute individually, and through synthesis, to answering the bigger transformational question. In this way we hope to make shifts towards a world that is more sustainable and equitable.



**Figure 4: The concept of climate compatible development (after CDKN 2011).**



In doing our research, we aspire to be both responsive and provocative, by responding to the evidence requirements of different actors in the climate change arena, but also by posing and answering new – potentially disruptive – questions to effect changes in thinking and, ultimately, societal change. Moreover, to achieve research that has impact and that results in the transformation we advocate for, a transdisciplinary, systems approach and design that draws on multiple knowledge sources, and is associated with multiple actors in a process of co-design and co-knowledge production, is required. We also acknowledge that the outputs and impacts of our research need to go far beyond academic publications to achieve our vision as indicated by our ToC. Some of our efforts will go to understanding what is required to make this type of research work and what some of the barriers might be.

Through this approach, we aim to set a research agenda that recognises scholarly excellence and values-driven, engaged research on issues critical to the future climate change will bring. We also propose to cultivate a vibrant, transdisciplinary intellectual community at UCT and beyond, that specialises in meeting the climate change and development research needs of the continent. Finally, we will design and undertake our research to make a significant contribution to policy and practice.

## Research framework and agenda

Our research framework is provided in Figure 5. Aligned with the above framing, our themes are sandwiched between two supporting pillars, related to energy and mitigation and climate change adaptation and sustainable development respectively (Pillar 1 and 2, Figure 5). The imperative to apply a systematic, innovative and transdisciplinary research approach that engages complexity and embraces multiple forms of knowledge overarches the entire framework. All our projects, individual studies and working groups emerge in the space between place (a locality at different scales), the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and a range of cross-cutting themes such as governance, risk, behavior and social justice. The understanding and knowledge that emerges at the junction of these different components (cross-hatched area in the centre, Figure 5) can contribute towards identifying context specific, inclusive climate resilient pathways.

An example is our project on the socio-economic benefits of ecological infrastructure (SEBEI) which operates at the landscape and ecosystem level in two South African water catchments and focuses on the governance and management systems (including ecosystem restoration) needed for positive impacts on the development goals listed on the righthand side of Figure 5.

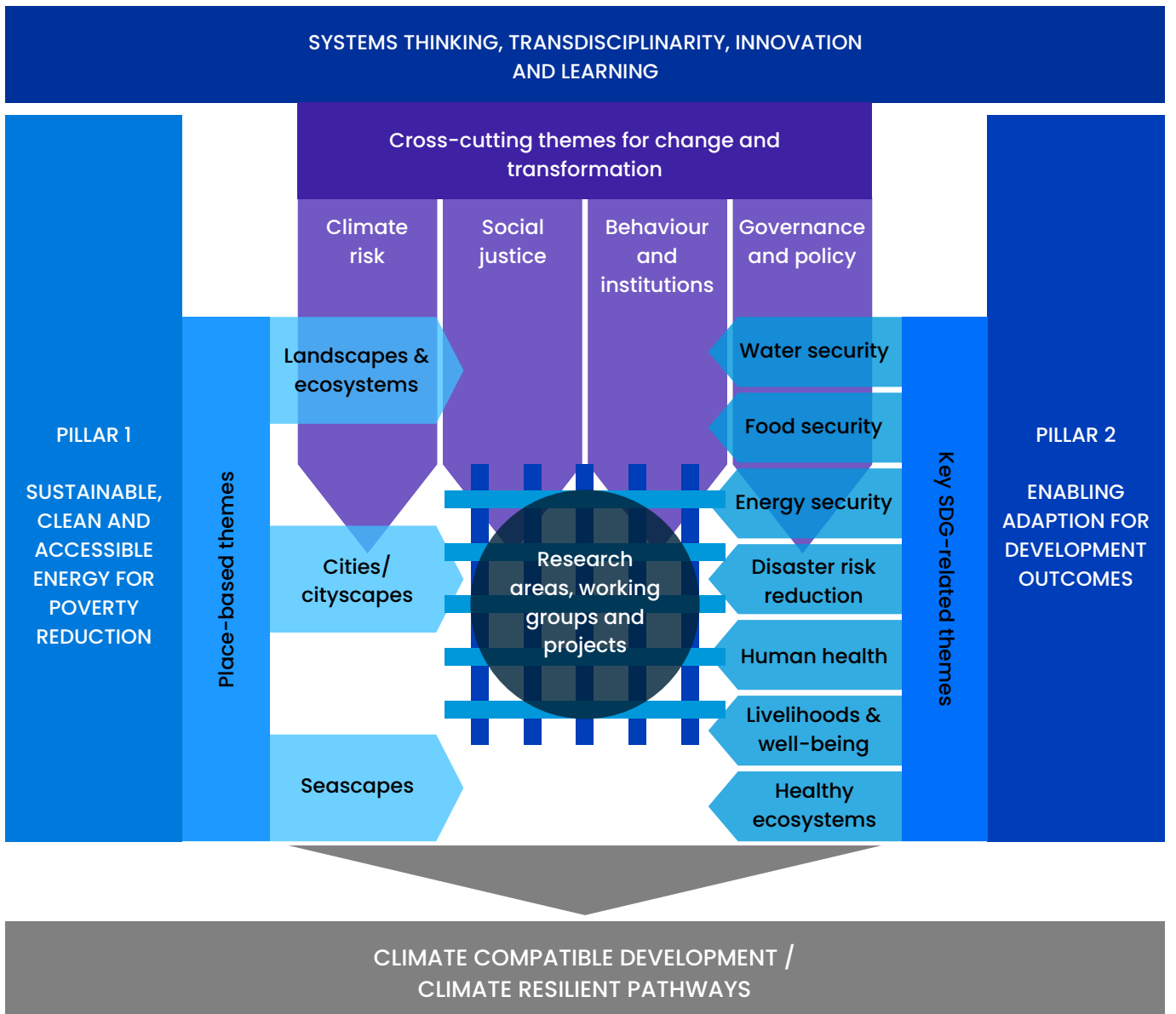


Figure 5: ACDI's research framework







# Our accomplishments so far: key findings from our 5-year review

Noted gains in the first five years of ACDI's existence are provided below. The next five years will build on and expand on these achievements. Key achievements included:

- external positioning of UCT and ACDI as a globally recognised and acclaimed partner in addressing climate and development challenges;
- facilitation and enabling of trans- and interdisciplinary research for societal impact through several large projects;
- interdisciplinary postgraduate training for next generation researchers and practitioners;
- networking and facilitated collaboration and partnerships for researchers across UCT and beyond;
- provision of a human resource “research infrastructure” that can support ACDI members to enhance their resourcing, productivity and profile; and
- strengthening sustainability agendas within UCT.

Some specific details of outputs are provided in Figure 6 below.

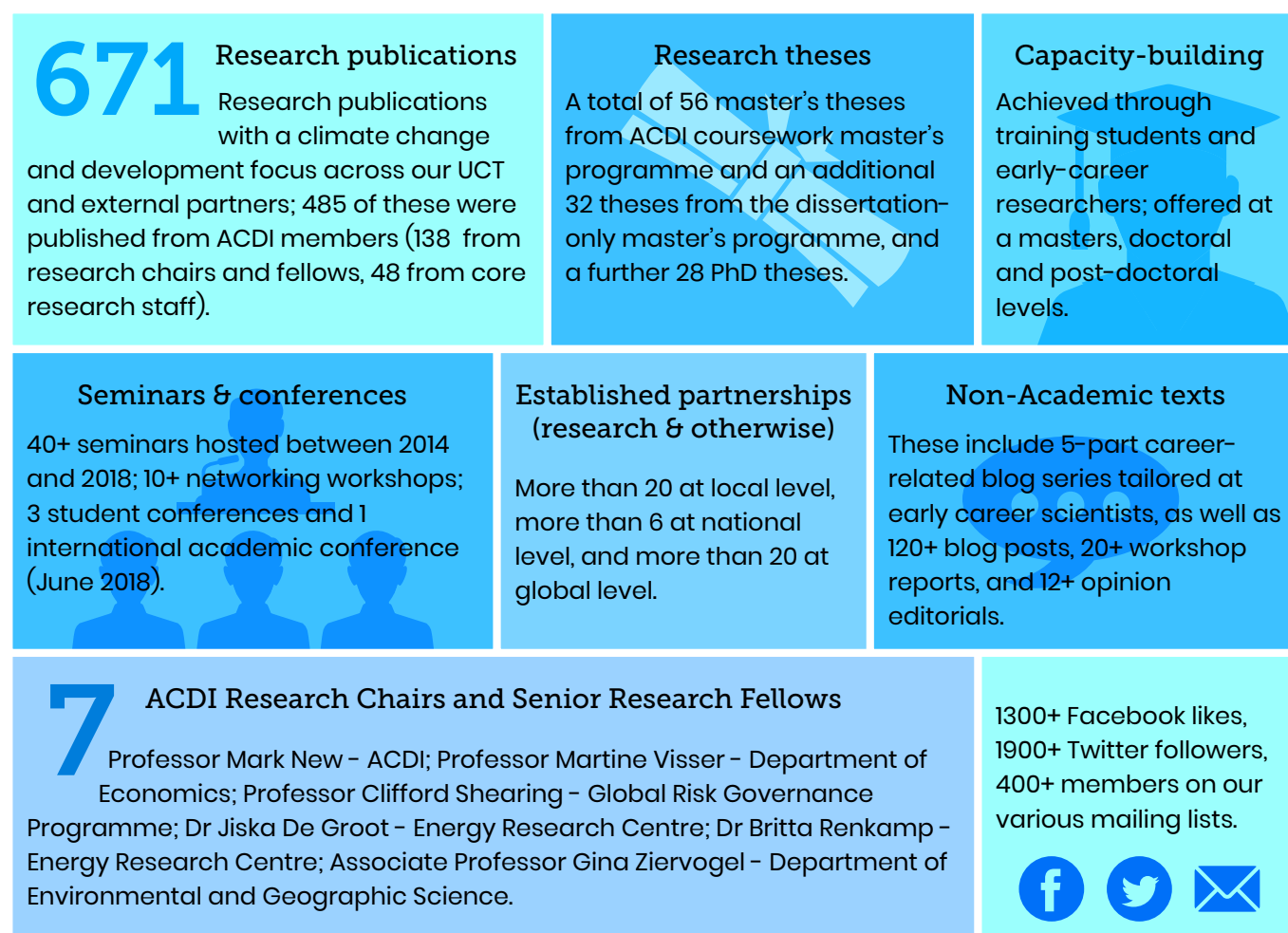


Figure 6: Summary of key outputs in first 5 years







## Five-year Strategic Plan: 2018 - 2022

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We identified seven imperatives to expand and develop in the next five years that contribute to our vision, align with our ToC, and strengthen our purpose and effectiveness as a coordinating platform for climate change work at UCT. There are some overlaps between some of the actions, in that several address multiple priorities. We have noted incidences where this applies. Below are the strategic priorities, listed in no particular order.

1. Expand the thematic areas of research that contribute towards climate compatible/resilient development.
2. Develop and strengthen partnerships at multiple levels both for academic purposes and for improved science-society interaction.
3. Strengthen our transdisciplinary and knowledge co-development practice.
4. Strengthen our influencing capacity and explore the solutions space for action and change.
5. Build the capacity of early career researchers and practitioners, with a focus on diversity and redress, to conduct relevant, problem-based research and explore solutions at the nexus of climate change and development in Africa.
6. Develop systems and mechanisms for assessing the learning, outcomes and impacts of UCT's climate change work across scales and levels.
7. Ensure financial sustainability, facilitate transformation, operational efficiency and staff development for an effective coordinating platform for climate change research across UCT.





## Actioning these priorities

To achieve these strategic priorities entails the following action steps.

### **Priority 1: Expand on thematic areas of research that contribute towards climate compatible / resilient development.**

- Assess new research opportunities and interests at UCT across departments and institutes and develop these.
- Identify and/or recruit champions for new research areas.
- Develop and refine concept notes for existing and new thematic areas and establish communities of practice/ modes of engagement for knowledge sharing and collaboration on these themes.
- Work with partners to seek funding for research in the new thematic areas.

### **Priority 2: Develop and strengthen partnerships at multiple levels both for academic purposes and for improved science-society interaction.**

- Grow and diversify ACDI to be more representative of UCT Faculties and society.
- Invest in the ARUA Centre of Excellence in Climate and Development (ARUA-CD), and other key networks we are part of nationally and internationally, through development of joint projects.
- Strengthen our relationships and alliances internationally by building on successful existing relationships.
- Identify, engage and partner with non-academic actors in our research projects, governance structure, teaching and learning and in other engagements to bridge the science-society gap. This includes government, civil society and business.

### **Priority 3: Strengthen our transdisciplinary and knowledge co-development practice.**

- Establish and coordinate a university wide transdisciplinary scholarship working group/ community of practice for learning, sharing and publishing experiences related to climate and development.
- Agree and implement a set of dialogues that specifically target current areas of concern or policy relevant issues related to climate change.
- Develop capacity in transdisciplinary research amongst postgraduates, early career researchers and supervisors through summer schools and other training (see below).
- Establish a means for recognising excellent transdisciplinary research (e.g. annual prize).



**Priority 4: Strengthen our influencing capacity and explore the solutions space for action and change.**

- Explore and test mechanisms for finding solutions to the adaptation challenges we have identified in our research and move from knowledge generation to action.
- Identify and implement a targeted influencing strategy through engagement and the creative communication of the impact of ACDI's programme of work, both internally and externally.
- Revise, expand, reflect on and improve our communication strategy and mechanisms for sharing our work.
- Pursue ways to increase our visibility outside of the university, through public events, media exposure, board membership, etc.
- Establish mechanisms to improve the impact of our research, including building this in as a key component of funding proposals.

**Priority 5: Build the capacity of early career researchers and practitioners, with a focus on diversity and redress, to conduct research that transforms how we think about climate and development in Africa and that seeks innovative, equitable solutions. (Also see actions under priority 3).**

- Seek opportunities to increase the number of Doctoral, Masters and Postdoctoral scholars through targeting grants that are designed for capacity building.
- Establish a climate change and development a PhD programme and summer school linking to our strategic partnerships, e.g. ARUA-CD.
- Strengthen the curriculum through on-going sharing of theory, relevance and innovation with other similar Masters programmes (e.g. ARUA-CD, SARUA).
- Develop our early career researcher network – linking UCT students and external early career practitioners – and identify suitable activities to promote.
- Identify and develop new opportunities for professional courses.
- Build capacity for climate change and development (co)supervision amongst postdoctoral fellows and academics.
- Establish a strong internship programme.
- Source funding for ACDI Masters scholarships for African students.

**Priority 6: Develop systems and mechanisms for assessing the learning, outcomes and impacts of UCT's climate change work across scales and levels.**

- Implement our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan and hold annual reflections on progress against our MEL and ToC.
- Build understanding of transformative learning theory and practice and apply it to our MEL.

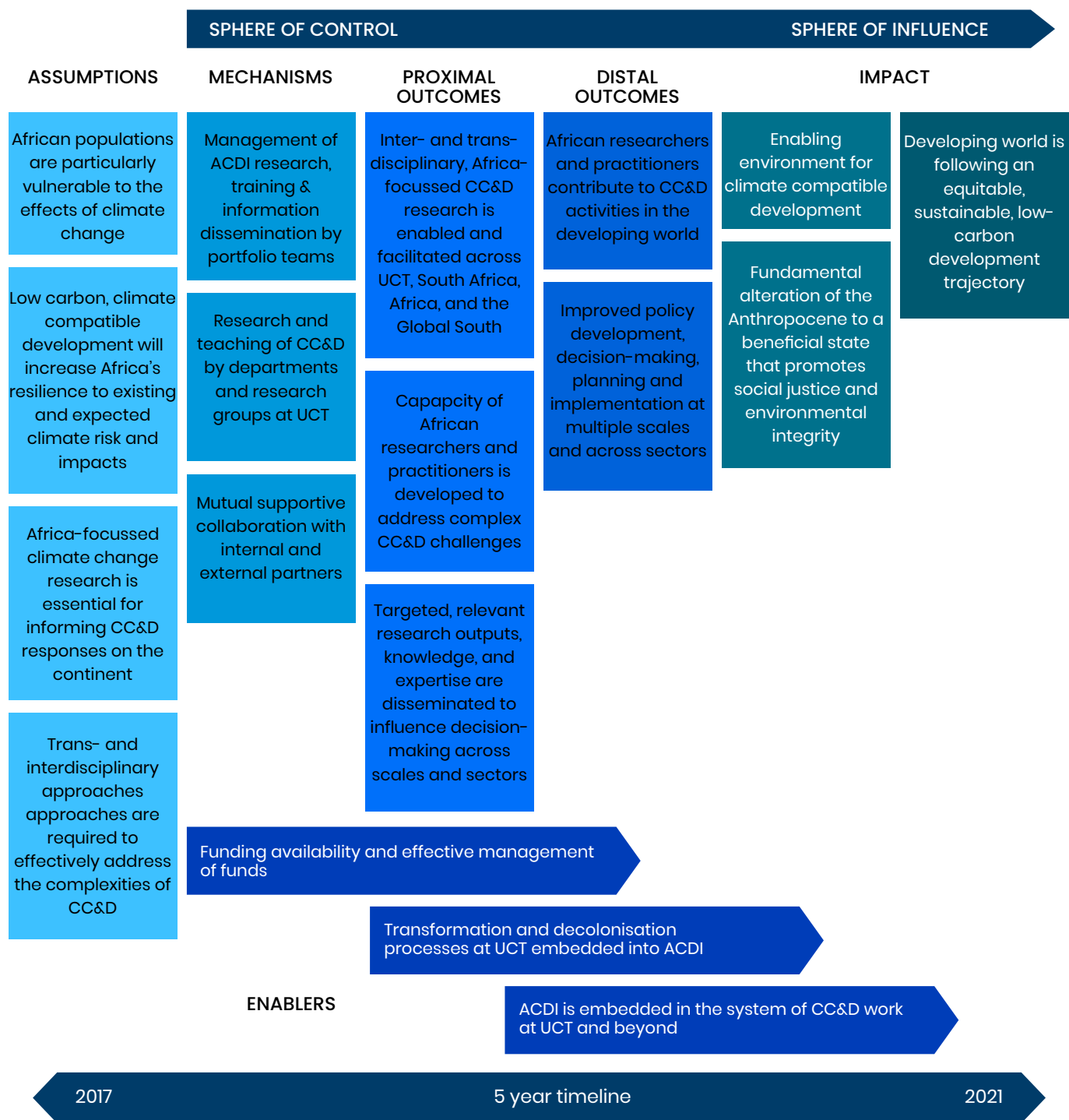
**Priority 7: Ensure financial sustainability, diversify funding sources, and facilitate transformation, equity, operational efficiency and staff development for an effective coordinating platform for climate change research across UCT.**

- Embed transformation, inclusivity and decoloniality into our research, teaching, employment practice, institutional culture and staff development.
- Explore and pursue alternative income streams to support staffing and other core costs, and systematise related fundraising processes.
- Explore and select the most appropriate ways to ensure a minimum financial growth of 10% year on year to keep up with inflation (see Appendix 3).

To achieve these actions over the next five years requires coordination between the four ACIDI portfolios, strategic guidance from the executive committee and governance board and effective collaboration with partners across UCT and through ARUA-CD (which will have its own five-year strategic plan). This cannot happen without adequate funds and so diversification of our fund sources is a necessary priority.



# Appendix 1: ACDI's Theory of Change (ToC)



## Appendix 2: Workshopped 'Domains of Concern' (DoCs) our research should address

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Through a workshop process we identified four high-level challenges, or domains of concern (DoCs), that hinder progression towards a more sustainable, equitable and just future. It is these DoCs that we aspire to impact through our scholarship and work, and that provide the base for our research framework. The first overarches the other three as many aspects of system 'stuckness' relate to poor uptake of new knowledge, structural inequities, and power dynamics.

**The four DoCs include:**

**DoC 1: Systems 'stuckness'.** How do we avoid and escape traps (lock-in, poverty, social-ecological) and identify change leverage points at different scales from the individual to global level?

**DoC 2: Low/slow uptake and use of knowledge/evidence as a basis for decision making.** How do we facilitate knowledge co-production, sharing, learning, capacity building and improved communication to make our research more responsive to needs and ensure it has impact?

**DoC 3: Lack of transformation towards greater social equity and inclusiveness.** How do we address social differentiation, gender and other forms of discrimination that keep the people most vulnerable to climate change on the margins?

**DoC 4: Unequal power relations and abuse of power at different scales.** How do we recognise and be sensitive to power and politics in our work, and challenge unjust policies, processes and practices?

### Key thoughts emerging from a workshop on the DoCs

#### How do we move beyond system 'stuckness'?

- Need to consider scale (individual to global including temporal), interlinkages/ connections and path dependency (e.g. patriarchy) and get away from linear thinking.
- At individual/group level – need to consider behaviour, values, choice, incentives and penalties, triggers for change, as well as denial (and why).
- At institutional level – need to consider power, vested interests, politics.
- Need to think about sustainable 'de-growth' – but in African context this needs to be balanced with development.
- Need to challenge binary thinking – environment versus development, look at alternative models.
- Need to better understand the opportunities that crises (such as the water situation in Cape Town) create for leveraging new trajectories and think about 'leap frogging.'
- Need to find ways to measure our success at moving systems beyond sticking points.



### **How do we encourage use of research information?**

- Need to develop tools and methods to assess evidence-based decision making.
- Need to identify and find ways to overcome the barriers to uptake of research and new knowledge - this means understanding what it means to live in a post truth world, what is needed for research translation, hierarchies of knowledge and what is valid knowledge.
- Need to evaluate and learn from cases where research has been taken up, and ask why, how it was used and what was useful.
- Need to work harder on co-production of knowledge with local non-academic knowledge producers.

### **How do we contribute to transformation and inclusiveness?**

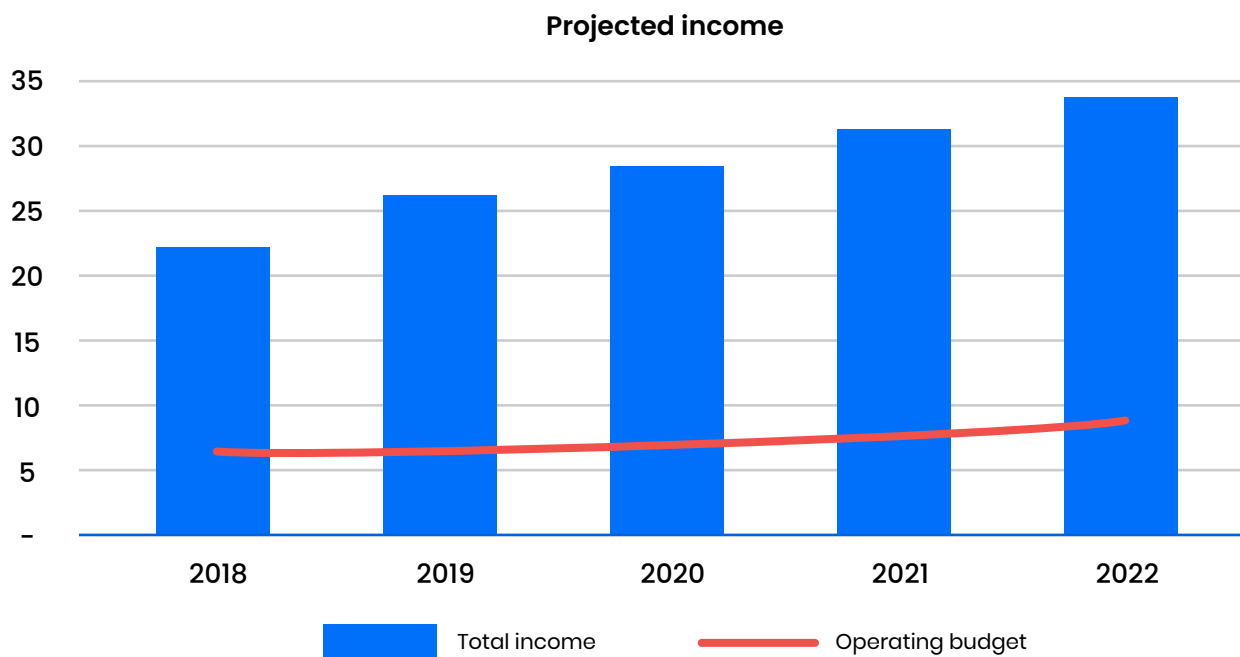
- Need to constantly challenge simplistic assumptions and unpack them as part of our institutional culture.
- Need to make poverty, human development and equity core in our work.
- Need to understand intersectionality when looking at vulnerability and adaptation – e.g. gender and poverty, poverty and caste, young and male, etc.
- Need to find ways around the constraints of present funding models and higher education set-ups – need to keep communicating with funders.
- Need to build skills development of citizen researchers into our projects.
- Need to use MEL systems that make transformation goals explicit.
- Need to learn from our own reflections in the ACDI Transformation Working Group and apply in our research.

### **How do we take cognisance of power dynamics?**

- Need to be conscious/ mindful of the power dynamics in how we approach our work and think about north-south relations and South Africa and rest of Africa, race, etc.
- Need to watch out for invisible dynamics – e.g in global approaches such as SDGs, in our everyday environment.
- We need to think through the histories of where we work.

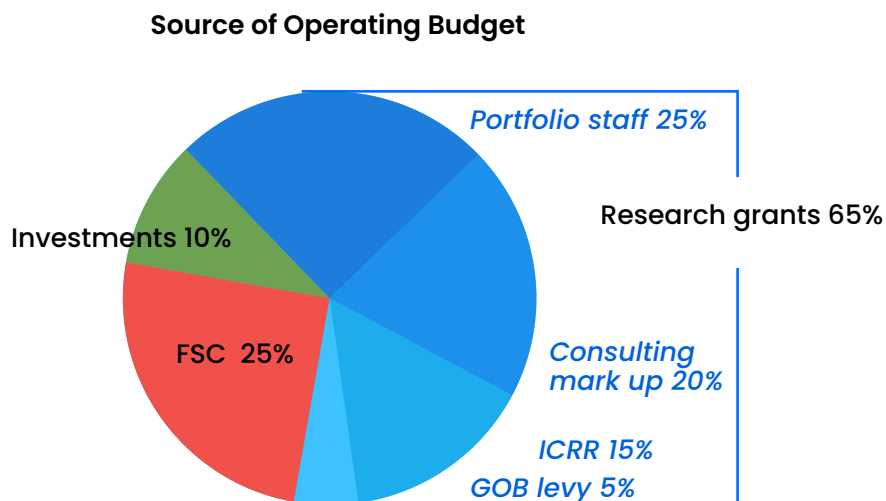
## Appendix 3: Financial Projections

To maintain current activities over the next five years the institute will need a minimum financial growth of 10% year-on-year to keep up with inflation.



The operating budget is expected to remain stable at 25% of the total budget.

Operating costs include salaries and travel for the portfolio staff as well as general office expenditure. Budget comes from the following sources: 65% research grants (portfolio salaries, indirect cost recovery, staff levy and consulting fees), 10% from investments and 25% from the Faculty of Science.





The goal over the next five years will be to reach financial sustainability with regards the operating budget. The support from the Faculty of Science should be based on ICRR only. There are various ways to achieve this:

- Increase the budget allocation of operational staff salaries and general office costs on all research projects and consulting service contracts.
- Ensure the maximum Indirect/Institutional Overhead rate is obtained from funders.
- Invest research and consulting surplus income in a medium- to-long term Portfolio 2 investment fund which would be used to support staff currently funded by the FSC.
- Source an endowment which would be invested in an Endowed Fund (Portfolio 1) investment fund. Endowed funds consist of donations and bequests and are considered restricted funds. The capital is protected and only earnings on the capital may be used to fund activities. If the institute invested ZAR 25 million in 2019 it is expected that, at a 4% real return, the goal of financial independence from the faculty would be reached by 2025.



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