

**Sustainability and Development Conference (SDC) Nov 9-11, 2018, University of Michigan,
End of Event Report**



Introduction

Sustainable development is among the greatest challenges facing people and countries. Efforts to realize it, recently through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations and many governments and donors, seek to end poverty, protect the planet, and secure human and environmental well-being. Scholarly research, student training, and opportunities to apply cutting edge research to solve problems will continue to increase as the United Nation- sponsored sustainable development goals find traction and as the world seeks to understand better how to realize human wellbeing together with sustainability of global to local environments.

In collaboration with the World Development Journal, and with support from the University of Michigan (School for Environment and Sustainability, the International Institute Enterprise Fund, the African Studies Center, and the Provost's office), the inaugural Sustainability and Development Conference was held at the University of Michigan, November 9-11, 2018. Around 600 participants from 58 countries came together to share their work and engage in new friendships and collaborations.

Events at SDC 2018

The meeting centered around thirteen SDG-based themes: Sustainable Development and Indigenous Peoples; Building Institutions for Sustainable Development; Education; Equality, Equity and Development; Conflict, Security, and Development; Development and Climate Change; Reshaping Economic Geography; Agriculture for Development; Water, Sanitation, and Health; Biodiversity and Conservation; Energy Provision and Access; Infrastructure and Industrialization; Mobilizing the Private Sector; Financing the Sustainable Development Goals; Developing Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

115 sessions and 22 posters explored these themes extensively during the meeting. A cursory summary of the presentations includes the following points: Local people/communities must be integrated into SD interventions; SDG targets, while broad scale in nature, must be assessed at country, regional, and local levels; trade-offs and synergies between goals and targets must be acknowledged and reconciled; and terminology and definitions can be extraordinarily diverse across disciplines and cultures. Presentations highlighted cases where development interventions are succeeding (for example, the adoption of modern agricultural technologies by farmers around the globe; the integration of technology into market development; and building collaborative institutions for natural resource management), and where there is more work to be done (for example, reducing bias and discrimination in health, education, and labor sectors; and the persistent challenges of scaling up).

In addition to thematic sessions, the conference hosted 11 plenary speakers. We opened the conference with a Welcome Plenary Roundtable panel on "Careers and Opportunities in Sustainable Development". Cris Doby (Erb Foundation), Patrick Doran (The Nature Conservancy), Catherine Harris (Acre), Jennifer Haverkamp (UM-Graham Institute), Shelie Miller (UM-SEAS), and Samuel Passmore (Mott Foundation) shared their perspectives on their career trajectories and their work related to

sustainability and development. Bina Agarwal of Manchester University gave the keynote address on “Gender inequality and food security: How far can SDG 5 take us?” The conference concluded with an all-women panel on “Realizing Sustainability and Development: Knowledge, Collaborations, and Power.” Eleanor Allen (Water for People), Isabella Bakker (York University), Ana María Ibanez (Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia), Agnes Quisumbing (IFPRI), and Marlene Wolfe (Tufts University) provided insights into the strategies necessary to achieve the SDGs.

The conference also offered 4 skill- or tool-based workshops to participants: Critical Dialogue to Enhance Effectiveness in the Practice of Sustainable Development; Open-Source Analysis of SDGs at the Food-Water-Energy Nexus Using Global, Gridded Modeling; Improving Evaluation in Foreign Aid; and Case-Based Learning in the Classroom and Beyond.

Publication Opportunities

Five journal editors participated in the meeting. Arun Agrawal (World Development), Marc Bellemare (Food Policy), Lance Gunderson (Ecology and Society), Joan Nassauer (Landscape and Urban Planning), and Rich Howarth (Ecological Economics) spoke about the publishing process and offered insights and guidance to a packed room in a special Editor’s Roundtable. Several editors provided one-on-one feedback to participants in a series of expedited review sessions. Participants also had the opportunity to submit their presented paper for review consideration for a special issue with World Development. To date, 35 papers have been submitted and we anticipate that after a rigorous review process we will have a special issue of 50+ papers on a wide range of sustainability and development topics.

Conference feedback

Based on post-event evaluations from about 200 participants, the conference was an extremely positive experience and has the potential to become an annual event for scholars and students of sustainability and development. The most common rating in all categories (Content, Format, Registration, Venue, Cost) was a 4 out of 5, with 5 being the highest. Content, networking, and potential for publication in World Development were the primary reasons individuals chose to attend. Participants varied substantially in the future opportunities they would like to be involved with but the most commonly listed were: SDC 2019, participation in research collaborations, participation in research opportunities, and participation in World Development opportunities.

Future plans

The first annual Sustainability and Development Conference showed that young researchers in this field are eager for better guidance, more supportive interactions, affirming environments, and positive role models and leadership. We are excited about the levels of interest in this conference and look forward to developing subsequent conferences and related activities. To this end, we are working with key researchers and center directors in 15 universities and NGOs globally to create a coordinating body that will support and guide future iterations of the SDC. Creation of such a body of engaged scholars will ensure the future sustainability of the event.

The next SDC will take place October 11-14, 2018, with a tentative target of 800 to 900 participants. To improve participant experience and satisfaction, we will offer (1) Additional learning workshops, (2) More plenary sessions, (3) Mentoring possibilities connecting senior and younger researchers, (4) Improved opportunities for networking, (5) Interaction sessions with journal editors, and (6) Directed discussions leading to special issues in multiple journals. These refinements, we believe, will yield a more appealing, engaged, and effective sustainability and development conference event to serve the global community of scholars and practitioners interested in the field.

A selection of Twitter compliments

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#sandmeet 2018 also showed how young researchers, especially in fields with high levels of competition, but equally also in interdisciplinary settings are thirsting for better guidance, more supportive interactions, affirming environments, and positive role models and leadership.

#SANDMEET = awesome. I was so excited by all the amazing people I met on the journey home. I agree with the quote wholeheartedly: intercultural, respectful, passionate! Thanks so much to the @umsustdev team for the hard work putting it together. Incredibly thoughtfully executed!

At Detroit airport and I can finally reflect on the 2 days at @umsustdev. I can only echo the opinion of fellow attendees - it was one of the most well-organized, positive, inspiring conferences I have been to. A big thanks to the organizers and participants! #SANDMEET

Thanks for the invitation to speak at #sandmeet @umsustdev. Take a look. Don't always get the perspective from the panelist seat. It was an incredible audience from around the globe. Happy to talk about careers at @nature_org

Must be "current, curious, and crazy," says Patrick Doran of TNC regarding opportunities in development. Great opening session at University of Michigan sustainability conference. #SANDMEET @umsustdev

An insightful conversation about access to water, gender and empowerment, feminist macroeconomists, & conflict in the context of sustainability & development. A fitting way to end the first #sandmeet @umsustdev!!! + a womanel (the opposite of a manel), to boot!!

I had a great time presenting #SANDMEET about @Blood_Bricks research, the whole room got into a debate about #growth and its driving of #exploitation and SDG 8, more critical voices are sorely needed! #SDGs

Having just left the @umsustdev #SANDMEET, all I can say is this: *Major* congratulations to @gotonura and his crew for putting together an event of that scale and quality! (And thanks again for having me on that roundtable!)

By email: "I've never experienced an intercultural, egalitarian, and friendly experience like this in academia and go back to Sweden with hope and inspiration