

SOR4D Research conference 2026

Call for Contributions

Date: 31. August 2026 (12.00 CET) – 1. September 2026 (17.00 CET)

Location: Bern, Switzerland

1 Rationale of the conference

This conference is organised and financed by the Solution Oriented Research for Development Programme ([SOR4D](#)), a joint funding instrument between the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The overarching goal of the SOR4D programme is to produce better knowledge, solutions and innovation by needs-driven, transdisciplinary research that opens up new ways for advancing sustainable development and reducing poverty in the least developed, low and lower middle-income countries.

The specific objectives of the conference are:

- Gather the research and development community to present and discuss results from research projects and their impact: showcasing highlights from SOR4D and other research for development projects.
- Discuss relevant topics and best practices for transdisciplinary projects and North-South research partnerships.
- Provide opportunities for networking and mutual learning among the research and development community and explore the potential establishment of new connections and consortia.

2 Conference themes

Overarching theme: Advancing Transdisciplinary Research for Global Development: Crisis, Collaboration, and Change

Today's world is shaped by overlapping crises such as geopolitical conflicts, climate shocks, pandemics, and rising inequality. These challenges put the sustainability and scalability of development efforts to the test, making it more urgent than ever to find new ways forward. The SOR4D Research Conference invites participants to explore how transdisciplinary projects contribute to creating knowledge and expertise that can address current complex challenges and develop relevant, impactful, and transformative solutions. Central to this discussion is the recognition that no single discipline, sector, or actor can address today's challenges alone. By working together across boundaries, we can co-create solutions that are tailored to local realities, inclusive, and ready to scale. This requires project design and implementation that provide a platform for actors from all, science, policy and practice.

The conference will focus on this overarching theme through three interlinked subthemes, each reflecting on how crises shape our work and how collaboration can drive change:

2.1 Converging Knowledge Systems: Dialogue Between Tradition, Science, and Practice

Crises often expose gaps in our understanding and highlight the need for diverse perspectives. This subtheme explores how different types of knowledge – scientific, indigenous, and practical – are being brought together to support sustainable development and transformation. Integrating these knowledge systems can contribute to creating solutions that are legitimate, effective, and resilient in the face of crisis. Reflections on how to manage and share knowledge, translate it into policy and practice, and overcome barriers such as power imbalances and language differences will be at the centre of this subtheme.

Specific topics could include (but are not limited to):

- The role of science in education during times of crisis
- Experiences with integrating/using indigenous knowledge systems
- Addressing power imbalances in knowledge production
- How to close the science to policy and practice gap
- How to overcome language barriers
- Methods and ethics of knowledge co-production
- Youth and intergenerational knowledge transfer in crisis response
- Indigenous knowledge and innovation for adaptation
- Lessons from failed attempts to integrate knowledge systems
- Opportunities and risks of AI and digital transformation in crisis contexts
- Informal networks as bridges across regions and socio-economic divides

2.2 Transformative Research: Solutions and Innovation in Crises

Crises demand more than just analysis, they require action and innovation. But how to move from defining problems to achieving real change? Transformative research challenges conventional thinking, inspires new approaches, and drives fundamental shifts that benefit society. Contributions to this subtheme look at how research can be designed for impact, how partnerships can foster transformation, and how ongoing monitoring can help us adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Specific topics could include (but are not limited to):

- Designing research for impact in crisis situations
- Building partnerships for transformation: co-design, co-creation and welcoming diverse visions
- Collaborative methodologies that break down silos between research, policy, and practice.
- Monitoring impact and adapting strategies in response to crisis
- Concrete examples of research leading to policy or practice change
- Fostering dialogue and mutual understanding between science and policy in turbulent times
- Innovative tools in research design
- Building and sustaining broad-based coalitions for change (long term sustainability and vision)

2.3 Shaping scalable solutions in real-world contexts

This subtheme will discuss how locally developed solutions can be scaled up to address broader challenges. This reflects that crises often start locally, but have global repercussions. Participants are invited to reflect on what it takes to move from local innovation to large-scale impact, and how to maintain relevance and community ownership while scaling across diverse contexts. Contributions will also

address the enabling conditions for scale-up, the role of technology, and the importance of equity and inclusion.

Specific topics could include (but are not limited to):

- Success stories and lessons learned from upscaling solutions
- The role of science in monitoring and scaling solutions
- Barriers to lasting change and strategies to overcome them
- Multi-level change strategies: taking innovations from local to regional or even global
- Maintaining local relevance and ownership while scaling
- Ensuring equity and inclusion during scale-up
- Discussion on enabling conditions for scale-up
- Adaptive management and iterative learning processes to ensure scaling
- Financing scale-up: what are innovative funding models?
- Leveraging digital tools and artificial intelligence for scaling impact
- Failures and lessons learned: why scaling didn't work

3 Conference format

The conference will feature a variety of formats, ranging from presentations to workshops and roundtables. Sessions within the subthemes will last 90 minutes. These sessions will not only allow participants to present their research findings but also focus on methodologies, the processes of co-creation, innovation, and upscaling. The different formats contribute to engaging both researchers and non-academic actors more effectively.

3.1 Presentations

Presentations are individual or joint talks where researchers and/or non-academic actors share findings, case studies, or best practices related to the conference themes. The conference particularly invites joint presentations, where researchers and non-academic actors jointly present their findings. This aims to foster a dialogue between the two groups and highlight different perspectives. Presentations are typically 10–15 minutes long, followed by a brief Q&A. This format is ideal for showcasing completed research, innovative approaches, or lessons learned from specific projects.

3.2 Roundtables

Roundtables are interactive discussion sessions that bring together a diverse group of participants to explore a specific topic or question in depth. A roundtable usually features a small panel of speakers (from different backgrounds, disciplines, or regions) who each provide brief opening remarks, followed by an open discussion with all attendees. The goal is to foster dialogue, exchange perspectives, and identify new ideas or collaborative opportunities.

3.3 Workshop sessions

Workshops are hands-on, participatory sessions designed to engage attendees in active learning, problem-solving, or co-creation. Workshops may focus on developing new skills, testing methodologies, or collaboratively addressing a challenge relevant to the conference subthemes. Participants are expected to contribute actively, and workshops often aim to produce a concrete output (such as a draft guideline, action plan, or joint statement).

4 Submissions

Researchers and non-academic actors are invited to submit contributions to the conference using the [conference submission form](#).

Deadline for submissions is on 19 January 2026 (17:00 CET).

5 FAQ

What is the target audience of this conference?

The conference takes place in the context of the SOR4D programme, a joint programme between the SNSF and SDC. The conference, which takes place in Switzerland, is expected to draw a large audience from researchers and development actors familiar with transdisciplinary research, North-South partnerships and international development.

Who can submit a contribution?

Researchers and non-academic actors are invited to submit contributions. Please refer to the call for contributions to ensure your contribution is in line with the conference themes and objectives.

What types of contributions can be submitted?

You may submit proposals for presentations, roundtables and workshops. Please refer to the call for contributions for specific guidelines.

Can I submit more than one contribution?

Yes, you can submit more than one contribution.

What information do I need to include in my submission?

Submissions are to be made using the [conference submission form](#). You must enter personal information, contact details as well as a title and abstract (max. 300 words).

If I submit a proposal for a roundtable, do I already need to know the names of all roundtable participants?

Not necessarily. You will need to describe the topic and questions addressed by the roundtable as well as give some details on confirmed or planned participants in the roundtable. Please note that roundtable submissions will only be considered if the proposed panel demonstrates diversity among its participants. This includes, but is not limited to, diversity in gender, background, career stage, institutional affiliation, and geographical representation.

How will contributions be selected?

Submissions will be reviewed by the scientific committee based on relevance to the conference themes, quality, and diversity of perspectives.

What is the official language of the conference?

The official language of the conference is English. All sessions, presentations, and materials will be provided in English.

Will the conference be held in-person, online, or in a hybrid format?

The main conference will be held in-person at [Eventfabrik](#), Fabrikstrasse 12, 3012 Bern, Switzerland. The conference starts on Monday, 31.8.2026 at 12.00 CET and concludes on Tuesday, 1.9.2026 17.00 CET. Selected keynote speeches and webinars may be accessible online to facilitate broader participation.

Will there be opportunities for networking and collaboration?

Yes, the conference is designed to foster networking and collaboration through roundtables, workshops, and informal sessions. There will be coffee breaks throughout the conference and a reception in the evening of the first conference day.

Is there a registration fee for the conference?

No, there is no registration fee for attending the SOR4D Research Conference 2026.

Are travel or accommodation grants available for participants?

A limited number of scholarships covering travel, accommodation and meals are available for participants from least developed, low- and middle-income countries. These can be applied for through the [conference submission form](#). The maximum amount per scholarship is CHF 2'000. Only actual costs and flights in economy class are covered.

Will proceedings or outputs from the conference be published?

Selected outputs from workshops and sessions may be published as conference proceedings or shared on the SOR4D website.

Who should I contact for further questions?

For further questions, please contact the conference organizing team at sor4d@snf.ch.