2022-2023 BIENNIAL REPORT

VISION

We envision a more sustainable and equitable future through strengthening and connecting science with action.

MISSION

We cultivate, inspire and connect emerging science leaders in Africa and Asia to work with societal partners in creating a more sustainable and equitable future

Welcome

From START's Executive Director, Jon Padgham

Reflections on the 2022-2023 period:
The world experienced yet another climate wake-up call in 2023 as heat records were broken around the globe. Last year's extreme temperatures provided a stark reminder of the ever-widening climate-adaptation gap between the Global South and Global North, and underscored how the new climate normal is increasingly being experienced as an accumulation of serial abnormalities. In a case of fiction mirroring reality, Kim Stanley Robinson in his book The Ministry for the Future writes "[I]t looked like the great heat wave would be like mass shootings in the United States— mourned by all, deplored by all, and then immediately forgotten or superseded by the next one, until they came in a daily drumbeat and became the new normal."

Last year, the world, and in particular the Global South, lost a great champion with the passing of Professor Saleemul Huq. His legacy lives on with the establishment, in 2022, of the loss and damage fund through the UNFCCC, and the efforts of so many others that enable climate justice and equity to gain greater prominence within the global discourse on climate change.

START's Impact

Over the 2022-2023 period, START continued to contribute to strengthening actionable science around climate change. We did this through:

- Building a comprehensive leadership program: Fostering science leadership has been an important element of START's long-term impact through a multi-pronged approach of new skills, integrated knowledge, and greater connectivity. In 2022-2023, we created a holistic leadership fellows program on renewable energy in West Africa that enabled learning across young professionals from academic institutions and the private and public sectors.

- Expanding our work into capacity development on climate finance: In partnership with UNEP, START coordinated a 13-country LDC university network dedicated to strengthening the ability of universities to advise their governments in accessing climate finance. A key incentive for this work stems from the need to create an internally driven university-based alternative to the external-consultancy led model for generating access to climate finance in LDCs.

- Reinforcing partnerships on climate adaptation research: START embarked on a collaboration with several African universities and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre on using transdisciplinary approaches to engaging local communities in creating actionable research on climate change and health. This effort, through the CASCADE project, renews long-standing, productive relationships with African partners.

- Strengthening the role of universities to engage local governments and communities: START continued its partnership with EPIC-N on elevating the role of local universities to engage with local governments and communities in co-creating actionable solutions to environmental challenges. A core element of this work centers around engaging students in gaining practical skills for engaging local communities and co-producing sustainable solutions for cities.



The common throughlines of these efforts — where START has true impact and staying power — revolve around fostering connections across regions, disciplines, career levels, and cohorts, convening diverse voices on which to co-produce equitable solutions, cultivating leadership in science that is holistic and enables confidence to work in complex spaces, and supporting regional priorities for global challenges that emphasizes long-term processes driven by and reflecting regional needs and capabilities.

We are grateful for the support we received during this period from the US Global Change Research Program, the National Science Foundation of the US, NASA, the International Development Research Centre of Canada, the Research Fund of Quebec, the UN Environment Program, and others. We are also grateful for our strong partnerships with numerous universities, research centers, NGOs and government agencies in carrying out this work.

Table of Contents

KEY IMPACT AREAS

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

START fosters connections across sectors, disciplines and geographic boundaries. Our programs provide a space for scientists to co-develop solutions with practitioners and decision-makers; and for early-career researchers to connect with experts and networks at regional and international scale.

CONVENING DIVERSE VOICES IN PURSUIT OF EQUITABLE SOLUTIONS

START programs bring together groups from different backgrounds to identify priorities and co-produce more equitable and effective solutions to challenges associated with global environmental change.

CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP IN SCIENCE

START focuses on holistic science leadership development - including by providing opportunities for experiential learning, connections, career development and wellbeing - so that early-career researchers from different backgrounds may advance and become leading voices in their field.

SUPPORTING REGIONAL PRIORITIES FOR GLOBAL CHALLENGES

START's approach goes beyond one-off projects in favor of longer term processes driven by and reflecting regional needs and priorities. START seeks partnerships that amplify voices from the global south, engaging the donor community to more effectively support science capacity development.

OUR WORK

- Promoting Gains in Renewable Energy- West Africa (ProGREEN) Leadership Fellows Program
- EPIC-N
- Cascading Climate and Health Risks in African Cities (CASCADE)
- LDC University Leadership for Catalyzing Climate-Adaptation Finance (UNI-LEAD)
- Sheila N. Onzere Memorial Leadership Fellows Program
- Global Observation of Forest Cover and Land Dynamics (GOFC-GOLD)

ProGREEN Leadership Fellows Program

Novel approaches for science leadership are needed that enable researchers and sustainability professionals to navigate complexity and more effectively collaborate with diverse others. In 2022-23, START helped to advance leadership capabilities and confidence through a partnership with Reos Partners to design a holistic leadership fellows program for early-career renewable energy scientists and professionals from across Francophone West Africa. The Promoting Gains in Renewable Energy-West Africa (ProGREEN) leadership fellows program integrated insight with learning on how to work more effectively in complex environments with diverse stakeholders who bring varying values, priorities, knowledge and perspectives to the challenge of renewable energy transitions.

Previously, I thought a good leader was someone who was in charge of something and inspired others to follow and, if necessary, adopt her ideas. However, after the ProGREEN journey, I now believe a good leader is someone who listens to her collaborators. She is the one who sees the world through the perspective of others. It is someone who is humble and whose duty it is to inspire others to give their all.

-Pingdwende Inès Ernestine Ouiminga/Nana (ProGREEN Fellow)

Over 400 applicants were competitively reviewed and narrowed to sixteen gender-balanced fellows from Senegal, Togo, Benin, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso with multi-sector backgrounds in academia, the private sector, the public sector, and civil society. Over 10 months, these fellows progressed through online modules and online synchronous sessions on: Foundations for Impactful Collaborations; Systems Thinking; Foresight; Reflexivity and Empathy; Flexibility; Learning and Growing in the Face of Discomfort; Power, Gender, and Intersectionality; Reducing Injustice; and Dealing with Stuckness in a System.

Cultivating Leadership in Science

Through this leadership journey, fellows were asked to interrogate their assumptions of who leaders are and what it means to lead. Fellows came to understand that leadership does not always imply a particular professional position or seniority level, but rather the drive and ability to integrate core technical and disciplinary skills across disciplines, engage with societal actors, and communicate effectively in producing and mobilizing actionable knowledge,

Fostering Connections

The ProGREEN leadership fellows program fostered connections across academia, the private sector, government, and civil society through building relationships between peers and between fellows and experts in the West African renewable energy space. During the program, fellows were prompted to give critical consideration to the thematic content and how it manifested in their everyday professional and personal experiences. They then had opportunities to share these reflections with one another, ask for advice on difficult situations, and discuss how they might have done things differently if given the chance.

When the fellows were able to meet in person at the end of the program, many had come to think of their peer fellows as family, and as professional connections with whom they could continue to collaborate. During this final meeting, fellows were also able to share about their experiences in the program and details of their broader work with distinguished guests, as well as learning about the leadership journeys of the guests themselves, which provided inspiring exchanges on the importance of communication, being humble, being confident, and supporting African leadership of renewable energy and sustainability futures in Africa.

Fonds de recherche Québec

Reos Partners

EPIC-N

Significant potential exists for local universities to work collaboratively with local governments and communities to address place-based sustainability challenges. Over the past several years, START has helped to advance this effort through a partnership with the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities (EPIC)–Network. The EPIC model provides an innovative way to harness both university and municipal resources to address pressing local needs related to climate adaptation and resilient development, through fostering collaboration between local universities, communities and governments.

START is partnering with EPIC-N to share the EPIC approach in Africa and Asia, utilizing START's networks and experience to strengthen capacities for more robust engagement between universities, local governments and communities. The EPIC model promotes learning-centered approaches that enable university students to develop practical skills alongside academic training, and that match cities' needs with learning priorities of university and college students allowing for a broad spectrum of sustainability issues to be addressed in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Beginning with a seed grant administered through START, various city departments and agencies collaborated with the University of the Philippines Los Baños to employ the EPIC Model on the "Enhancing Disaster Preparedness of Lakeshore Communities in Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines" project. The important work continues today.

With the EPIC model, university students have been able to work alongside local government, NGOs, and conservation organizations to enhance community climate resilience through mangrove restoration at Lake Piso in Western Liberia.

Fostering Connections

The EPIC model helps foster partnerships and connections between universities, local governments and communities in Asian and African cities. The model offers a holistic approach to solving problems in city communities, with students, researchers, city practitioners, and communities working together to co-produce solutions within a multi and trans-disciplinary framework.

In Asia, 11 city-specific projects have helped support the EPIC Asia network, focusing on urban green development, water quality monitoring, solid waste management, disaster preparedness & early warning systems, biodiversity conservation, and climate-smart farming.

In Africa, as part of the work of the EPIC Africa Network, training sessions on the EPIC model were convened in four southern African cities. The trainings were co-designed with city partners, enabling tailor-made products and sharing of experiences and lessons as well as growing deeper connections between EPIC coordinators, researchers, and city partners.

In 2023, START, in collaboration with EPIC-N and funding from the US National Science Foundation initiated 18 additional pilot efforts (11 in Asia and 7 in Africa) to assist network members to co-explore, expand and implement collaborative EPIC work.

Supporting Regional Priorities for Global Challenges

START's partnership with EPIC (which was initiated in the US) has helped it to internationalize the program in a manner that more fully considers a diversity of African and Asian contexts. In doing so, START is contributing to the long-term relevance of this initiative. The EPIC model is community centered and driven and prioritizes local needs in dealing with challenges such as flooding, solid waste management, ecosystem (rivers, green spaces) restoration and conservation, and informal settlements.

The sustained approaches utilized by EPIC promote fostering of relationships and collaborative partnerships beyond project cycles. These processes are driven by local and regional- contextualized needs and priorities, and therefore support START's efforts to amplify students and community voices in Africa and Asia.

CASCADE

Urban areas across the African continent are experiencing extraordinary growth, with 60% of the population anticipated to reside in cities by 2050. Simultaneously, African cities are witnessing unprecedented climatic shifts accompanied by changes in temperature and rainfall patterns, bringing extreme weather events that can be difficult to predict. These rapid changes are exacerbating existing challenges related to urban infrastructure, sanitation, transportation, and health systems, resulting in multiple and cascading risks for people residing in these areas.

Within this context, the Cascading Climate Health Risks in African Cities (CASCADE) project was launched in November 2023. With five participating cities (Accra, Ghana; Cape Town, South Africa; Johannesburg, South Africa; Harare, Zimbabwe and Kampala, Uganda) across the Southern, Eastern, and West African regions, the project focuses on advancing the understanding of critical urban health challenges faced by African cities and using transdisciplinary research methods toward finding practical and effective interventions to address these challenges.

This project is part of the broader Developing Excellence in Leadership, Training and Science (DELTAS II) program. The DELTAS Africa program supports African-led research and scientific leadership to address health and development challenges on the continent. It is funded under the Science for Africa Foundation, with support from Wellcome Trust and the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Cultivating Leadership in Science

Capacity building is a core component of the CASCADE program, and as such, emphasizes the leadership and empowerment aspects of early career researchers, ensuring practical experiences on the ground across the continent. Working together with the Red Cross Crescent's Climate Center, START is co-leading the capacity-building and learning components of the project, including the Scholars Research program, which targets up to 50 early to mid-career researchers enrolled as post graduate students across the five universities. Diverse approaches to learning, inclusive of social and professional training will be used to enrich the learning experiences including experiential learning, city-to-city exchanges, and peer-to-peer learning. START will be spearheading the leadership capacity strengthening activities with student researchers with the aim of bolstering collaborative capacities and appreciation for diversity in transdisciplinary processes.

Fostering Connections

Together with other project partners, START is helping to facilitate city learning-action labs, which are a core component of the CASCADE program. These labs create opportunities for fostering collaboration and relationships, prioritizing transdisciplinary methods and co-creation, and building connections across city departments, civil society, student researchers and university experts. By providing spaces for mutual learning, learning labs serve as a catalyst for new ideas, learning, and co-produced solutions for complex problems facing cities across Africa.

As part of a multi-city consortia, each participating city will benefit from the lessons being produced in other locations, both relating to solutions and collaborative processes. The same is true for the student researchers who will have opportunities to participate in knowledge exchange and peer learning across project cities.

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
APHRC African Population and Health Research Center
Chinhoyi University of Technology
University of Ghana
Makerere University
CSAG Climate System Analysis Group
Climate Centre
Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
Science for Africa Foundation
Wellcome Trust

UNI-LEAD

Financing for adaptation lags far behind the growing threat of climate change, with the gap between finance and need particularly acute in the Least Developed Countries. LDCs have significant capacity development needs related to accessing international climate finance, given that: i) their governments largely rely on international experts and multilateral intermediaries to develop climate finance proposals, ii) these external consultants lack understanding of national contexts, to ensure sustainability of adaptation finance investments, and iii) LDC universities have unrealized potential to play a much more visible role in advising their governments on accessing climate finance.

As coordinator of the LDC University Leadership for Catalyzing Climate-Adaptation Finance (UNI-LEAD) project, START is addressing this critical challenge. In partnership with UNEP and 13 universities within the LDC University Consortium on Climate Change (LUCCC), the UNI-LEAD project is developing short courses on accessing climate finance that are contextualized to LDC needs and priorities, and establishing climate finance think-tanks in 4 of the 13 countries within the LUCCC. These climate-finance think-tanks are developing training and advisory services to their governments to enhance access to climate finance.

The UNI-LEAD project is unique in its approach to strengthening core capacities at LDC universities on climate finance. Many of the universities in this LDC network have climate change units or climate change centers within their universities that work on adaptationresearch but they lack the specific expertise on climate adaptation financing mechanismse. This project is addressing this gap, and in doing so will enable these universities to play a more active, leadership role in strengthening the science-policy interface for climate change adaptation and in advising their governments on how to unlock access climate finance access for a climate-resilient future.

Mahugnon Serge Djohy
Institutional Strengthening Specialist
UNI-LEAD PROJECT

Fostering Connections

The UNI-LEAD project, through engaging ten universities in Africa and three in South Asia, is strengthening peer-learning across the LUCCC network. The project is also promoting stronger connectivity between universities and governments through the numerous engagements that the universities have held with their government counterparts to establish priorities for accessing climate finance across varying contexts, and to identify ways that this project could enhance linkages between national and sub-national levels for mobilizing adaptation funding.

Supporting Regional Priorities for Global Challenges

The UNI-LEAD project represents a comprehensive effort within LDCs to shift from a predominantly external consultancy model for proposal development to access climate finance to processes that are internally driven and owned. The latter approach— through more fully enabling universities to collaborate with governments — can create stronger and more sustainable climate finance outcomes that reflect internally driven adaptation priorities.

UN environment programme
gef
LDC CLIMATE CHANGE
CLIMATE ANALYTICS
LUCCC Least Developed Countries Universities Consortium on Climate Change

Sheila N. Onzere Memorial Leadership Fellows Program

Bringing greater visibility to African women scientists, helping them strengthen their skills for collaboratively working with others, and linking them with a diverse community of professionals was at the core of this memorial fellows program. Sheila was a Kenyan-American research scientist who made significant contributions to the fields of development, livelihoods, climate change adaptation, and forest governance.

The SNO fellowship program, undertaken by eight competitively selected women scientists from six African countries, honored Sheila's legacy and her aspirations for more equitable and just work at the interface of science and society.

Fellows journeyed through a tailored set of online modules, synchronous zoom sessions, and an in-person meeting at Adaptation Futures 2023. Themes included: power, gender, and intersectionality; systems thinking; fostering equity and justice in adaptation and adaptation interventions; reflexivity and empathy; and learning and growing in the face of discomfort.

Convening diverse voices in pursuit of equitable solutions

Taking the time to reflect on one's own experiences, values, and goals, as well as giving thoughtful consideration to those of others, can almost seem like a luxury to women scientists trying to balance incredibly busy professional and

personal responsibilities. However, the eight SNO Memorial Leadership Fellows were provided with such an opportunity as they progressed through their online modules. During the virtual live sessions, the fellows shared experiences regarding their positionality statements, the complex power dynamics they've experienced as part of professional teams, burnout and work/life balance, and experiences in leadership positions where they had to manage different personalities, needs, and aspirations of diverse teams. Having a moment to slow down and think about how their own positionality impacted their own behaviors and choices in certain situations, as well as reflecting on potential motivations for the decisions of others was a pivotal moment of learning for many of the fellows who came to better understand how diversity in a team can be much more than a hurdle to overcome or manage but instead be a rich and valuable asset.

"Looking forward, these lessons have become the bedrock of my leadership mindset. I don't just see myself as a leader, but as a facilitator of inclusivity and collaboration. The aim is to create an environment where every team member feels heard and valued."
-Dr. Stella Shumba

Cultivating Leadership in Science-

The women scientists participating in this program sit at broadly varying stages of their careers. Some are still in the midst of their graduate studies, some beginning to embark on careers within or outside of academia, and some are seasoned professionals who are themselves overseeing students and employees in different sectors. Through this versatile leadership program, all of these women found valuable lessons that will help them to navigate their own unique challenges and to lead with greater intentionality and appreciation of the experiences of others.

The Sheila N. Onzere Memorial Leadership Fellows Program was funded through a memorial fund in Dr. Onzere's honor that was spearheaded by her colleagues and friends at the Humanitarian Response and Development Lab (HURDL) which is part of the George Perkins Marsh Institute at Clark University where Dr. Onzere was a research scientist at the time of her passing.

GOFC-GOLD

Satellite images and remote sensing data provide critical information to better understand complex dynamics between forest cover, land-use change and climate change. In turn, this science helps to inform evidence-based decision making related to sustainably managing natural resources and developing appropriate climate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

START has a long-term commitment to strengthening these capabilities through involvement in the Global Observations of Forest Cover and Land-use Dynamics (GOFC-GOLD) program administered by NASA. This program represents a comprehensive effort, across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, to improve access to Earth observation data, strengthen capacities to generate and access new data, and foster an international network of scientific collaboration.

START provides a vital coordination role for the GOFC-GOLD regional networks, which enables capacity strengthening through early-career researcher training, regional meetings for sharing research results and establishing networks' research priorities, and skills enhancement on the use of new technologies and data analysis products to advance land-use and land-cover change research.

Fostering Connections

Although satellite data are readily available in northern countries, access remains a challenge for scientists in the global south. The GOFC-GOLD program addresses this critical need through a coordinated effort to broaden access to existing data and foster regional and international networks of scientists working on land cover and forest change issues. GOFC-GOLD acts as an international forum to exchange information, coordinate satellite observations and provide a framework for establishing long-term monitoring systems. To achieve its goals, GOFC-GOLD has developed regional networks of data providers, brokers and users, and one of the key ways that the GOFC program encourages cross-learning and sharing of findings is through symposium events that bring together representatives from across the networks.

2022

SCERIN-9 Virtual Workshop —Satellite remote sensing for forest management and ecosystem health - floods, droughts, and wildfires in the context of climate change;
SARI —International Workshop On Land Cover/Land Use Changes, Forestry, and Agriculture in South/Southeast Asia; convened in Phnom Penh, Cambodia
SARI —International Meeting on Air Pollution in Asia – Inventories, Monitoring and Mitigation; convened in Hanoi, Vietnam
SARI —Training Workshop on Fundamentals of Remote Sensing; convened in Phnom Penh, Cambodia
SCERIN-10 -Workshop on Earth System Observations and 10th Anniversary: Recent terrestrial ecosystems LCLU changes and driving forces - challenges for remote sensing and sustainable management; convened in Brno, Czech Republic

2023

CARIN Early Career Scientist training at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, KYR; Regional workshop for CARIN held in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan from 13-16 September 2023. The ECS workshop had 21 participants, and the regional meeting had 45 participants.
REDLaTIF: Parallel meeting of REDLaTIF within the SpaceWeek Northeast 2023 held 14th-20th August 2023 in Fortaleza, Brazil. The parallel meeting focused on land-cover change research undertaken by 6 regionally based members of RedLatif who were able to attend SpaceWeek.
SEARRIN SAR training; 3rd Vietnam School of Earth Observation: SAR remote sensing of land surfaces in Vietnam: focus on rice and forest ecosystems.

NASA

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Regional Center Spotlight: TEA-START

Global Environment Outlook for International graduate students at CAS University

In 2023, TEA-START developed a core course of the Global Environment Outlook at the International School, University of Chinese Academy of Sciences and began to offer the classes to international graduate students in the Fall semesters of 2023. The 40-hour courses cover various topics on global environment assessments and outlooks, including climate change impacts and adaptation, biodiversity and ecosystem services, marine and coastal environments, air quality and pollution control, water quality and security, disaster risks and mitigation, solid waste and resources management. It also introduces various frontiers for environmental issues, mega-trends, cross-cutting issues, and a future outlook towards the UN sustainable development goals. The course was wrapped up with a science-policy forum on critical environmental issues in different regions and sub-regions. 54 graduate students from 19 countries of Africa, Asia, and North America joined the classes.

TEA- START SCIENTIST SERVES THE UNEP-ISC FORESIGHT EXPERT PANEL

An independent Foresight Expert Panel was established in 2023 by the United National Environment Program (UNEP) and the International Science Council (ISC) to support, identify, and evaluate emerging issues and signals of change. TEA-START scientist, Professor Gensuo Jia is among the 20 panel members selected worldwide.

The Expert Panel reviews data collected through the recent UNEP Foresight Delphi Survey to providing necessary sense-making to identify the strengths, gaps, and any additional guidance on the way forward.

The Panel worked through a structured debate to:

- review, adjust and to prioritize the initial issues and signals and identified phenomena that were gleaned from the survey; and
- connect the issues from the Horizon Scanning to the first set of UNEP scenario narratives that aim to provide a structure or framing for the issues and signals identified through the Horizon Scanning exercise.

The Expert Panel ultimately supports the attribution of Horizon Scanning issues and signals to specific scenarios as well as identifying where issues and signals from the Horizon Scanning may fall out of, or challenge the meta-frame, and how the meta-frame may have to be further developed or adjusted.

The Temperate East Asia Regional Center (TEA-START) is located in Beijing, China and supported as a key laboratory in the Chinese Academy of Sciences. TEA-START promotes capacity building in China and in Temperate East Asia.

Our Partners

African Population and Health Research Center
Belmont Forum
Chinese Academy of Sciences
Chinhoyi University of Technology
Climate Analytics
Climate System Analysis Group, University of Cape Town
Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities Network
Fonds de recherche du Québec
Future Earth
Future Science for Africa
Global Environment Facility (GEF)
ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, Africa
Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
International Development Research Centre
JPI Urban Europe
LDC University Consortium for Climate Change
Makerere University
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
National Science Foundation
Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre
Reos Partners
Rural Polytechnical Institute for Training and Applied Research (IPR/IFRA)-Katibougou
Thammasat University
United Nations Environment Programme
United States Global Change Research Program
University of Ghana
Visvesvaraya National Institute Of Technology
United Kingdom Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
University of Maryland
University of the Witwatersrand
Wellcome Trust
World Climate Research Programme
World Meteorological Organization

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