

# Science Missions for Sustainability

27 January 2025 | Muscat, Oman



*Progress is slower than needed: We need to urgently redouble efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*

ISC. *Unleashing Science: Delivering Missions for Sustainability 2021*

*“We must rise higher **to rescue** the Sustainable Development Goals – and stay true to our promise of a world of peace, dignity and prosperity on a healthy planet.”*

António Guterres, *Secretary-General, United Nations*  
*The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*

# LIMITS OF THE CURRENT SCIENCE SYSTEM THAT SLOW PROGRESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

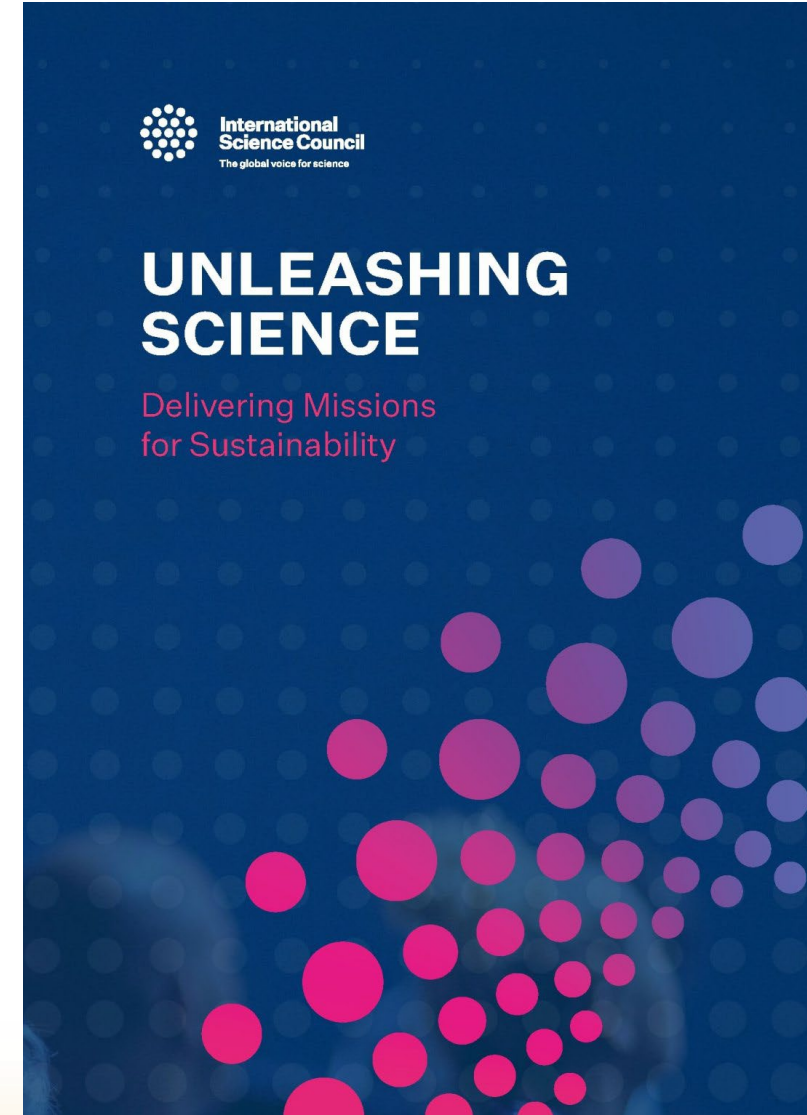
A lot of knowledge on sustainability challenges but...

- Disciplinary and siloed nature of scientific efforts
- Not designed to deal with complexity
- Persistent disconnect between knowledge and action
- Focus on problem understanding rather than on helping to solve it
- Top-down planning
- Production of information that is not trusted
- Intense competition
- Organisational and funding mechanisms not fit for purpose

# BACKGROUND

**Global Forum of Funders** asked ISC to make recommendations on how science could serve sustainability goals better

Published in response to this request, report on **Unleashing Science: Delivering Missions for Sustainability** makes a compelling case for stepping out of our business-as-usual approaches to structuring and organising science, funding science and doing science and advocates for a big science mission approach.



# THE GLOBAL COMMISSION



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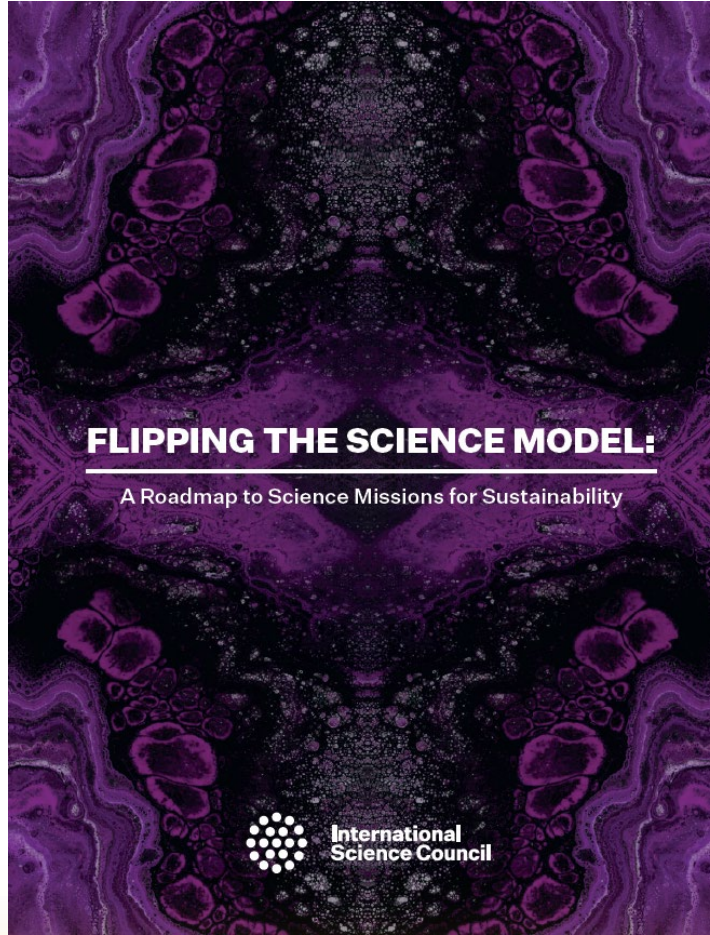
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# THE RESPONSE

Focus on *how* not just *what*





**We need integrated science that works with society to generate actionable knowledge in the pursuit of transformations to sustainability**



# PROPOSED MODEL: A GLOBAL NETWORK OF SCIENCE MISSIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY



# GOALS

- ▶▶ A **novel mechanism to fast-track achievement of SDGs** in regions where progress is lagging most
-  **The building of a global community** of scientific, policy development and stakeholder expertise capable of resolving complex and nexus SDG matters
-  **Trust building** between the scientific community and the societies it serves
-  **Promoting culture change within science and science funding** and driving global cooperation in service of a more sustainable planet and a dignified future for humanity
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Responding to the UN International **Decade of Sciences for**

# FOCUS ON

- **Harnessing context-specific actionable knowledge** to address the most pressing demand-driven sustainability challenges that occur at the intersection of multiple SDGs — “**nexus challenges**” - at the local, regional and sub-regional levels
- **Building trust and legitimacy** through broad stakeholder **co-design, co-production and co-implementation processes**
- Focusing efforts that **complement and integrate** rather than compete with existing efforts to promote sustainability

We now seek **strong support** of the Pilot Missions to demonstrate the validity and effectiveness of this new paradigm for global science.



# Launching pilot science Missions for sustainability

January 2025 | Muscat, Oman



Over **250** expressions of interest  
**23** shortlisted projects  
**12** Selected Missions  
**2** pilot missions begin co-design



Pilots in the co-design process, require additional resources to achieve full implementation and impact:

## **Meta-Network Hub for SDGs in Asia**

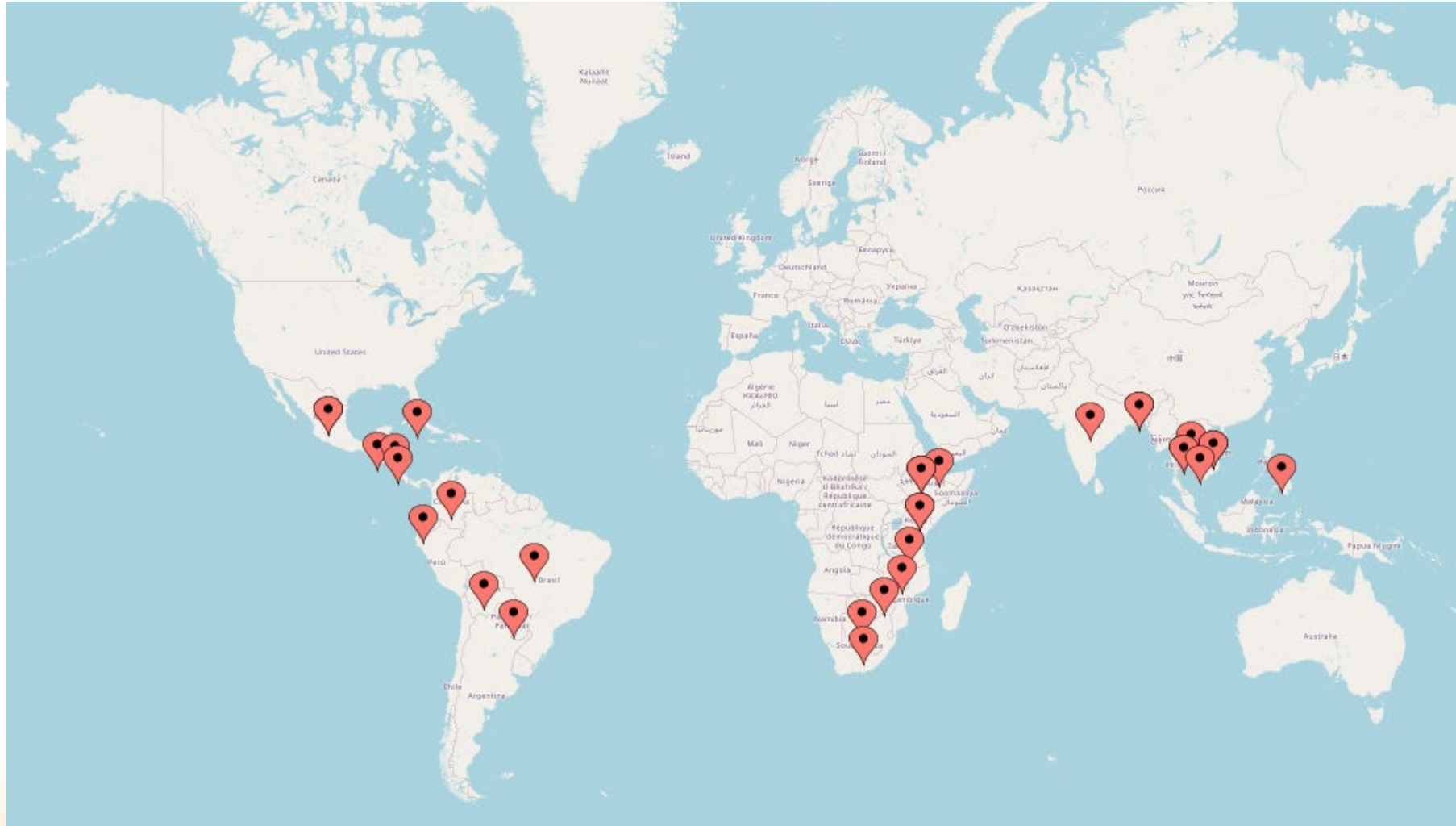
**Sustainable-use protected areas to catalyse enhanced  
livelihoods in rural Amazonia**

# READY TO LAUNCH PILOT MISSIONS AWAITING FUNDING TO BEGIN TRANSFORMATIVE WORK

1. Transformative adaptation of rural landscapes across the **nexus** (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Vietnam).
2. Co-designing multiple **intensification strategies in smallholder farming systems**: overcoming institutional and gender barriers (Ethiopia).
3. Transformative futures for **water security**, road map for the Mekong (Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Viet Nam Delta and North-East Thailand).
4. Agroecological transition and adaptive climate governance: building **community water monitoring** capacities in vulnerable Andean watersheds (Eastern Andes of Colombia).
5. “ZAPI” concept: **innovation and priority adaptation areas** (Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania).
- 6. Citizen-driven living labs for urban heat island mitigation**: a women-led transdisciplinary approach for health, equity and sustainability (India, Bangladesh, and Thailand).
7. Strengthening the agroecological **stewardship of pollinators by indigenous rural women** (Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua and Paraguay).
8. Beyond the coffee cup: **empowering coffee-production communities** (Chiapas, Mexico).
- 9. Thriving cross-border landscapes and societies** in Mapungubwe (Mapungubwe region in Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe).
- 10. Mitigating health impacts of climate change** through sustainable structural transformations (Bangladesh, Ecuador, Kenya, Malawi, United States, and Vietnam).



# PILOT MISSIONS ACROSS SDG HOTSPOTS



# CALLING VISIONARY PARTNERS

We are at a **critical turning point**. The slow progress on sustainability challenges reminds us of the urgency to think big and act boldly.

The global science community is ready to meet this moment but cannot do it alone. We need forward-thinking funders and partners willing to embrace innovation, and power this ambitious mission-driven approach.

We **invite diverse partners** – national agencies, foundations, philanthropies, development banks, and more – to join us in pioneering a transdisciplinary and engaged science model.

Together, we can create a proof of concept that demonstrates how science, shaped by collaboration and inclusivity, can address today's most pressing sustainability challenges with actionable knowledge and solutions.

**Meeting of Funders**  
**5-6 March, Paris**





## Science Missions for Sustainability

*Be part of a bold collective action  
that redefines science to deliver  
real-world solutions for humanity's  
most urgent challenges.*



[Explore the pilot missions](#)