

Explanatory Note Re:
The High-Level Consultation Event:
Finalising the Cape Town Declaration on Science for Social Justice
Monday 17th July, 2023
Centre for Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)

Dear Stakeholder,

It is appropriate that our latest *five-year series of consultation events* were convened in Africa¹, the continent where the human story began. From our initial meeting in Cape Town in June, 2017 to the last gathering in Cape Town before the *World Science Forum* in December 2022, we have felt this social responsibility and connection to the first human who walked upright, dreamed, thought and co-existed with other humans, plants, animals, rivers, oceans and forests. The symbolism of Robben Island and the majesty of Table Mountain has not been lost on us either.

We are now meeting one final time in Pretoria on 17th July, 2023 to agree a revised set of ethics and principles that are all about Africa on its own terms and in its full voice titled the *Cape Town Declaration on Science for Social Justice*.

Our host is the *Science Diplomacy Capital for Africa* (SDCfA) and following our half-day of drafting and debate, you will be their guests for an important reception and dinner marking the first anniversary of their platform's launch.

The next day, Tuesday 18th July is *Nelson Mandela Day*. Drawing on the presence of many of our collective's presence in Pretoria, we are organising four discussion panels focused on *scientific advice and research for social justice* and count again on you to register, show up and get involved.

Driven by a sense of urgency and need to address societal harms, we continue to advance our commitment to justice, anchored in **people's power**.

We believe that one individual and one good idea can make all the difference. We are the problem and we are the solution. That is why we need you there on the 17th & 18th July.

The *World Science Forum Declaration 2022*² calls for:

“... renewed support for the social sciences and humanities, as these disciplines play a vital role in understanding societal challenges, including the role of harm reduction science³, which informs greater empathy for people with addictions, helping us to shape a more equal and inclusive world.”

The primary focus of this first WSF legacy event is on **scientific advice and research for social justice** and five overriding principles inform the programme:

¹ www.sci-com.eu

² [Declaration of the World Science Forum 2022 | World Science Forum](#)

³ Note from organiser: *harm reduction sciences* refer to the policies, programmes and practices that aim to minimise the negative health, social and legal impacts associated with drug use, drug policies and drug laws. Moving from drug prohibition to legal regulation, we aim to explore tales of resilience, while identifying the best practices in science that can move us from punitive policies to effective solutions.

1. Prioritising public health;
2. Ensuring access to controlled medicines;
3. Decriminalising personal use and possession;
4. Relying on alternatives to punishment for non-violent, low-level actors in illicit drug markets, and promoting longer-term socio-economic development efforts to offer them a legitimate exit strategy; &
5. Regulating the drug markets, and rolling back organised crime and its corruptive and violent influence.

A full history and archive of our partnered events 2012 – 2023 can be found at www.sci-com.eu and the final ***Cape Town Declaration*** and its concrete recommendations will also be posted there once completed.

Below, is a resumé of who we are, what we stand for, the principles and ideas we considered and what we hope to achieve.

BACKGROUND

Today, as ever, all kinds of **injustices and inequalities** persist making an equal, fair and more just world seem far away. From *extreme poverty to food poverty and disease burden*, uneven access to *basic education, reproductive or mobility rights*, to *gender-based violence, xenophobia, homophobia* and widely diverging *punitive legal systems*, our life chances appear to be a post-code lottery. In our interconnected and ever-smaller world, where you were born matters most.

There are constantly evolving known and unknown injustices. What we might take for granted today as best societal practice, future generations and history might judge us harshly for.

Pessimists would argue that when you add in *climate change and geopolitical conflicts*, that our common humanity is at risk of extinction. We are societal beings, and individual actions have social consequences. The conduct of our shared global commons threatens our world questioning the future of all life on the planet. There is a creeping sense of inertia, paralysis and sleepwalking-through.

Optimists would argue that we are in a *golden age of scientific discovery* and certainly have the means to remedy most of our societal ills. We must **unleash the power of science** to create new knowledge, to share it, to find solutions and to tackle injustices head-on. Science in itself cannot ensure that the spoils of our planet are accessible to all and fairly distributed, of course. That would be over-stating its importance. Yet, what is science but a collective of individuals, voters, citizens, values-led institutions, innovation-driven funds, and nuts and bolts infrastructures.

We call for concerted action and will continue mobilising personally and through whatever professional roles we might have to advance the **politics of hope** and to empower the powerless. We must ensure that the fruits of scientific endeavour are available to all, especially the most vulnerable.

With the encouragement and support of all participating organisations, public and industry scientists, representatives of science-led civil society groups and particularly those many individuals assuming leadership roles in steering the *Consultation Events* held from 2017 – 2022, we put forward the ***Cape Town Declaration on Science for Social Justice***.

This body of work is inspired by, and follows on from, the mid-term, ***Brussels Declaration on Ethics & Principles for Science & Society Policy-Making***⁴ (2012 – 2017).

We build on these original twenty principles and renew our commitment towards the responsible, ethical and fair use of scientific knowledge in addressing the grand challenges of humankind.

We continue to champion the *Brussels Declarations*' Principle #14 that: ***“The public plays a critical role in influencing policy and must be included in the decision-making process”*** and Principle #18 that: ***“Scientific advice must be more involved in all stages of the policy-making process”***.

⁴ [Ethics & Principles of Science & Society Policy-Making: The Brussels Declaration \(sci-com.eu\)](http://www.sci-com.eu)

We call for a new orientation of science to be transformative, driven by the common good, equitable human development within planetary boundaries, and to be solutions-focused and planned for the ethical application of knowledge.

We call for a new attitude or ethos in science, to become more inclusive and collaborative, integrative of diverse sources of knowledge, open and accessible to all.

We call for the reorganisation of science systems towards greater global connectivity, collaboration and genuine integration across different parts of the world, while retaining necessary adaptable structures for social impacts in different social contexts.

Our manifesto of ideas and recommendations stem from a decade-long, *high-level* and purposefully *'low-level'* consultation process involving dozens of meetings and thousands of individuals from *civil* and what some might see as *'uncivil society'* alike.

We are committed to do everything within our power and areas of influence to promote, defend and stand-up for vulnerable groups.

We will not simply accept the liquidation of hard-won democratic principles and freedoms in the name of politics as usual.

We call upon all stakeholders – governments, scientists, activists, media, industry and the public at large – to cooperate in a joint effort to ensure the just application of evidence-based policy-making and community-focussed interventions for the benefit of society as a whole.

We will work to fight for greater inclusiveness, participation and accountability in science and to stand up and be counted when we find this not to be the case.

We will work to end gross misconduct and marginalisation via the sharing of science's benefits and the global public goods it can and must provide for all citizens of our planet, regardless of race, nationality, class, gender, sex or age.

OUR VALUES AND GOALS

According to the U.N., *“Social justice is based on the values of fairness, equality, respect for diversity, access to social protection, and the application of human rights in all spheres of life, including in the workplace.”*⁵

In line with the outcomes of the **1999 World Conference on Science (WCS)** that led to the *World Science Forum*, and taking into account the **2011 Budapest Declaration** on the *New Era of Global Science*, the **2013 Rio de Janeiro Declaration** on *Science for Global Sustainable Development*, and the **2017 Jordan Declaration** on *Science for Peace*, our collective helped draft **Article IV** of the **2015 World Science Forum's Budapest Declaration** on the *Enabling Power of Science* entitled *'Scientific Advice for Policies'*.

This calls for: *“...concerted action of scientists and policy-makers to define and promulgate universal principles for developing and communicating science to inform and evaluate policy based on responsibility, integrity, independence, and accountability.”*

We have also been inspired by the social justice credentials of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and notably Goal #16 to: *“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”* and Goal #10 to: *“Reduce inequality within and among countries”*.

⁵ <https://sdgs.un.org/statements/message-world-day-social-justice-10379>

Everywhere that science meets society, furthering social justice is an imperative. We have been conscious that this requires a **two-pronged approach**. We must get our ‘own scientific house’ in order and tackle social injustice in science. In parallel, we must look at the role of science in both championing and making possible through progress broader social justice.

Achieving both requires clear-eyed recognition of the current **unequal state of scientific access across the world** and, similarly, **unequal historical contributions to science**. A global campaign aiming to root-out injustice and inequity and emphasising the attainment of greater social justice must acknowledge that progress cannot be measured only by temperature or life expectancy targets.

Concepts of **human dignity** and **autonomy** and **responsibility** within society matter too. How do we differentiate between the responsibilities of individuals to look after themselves within an ever-more complex social structure, and the responsibilities of States to look after their citizens, provide security and a milieu in which to live a satisfying life?

Recognition of the centrality of social justice means that the reduction of inequality between and among peoples must be consistent with the achievement of fixed **social justice policy goals**. Societies worldwide both profess intolerance for the existence of injustices and inequalities, but by their very nature, provide the social and legal settings to enable and make legitimate their use.

Since the launch of the current consultative process in 2017, our framework recognises that the work of social justice permeates all of science and all of society. Social justice is core to these practices, not something added on to or separate from science.

Social justice must be considered as a core value of the scientific endeavour.

At the heart of these concepts is the lived reality of the contract between science and society, as practised at institutional and system levels. This social contract in part mirrors that between citizen and State, but it has unique features. The overarching social contract speaks to fluctuating, high-level power relationships, expectations and outcomes. The social contract with science is shaped by, and informs these processes, yet is often neglected.

Herein lies the challenge: *how do we make the practices and institutions of science more socially just?*

We begin with recognition that social justice is fundamental to the achievement of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs). The framework acknowledges the above-mentioned **five** values of social justice, emphasised by the United Nations, across the 17 SDGs.

- Fairness
- Equity
- Respect for diversity
- Access to social protection
- Application of human rights

We also take as a starting point the expectations articulated in the *2017 Brussels Declaration* of the scientific community, the policy-making community and the media, industry and interest groups. As part of our thinking, we are now busy updating all 20 principles via a *social justice lens*.

We believe that science is relevant to politics, policy and power because it is based on evidence and gets it right most of the time.

Whereas science portrays itself as perhaps *the* fundamental pillar of knowledge-based societies and the international community, the application of science is not without uncertainties. It can both benefit and pose risks to the human condition.

It is equally important to distinguish between *social justice in science* (e.g., education, research) and *science for social justice* in our broader society.

Basic questions abound: who gets to go to school and who teaches? Who gets degrees or PhDs? Where is research done? Who gets the grants to do it? Who are the researchers and where do they work? Why does data on tenure-track faculty members show such an incredible concentration of just a few types of people etc.?⁶ This small example underscores how deep social injustice is institutionalised within academia.

Any progress towards greater social justice needs to be tracked:

- What are the key few indicators we wish to highlight?
- Science inputs (e.g., money, people, ideas)?
- Science outputs (e.g., products, graduates, papers, etc.)?

Models of participatory research for greater social justice must also include best practices and case studies including affected citizen and vulnerable groups in research design, data collection, analysis and publication.

The impact of research for social justice is also a thorny question insofar as who gets to decide the spectrum of impacts of research on society? These impacts are mostly accounted for in terms of publications (science internal) or patents, start-ups, royalties (economic return).

However, a much larger web of impacts needs to be included: impact through working with social movements, citizens, civic institutions, policy programmes, government advice etc.

Social Justice Development Index: one of the continued working streams of our collective will be to seek out partners to help formalise a new UN-style Human Development Index indicator for research and education that includes ‘social justice impacts’.

To get there, we must **confront all forms of discrimination and oppression** as it relates to race, nationality, class, gender, sex and age. What is less acknowledged, is that we must *equally* confront all forms of discrimination and oppression as it relates to shared knowledge, wealth generation and access to public goods on our planet. Striving for both are two sides of the same social justice coin.

We reiterate our commitment to **participatory democracy**. Science professes to be a universal value, but on closer inspection it is often hard to access, and is an elitist club. All social justice transition policies must be informed by the voices, consent and needs of all people, especially vulnerable groups facing actual harms. We need more bottom-up evidence alongside welcome top-down certainty, we need civil society, but also the voices of our ‘uncivil’ society.

We call for greater **socialised ownership** of common goods above the cult of individualism in our homes, our places of work and our communities. The winner-takes-all social model goes against the guiding principle of Ubuntu, expressed variably in South Africa’s local languages as *Motho ke motho ka batho* or *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu* – a person is a person through others.

We call for people’s power expressed itself through greater **democratic control**. Public utilities, participatory planning and budgeting in our towns and cities, for example, are essential to the sound stewardship and collective management of life enabling, public goods. Dictatorships, military or family-run states, illiberal democracies or regional, multi-state institutions etc. promoting bureaucratic rules and trade above aid, are hardly conducive to strengthening social justice.

We call for action in addressing the **democratic deficit** felt by citizens worldwide and a new sense of scrutiny and repercussions when **state capture** in one country or region literally removes the bread from the mouth and the hospital beds from under its citizens.

We call for greater **international solidarity** within science and within our broader society.

⁶ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-03065-0>

*What we do mean by this is international solidarity in standing up and shouting up for a **just transition towards a better world for all.***

What we do mean by this is the continued emancipation of those citizens living under non-democratic laws.

What we do mean by this is acknowledging the negative effects of colonial, neo-colonial and imperial domination of the under-developed world.

What we do mean by this is assessing the many positive, but also negative roles of capitalism in fostering inequalities and injustice.

What we must avoid is ‘race-washing’ research teams or global conferences or colouring in maps with the odd inclusion of a non-usual-suspect grantee or speaker. Competition between groups to be seen to be first or to follow the leader in issuing a statement about the war in Ukraine, scientist refugees, LGBT+ rights etc. is all too common without real action to back it up. Furthermore, we can do better than enlightened self-interest, no matter how valid, beyond the business-as-usual model of collective lobbying for more funding, for more international projects and infrastructure, for more researcher mobility and visa rights etc.

CAN THE CONDITIONS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE EXIST:

- If the salient model is striving for ‘poor societies’ with a small cohort of extremely rich individuals?
- If the salient economic model is a continued ‘scramble for natural resources’ by taking more out in real terms than is going in to less developed nations and the implicit bribery and corruption this entails?
- If the ‘worship culture’ remains uncontested for all things growth, technology, finance and markets and continues to be pushed on countries characterised as easily influenced or having weak institutions?
- If we fail to rebalance back to an emancipatory relationship between humans rooted in respect for history, culture and indigenous knowledge?
- Without greater eco-centric living, recognising the sanctity of all life forms, our inter-connections and an ethics of respect and care for others, for animals and for our shared environment?
- Without the unleashing of the power of science as a solutions-focused enterprise that is both societally accountable and driven by the common good?
- Without a better alignment between the scale of global challenges and an agreement on what takes priority and what gets funded first?
- Without a better alignment between the capacities of the Global North and the Global South to produce scientific knowledge that is better tailored to resolve local, national, regional and global challenges?
- If global, multilateral scientific cooperation is the exception rather than the rule and grossly underfunded with extremely competitive national systems and national investments dominating?
- If this intense competition for limited resources undermines by its very nature the ability for researchers to come together and bring a unified focus and solutions-based approach to common challenges facing humanity?
- If public awareness of science, public trust in science, and public understanding of how science advisory systems work and how they might play a role, remain significantly weak?

- If the science and society compact cannot auto-correct and be held to account, if statements on the human right to science, the importance of open science, the value of citizen science, the need for investment as a % of GDP etc. remain declaratory and seldom enforced?

SOCIAL JUSTICE: 20 PRINCIPLES WE CONSIDERED

Section 1: The science-policy nexus

1. Science should empower global social justice.

Bringing science and an understanding of its complexities into the lives of citizens and promoting literacy and open communication must be taken seriously by the scientific community to create social justice.

2. Science can inform social justice policies.

Scientists need to insist that science as a public good should benefit all citizens and be better coordinated, funded and used to promote justice and social scientific responsibility.

3. Robust institutions are necessary to support science for social justice.

How funding and other resources are allocated to different areas of research can have a major impact on the ability of the scientific community to promote justice for all. An agreed pecking order is needed in terms of setting priorities. What matters for one might not matter for all.

4. The dialogue between science, policy and society is important and complex.

Citing 8 billion citizens and hundreds of diverging systems is not an excuse to accept mediocrity. Solutions and impacts need to be co-created and co-opted by communities, civil institutions, and governments.

Section 2: What we expect from the scientific community

5. The integrity of science is central.

Both scientific and societal progress require universal and rigorous research standards that guarantee the quality and reliability of scientific knowledge.

6. All scientific disciplines should inform interventions for social justice.

To fully mobilise science for social justice, the human and social sciences, as well as natural, health, and technical sciences, need to be better aligned to common goals. A G7 versus G20 power mindset exists between the sciences and this is damaging to group action prospects.

7. Scientists need to engage with citizens and stakeholder groups, including vulnerable groups and groups without institutional capacities.

Scientists must accept their responsibility to translate their scientific knowledge into forms that are understandable for society at large – especially where research aims to provide social progress and social justice. Publicly funded science is exactly that. The private sector generates 80% of all research yet coordination is too weak between both groups.

8. Scientists must listen and respond to the needs of citizens and inform interventions co-designed with citizens and policymakers.

Responding to the needs of citizens requires that citizens have a voice and that scientists empower stakeholders to take an active part in designing solutions and creating interventions that work. People power must be reflected in our R&D choices.

Section 3: What we expect from the policy community

9. Policymakers must respect a role for expertise.

Policymakers need to be held accountable and should accept public scrutiny. They should keep their door open and include academic advisers, civil society groups and NGOs in public dialogue, especially on issues of social justice.

10. Policies should improve social justice outcomes.

The ethical responsibility of improving human health, planetary health, and societal health clearly lies with elected policymakers. Politicians need to be made more aware of the short and long-term social justice impacts of their decisions. Examples of good social justice outcomes ought to be flagged and travel between jurisdictions more easily.

11. Policymakers must challenge science to deliver on public justice.

Providing access to science and utilising science to empower social groups and civil society should not only be looked upon as an aspiration, but should define explicit goals. This includes using scientific evidence as a guide to help define and achieve faster and better results for social justice programmes.

12. Policymakers should support institutions of independent scientific advice.

Science advisers are few and far between on the global stage. Who the experts are, how they are appointed and how they are held accountable remains a cause for concern. Where they do exist, they need space to provide a balanced account without fear of sanctions or ideological pressures.

13. Policymakers should acknowledge social justice outcome in and informed by science.

Governmental institutions are politically responsible for their initiatives: they must not appear to ‘hide behind’ expert advice. Policymakers have a special responsibility to listen to sound and independent advice, while at the same time not outsourcing policy decisions and social outcomes to experts.

Section 4: What we expect from the public, media and industry

14. The public plays a critical role in influencing policy and must have a clear voice science informing decisions affecting their communities.

Unless scientists and policymakers understand the principle ‘nothing for us, without us’, social outcomes will not be truly legitimate or balanced.

15. Industries should acknowledge the importance of science for social justice.

Too often industry is perceived as suffering from fatal conflicts of interest and its transformative power is dismissed. In fact, commercial conflicts of interest are fairly easy to deal with if they are properly declared. Industry is the cornerstone of progress and must be aware of this influence and responsibility.

16. Citizen groups have notable expertise that can inform social justice policies.

Whilst evidence is objective, its interpretation depends on many factors. Citizen groups have every right to have their voice heard as guardians of the common good and as legitimate actors in both science and policy. Excluding them only removes real truth from the decision-making equation.

17. Democracy depends upon hearing the voices of all citizens, including those marginalized and often without voice.

Many individuals and vulnerable groups do not have access to institutions or official channels of information and communication. Democracy depends not only on majority rule but on the empowerment and platform of marginalised minorities. This too easily gets forgotten.

Section 5: What needs to change: how scientific advice & greater focus on social justice need to be integrated more effectively

18. Scientific research should be incentivised and organised to address pertinent issues of social justice and deliver high-quality and transparent advice to policies for social justice.

As it is currently organised, the science system produces significant but narrowly-focused, fragmented and compartmentalised knowledge that is often disconnected from society's most immediate needs.

19. Policymakers must learn to include input from all disciplines and stakeholders when improving rights and social justice.

Decision-makers' mental models matter. If decision-makers think of citizens as incapable or panic-prone, they will downplay engagement and transparency. If decision-makers think of citizens as ignorant, they will downplay complexities.

20. Unleashing science to address and improve social justice issues will require active priority-setting and funding, plus the creation of missions for social justice with special attention on health, education and climate justice.

The scale of the challenges we face is far greater than the existing capacity of the research community to meet our societal needs. Research performing institutions and funding agencies must come together to prioritise a new set of science missions to support the attainment of greater social justice for all.