

## Global Development Futures at Northumbria University's Interdisciplinary Research Themes Conference

*Blog piece co-authored by Ana Moreno Merino and Adunola Bello\**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2023, Northumbria University organised its first [Interdisciplinary Research Themes \(IDRTs\) Conference](#), attended by over 200 participants. The IDRTs are communities of practice bringing together expertise from across the University to address pressing regional, societal and global challenges. There are currently seven IDRTs within Northumbria University, including Global Development Futures, which is of particular interest for staff and students at the Centre for Global Development.



*Global Development Futures stand at the IDRT Conference*

The Conference focused on celebrating IDRTs' successes to date, sharing work in progress, and opening up opportunities for further dialogue amongst academic staff, professional support staff and postgraduate researchers to develop new collaborations across disciplines and to find out more about the benefits of engaging with the different IDRTs. Members of the Centre for Global Development were present throughout the day, showcasing their work (see photo) and running two sessions as part of the Global Development Futures IDRT.

During the first session, Professor Matt Baillie Smith explained the aims of the [Global Development Futures IDRT](#), and how it focuses on enabling and promoting research that enhances understandings and supports livelihoods, economies and environments in the global South.

The Global Development Futures IDRT has three key research areas: **Community Action and Innovation**; **Mobilities and Displacement**; and **Climate Crises and Disasters**. Dr Reem Talhouk, Professor Steve Taylor and Dr Katie Oven introduced these themes, respectively, with a short presentation discussing methodological approaches, objectives, and strategic partnerships and stakeholder relationships. Cutting across the research areas are commitments to interdisciplinarity and co-production, innovative and participatory methodologies, and finding ways to face challenges and co-produce research in equitable ways.

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Professor Baillie Smith highlighted the centrality of ethical partnerships and collaborations across sectors in North and South contexts as he explained: *"It's not about the flashy technology being used, it's about doing things differently"*. He further emphasised the benefits of understanding and fostering equitable and participatory approaches to tackle key global development issues, as well as the importance of working *with* communities to produce knowledge.

The presentations were followed by smaller group discussions, where members of the audience were given the opportunity to come together and discuss their interests in one of the research areas of their choosing. This provided a unique opportunity for people from different disciplines to connect and share their views, as well as explore potential areas of collaboration.

During the second session of the Global Development Futures IDRT, participants were grouped to discuss three main questions: *'What are we already doing? What do we need to do to make it work better? And what can the IDRT do to support your research?'*. During the discussions, participants explored how the IDRT could promote opportunities for networking and improving existing activities, as well as further supporting equitable partnerships in research. There was a common motivation amongst attendees to foster participatory approaches to research and co-production of outputs. As explained by Dr Bianca Fadel when sharing feedback from group discussions: *"one highlight is the desire for fostering collaborations for academic writing across faculties, publishing together and building platforms to share ideas"*. Other insights for the Global Development Futures IDRT included sharing expertise on bidding and implementing research projects in the global South and facilitating spaces for peer-to-peer support and advice on the practical issues that academics and professional services face in research management.

Going forward, the Global Development Futures IDRT is expected to provide further avenues for people to get involved and collaborate with others through future events and social activities, such as to explore the meanings and uses of participatory methodologies. Ultimately, the IDRTs provide an exciting space for interdisciplinary networking and sharing of opportunities and communication at Northumbria University, enhancing cooperation across Faculties for a more equitable and sustainable research future.