

## **SRU leads on long Term Social Ecological Research (LTSER) as a seedbed for transformation.**

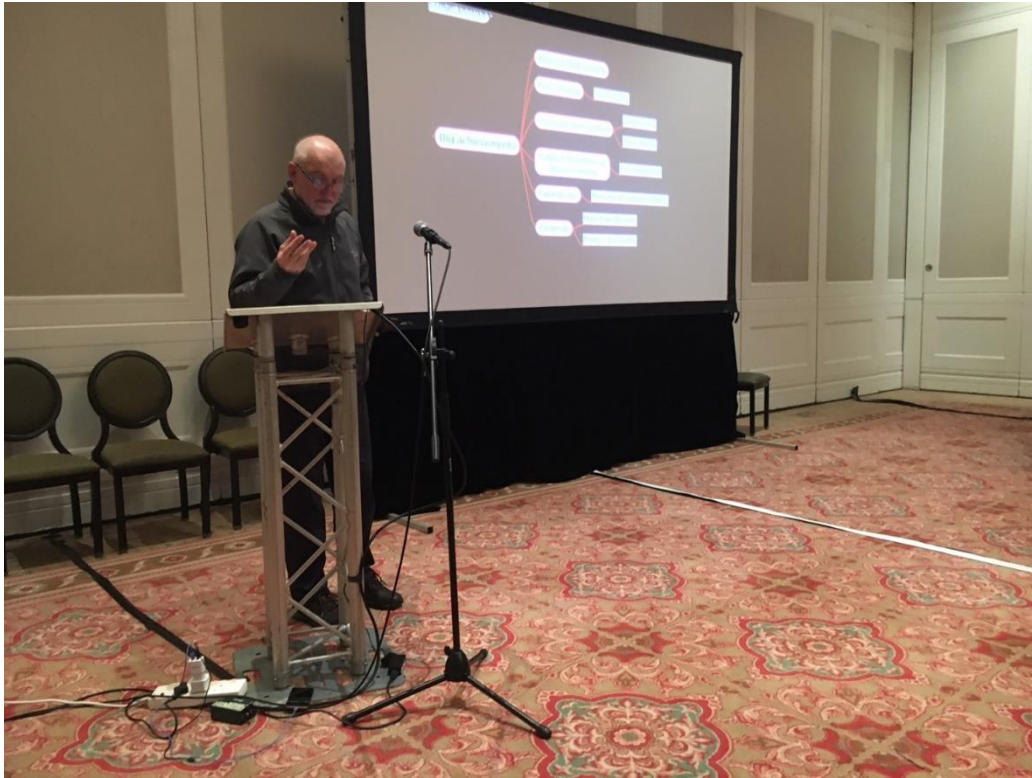
The Sustainability Research Unit led a session at the recent Future Earth Seedbeds of Transformation conference focused on the role of science with society and the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa. The conference took place in Port Elizabeth on the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2018. The session was attended by innovators from research, government, industry, and Non-Government Organisations predominantly from Africa and France.

Professor Herve Fritz the Director of The National Center for Scientific Research, Hwange Zone Atelier in Zimbabwe & SRU Adjunct Professor introduced the concept of long term social ecological systems and made the argument for a site in Africa. Dr. Chloe Guerbois, post-doctoral researcher at the SRU presented Hwange as an existing case study illustrating the benefits of such a site in Africa. Dr. Bianca Currie, the director of the SRU highlighted the need for collaboration and discussed the benefits of LTSER to researchers. The presentations set the scene for small group dialogues focus on identify the high-level achievements for good collaborative LTSER in Africa, the barriers, opportunities and leverage points for LTSER in Africa. Samantha Mc Culloch, Zanele Hartmann and Current Masunungure, all SRU PhD students helped facilitate and stimulate the small group dialogues. Christo Fabricius, a Global Lead Scientist with the World Wildlife Fund and Emeritus Professor with the SRU provided a succinct summary of the outcomes.

In discussing the high-level achievements for collaborative LTSER in Africa, participants painted a picture of an African coordinating body that can offer consistency and coordination of data collections. A body which has institutional buy in and facilitates collaboration at a regional and sub regional levels with strong links to policy makers, investment and policy change agents. The desire is for a platform for communication and knowledge sharing and the creation of a new generation of system thinkers.

Participants in the session identified several barriers to LTSER in Africa. These barriers included the lack of a common language, cultural and behavioural differences, short term mentality, research ethics, the ownership of data, and bureaucracy, to name a few. Opportunities were also identified which included connecting across traditional disciplinary silos to engage in transformational research and people centred development. Restoring social justice and empowering existing institutions were also identified. Leverage points included promoting a good understanding of local context, cooperation and trust, citizen science and community information centres, local capacity building element such as human resources and networking, innovation hub centred around engagement and learning.

The SRU session at the Future Earth conference produced an African perspective of the potential for LTSER in Africa. The outcomes of the session indicate that Africa together with French initiatives appear receptive to the prospect. Several participants expressed their interest in being involved and buying into the proposal for LTSER in Africa.



SRU Emirates Professor, Christo Fabricius providing a summary of the outcomes of the SRU session at the Future Earth, Seedbeds of Transformation conference on the 11 of May 2018.



Participants in the SRU session at the Future Earth, Seedbeds of Transformation Conference held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2018