The Open University

Centre for the Study of Global Development – CSGD

Centre for the Study of Global Development

Strategy 2026-2029

Transformative research and learning in pursuit of human wellbeing and social justice.

The CSGD is a Research Centre in the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS) at The Open University in the UK



INTRODUCTION

The **Centre for the Study of Global Development (CSGD)** is a research centre which aims to understand and address global development challenges, particularly among disadvantaged and marginalised populations.

Our focus is **global in nature**, acknowledging that these challenges exist across countries and contexts, and **interdisciplinary at heart**, recognising that they are best addressed through a combination of expertise, data and methods.

Our vision is to lead and support **transformative research and learning in pursuit of human wellbeing and social justice**. We aim for our work to make a genuine difference to people's lives, and lead to knowledge that matters to and can be actioned by partners and participants.

This strategy offers an overview of our main areas of expertise. It sets out our aspirations and priorities in support of our vision – and how we will know these are successful – and locates our core activities across our Open University inspired, interconnected values of **innovation, inclusivity and initiative**.

THE CSGD AT A GLANCE

OUR AREAS OF EXPERTISE
(What we know)

Our members work within and across **six areas of global development** to lead and support research projects and activities:

1. LEARNERS AND LEARNING
2. HEALTH AND WELLBEING
3. POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
4. LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY
5. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY
6. YOUTH AND TRANSITIONS

OUR RESEARCH ASPIRATIONS
(How we learn)

We collaborate with people and organisations across the world with whom we build sustained partnerships, and who share our belief that the best research is...

COLLABORATIVE

- IMPACTFUL AND IMAGINATIVE
- INTERDISCIPLINARY AND RELATIONAL
- CURIOUS AND CRITICAL
- OPEN AND REFLECTIVE

OUR CORE ACTIVITY AREAS
(What we do)

This research is inspired, enabled and supported by a range of activities that strengthen collaboration and maximise engagement and impact. These activities fall under and across three key areas...

1. INNOVATION FOR ETHICAL AND MEANINGFUL GROWTH
2. INCLUSIVITY FOR COLLABORATION AND BETTER LEARNING
3. INITIATIVE FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

OUR VISION
(What we want to achieve)

Our ultimate aim is to be known as the centre that does research that makes a genuine difference to people's lives, and that matters to partners and participants.

TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH AND LEARNING IN PURSUIT OF HUMAN WELLBEING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

OUR AREAS OF EXPERTISE

What we know:

CSGD members' research clusters around six areas of global development that underpin human wellbeing and social justice.

1	LEARNERS AND LEARNING	We research the learning that takes place in schools, informal and community settings and its impact on children, young people and educators.
2	HEALTH AND WELLBEING	We explore diversity and inequality in health and wellbeing from the cradle to the grave.
3	POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION	We aim to enhance our understanding of the experiences, drivers and dynamics of poverty, and how social protection or welfare policies can meaningfully engage with these to reduce poverty in a dignified and empowering manner.
4	LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY	We research how language and culture enable or hinder equality, justice and fairness in times of rapid social change worldwide.
5	PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY	We explore the ways in which accessible technologies can be harnessed to improve professional learning and practice for front-line workers in health and education, often in challenging circumstances.
6	YOUTH AND TRANSITIONS	We focus on how young people manage transitions toward adulthood in diverse and often challenging circumstances.

OUR RESEARCH ASPIRATIONS

How we learn:

Our research strives to be...

IMPACTFUL AND IMAGINATIVE

We aim to do research that makes a genuine difference to people's lives. We recognise that impact is not straightforward or linear, and we think creatively with colleagues, partners and participants about research processes, methods, data, artefacts, and language and communications to challenge and improve normative research design and impact pathways in global development.

Examples of this aspiration in practice: *our work with partners in South Africa to address adherence to HIV antiretroviral therapy, and in the UK on co-production of knowledge on poverty.*

We strive to connect, through research, those whose lives are most affected by a development challenge with those who have the most influence to address it, thereby leading to transformative and socially just change.

Examples of this aspiration in practice: *our work with partners in Ghana and Bangladesh which is inspiring diverse teams to develop sustainable, locally grounded support networks to improve children's educational access and learning.*

INTERDISCIPLINARY AND RELATIONAL

Human wellbeing and social justice are complex, and we believe that interdisciplinary research has the most potential for transformative impact at individual, policy and societal levels. Our members' research focuses on development challenges across all countries, in health, education, life-stage transitions, employment and professional learning.

Examples of this aspiration in practice: *our work on young mothers' wellbeing in Ghana, the use of technology to support maths education in Bangladesh, and living in new housing areas in the UK.*

Strong and ethical partnerships are key, and we recognise the expertise that all collaborators and participants contribute to our goal of research that matters. We value doctoral students and early career researchers as equal colleagues, and trust the wisdom shared by our research participants. We strive to invest in and nurture relationships and partnerships across all dimensions of our work.

Examples of this aspiration in practice: *our work supporting adolescents in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and the UK to showcase stories of their educational experiences at policy events, and our enhanced support for early career researchers transitioning from doctoral journeys to professional careers.*

OUR RESEARCH ASPIRATIONS

How we learn:

Our research strives to be...

CURIOUS AND CRITICAL

Global development, as a concept, as an industry, and as an area of research, is at a critical juncture. We need new language, frameworks and tools to talk about it, support it, understand it and improve it.

At the CSGD, we galvanise our critical thinking by adopting an 'inspiring question'. Rooted in our values, practices and partnerships this question is different every year and serves as a spark for conversation and reflection.



In 2026 our inspiring question considered the role of solidarity in global development.

OPEN AND REFLECTIVE

We recognise that research represents a moment in time, and we aim to do the best research we can, with the knowledge, language, resources and relationships at our disposal. As well as trying to effect change through our research, we recognise that our own understandings and positions as researchers may change, and we critically reflect on this in and across our research. We are committed to learning, we are prepared to be challenged, we are open to being wrong. We strive to be thoughtful and transparent about how we learn, as well as what we learn through our research.



Examples of this aspiration in practice: *our methodologically focused work on storytelling as an inclusive epistemology and approach, our work with children's art in the Lake Chad region, Ghana and India, and our regular work in progress events where members constructively critique proposals and projects, and spark ideas for new directions.*

OUR CORE ACTIVITY AREAS

What we do:

Our core activity areas are inspired by the OU's values of innovation, inclusivity and responsiveness.

INNOVATION FOR ETHICAL AND MEANINGFUL GROWTH

This area focuses on **conceptualising and catalysing new research, growing our income, increasing our reach and impact and expanding our work across the curriculum**. It does this in ways that align with our vision and aspirations.

Success in this area looks like...

- Strong submission of interdisciplinary research bids and success in securing research income from multiple sources.
- Strategic and meaningful integration of CSGD research into OU curriculum and promotion of this to external audiences.

INCLUSIVITY FOR COLLABORATION AND BETTER LEARNING

This area focuses on **embedding our vision and aspirations across our research collaborations and partnerships**. It takes account of our research environment, how we include and seek out different partners and perspectives, and how we positively impact research career development.

Success in this area looks like...

- Testimonials from students, colleagues and established and new partners in relation to the positive impact of having CSGD as a collaborator.
- CSGD being recognised as a beacon for global development research within the WELS Faculty, across the OU, and externally.

INITIATIVE FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

This area focuses on **critically positioning our work within the wider field of global development**. It considers how we can be leaders in global development research and debate, how we make research relevant for wider audiences, and how we contribute to the OU-wide global development community.

Success in this area looks like...

- CSGD colleagues, research and perspectives are sought, cited and discussed in both academic and non-academic spaces.
- Strong and sustained external attendance and engagement with CSGD events, activities and social media.

OUR PRIORITIES 2026 – 2027

