

Blog recap of panel discussion

## **From Research to Action Advice from Four Experts**

The [Career Elixir](#) peer mentoring group held a panel discussion to stir up the debate on how to bridge the gap between research and practice. The panel was held at the University of Zurich and featured insights from both academics and practitioners. The panelists offered their experience and advice to those researchers in the room eager to combine their research efforts with making an impact for sustainability. Four learning lessons from the panel were:

1. **Start combining research and action from the very start.** Professor Michael Stauffacher from the [Transdisciplinarity lab](#) at ETH encouraged everyone to start collaborating closely with practitioners early on in the research process. Starting early means jointly framing the problem and scope of the study with the research partner. By collaborating early on, researchers are then in a better position to deliver practically relevant information and to ensure that their findings are used for the greater good.
2. **Collaborate with unusual partners.** Rosy Mondarini from the [Citizen Science Center Zurich](#) showed the power of collaborating with citizens on sustainability projects. The Center has been created by ETH and UZH to support such projects by providing methodology and tools. For example, the center is developing a toolkit to enable collaborations that track progress to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. If you have ideas for projects, do not hesitate to contact the Citizen Science Center!
3. **Use science to understand social issues.** Christoph Kuhnhanss explained how conducting a series of randomized control trials helped the team at [Consciente](#) to improve education in El Salvador. By using scientific methods, the team was able to better understand the mechanisms behind low learning rates in rural El Salvador and to design interventions more carefully. Before Consciente's work, low learning rates were attributed to factors such as low teacher motivation and salary, low attendance, bad school equipment, etc. But after several interventions, the team now understands that one of the root causes of the problem is actually teachers who were not yet competent enough at the subject matter for which they were responsible. In light of this so-far neglected root cause, the team has designed a "teach-the-teachers" program hoping to effectively improve teachers' knowledge.
4. **Be entrepreneurial.** Dr. Adina Rom from the ETH for Development initiative and founder of Policy Analytics Switzerland showed that entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial (innovation within existing organizations) activities based on research can be a route to combining research with action on sustainability issues such as poverty reduction. She works with local NGOs and other organizations to co-create solutions based on evidence and experimental approaches. Despite significant progress in poverty reduction, she said that much work remains to be done and that we can all play a role.

The panelists also reminded everyone that collaborative work bridging research with action is not always easy. Many barriers may arise such as progress delays, lack of mutual understanding, and budget or resource constraints. But at the same time, the panel members remained optimistic. They all saw research as a promising way to address sustainability challenges and encouraged young scholars to be persistent, creative and brave!

The four panelists were:

- Christoph Kuhnhanss, Vice President, [Consciente Bern / El Salvador](#)
- Maria Rosa (Rosy) Mondardini, Managing Director, [Citizen Science Center Zürich](#)
- Adina Rom, Executive Director [ETH for Development](#) (ETH4D), Founder and CEO [Policy Analytics Switzerland](#)
- Michael Stauffacher, [TdLab](#), Department Environmental Systems Science, ETH Zürich