

# Building Stronger Communities:

## *Enhancing Sustainable Economic Development and Social Well-Being at Home and Abroad*

### Impact Statement

#### INVESTIGATORS

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#### SUMMARY

Communities across the globe face numerous challenges to becoming more sustainable, including poverty, lack of social services, absence of infrastructure, and pollution that disproportionately affect people of lower socio-economic status. The School of Environment and Natural Resources **conducts research to understand the causes and consequences** of these problems and develop teaching and outreach programs to foster **innovative solutions** for enhancing social well-being and resilience.



Joe Campbell (right) working with leaders in Marwa, Tanzania, on the community water project.

#### SITUATION

Despite having many pockets of vibrant economic development, this **growth has not been shared equally**, and Ohio consistently ranks among the bottom states in many measures of social and economic well-being. Columbus ranks 59th in well-being among 382 U.S. metropolitan areas and ranks in the bottom five in environmental health. More broadly, **billions of people in the developing world lack access to basic services and are vulnerable to global climate change**. A fundamental challenge for sustainable development is how to reconcile the tension between economic growth, inequality, and environmental degradation. Addressing this challenge requires an understanding of both the tradeoffs and potential complementarities between economic, social, and environmental sustainability. **Collaborative and participatory approaches** that build on community assets and directly address differences in social, economic and political power are required to promote forms of development that benefit all citizens.



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### RESPONSE

The School of Environment and Natural Resources brings scientific research and outreach expertise to understand the distribution of poverty and prosperity across communities and to help develop policies to promote the well-being of people and places. Our research often highlights the interactions between social and environmental health. Recent examples include studies of how **changes in consumption patterns can improve well-being** and limit environmental impacts, comparisons of the social and environmental impacts of traditional and **renewable forms of energy development**, and documentation of **community perceptions of “green”** approaches to storm water management. Our sustainable community development efforts include: a service-learning course on the intersection of food, energy, and water in Tanzania; **a capstone course** where Ohio State students work with Smart Columbus staff to solve sustainability planning and implementation problems; and an **internship program** with the Mayor’s Office of Environmental Stewardship.

### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:



### IMPACT

Our work has been disseminated through journal publications, reports, presentations, and has demonstrated the important role local governments play in promoting economic development, energy development, sustainability, and well-being. **Our efforts have resulted in new city-campus partnerships** and provided support for efforts to enhance community sustainability and resilience at home and abroad. For example, we tracked how a large public green infrastructure program has affected water quality and broader neighborhood dynamics and well-being in Columbus neighborhoods, and documented how a refugee farming project has impacted the economic and social well-being of immigrants and refugees in the city. In both cases, our research has allowed city managers to better accomplish their social and environmental goals. Supported by competitive external grants, our courses, capstones, and internship programs have provided numerous opportunities for **hands-on training and practical experience** for graduate and undergraduate students to learn the challenges and opportunities of community development. Last year, **12 students** worked to design a community-based water treatment project in Tanzania, **15 capstone projects** led to sustainability projects that are being implemented in local communities and on Ohio State’s campus, **and 23 students have collected data** on local assets to guide decision-making and planning in communities and community-based organizations.

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### CONTACT

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