

'Changing the rules of the game' on collaborative climate change research

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To do effective climate change research, scientists need to collaborate with local participants.

And a new U of T study argues that those participants should be rewarded for the valuable input they provide.

"If we value their knowledge and want them to engage in [climate change](#) research to the extent that's required, we need to compensate stakeholders more than we have," says Nicole Klenk, an assistant professor in U of T Scarborough's Department of Physical and Environmental Science.

"We need to have policies in place that protect stakeholders, either in terms of intellectual property rights or in terms of how the collaboration is set up to begin with."

Klenk, along with colleagues, Katie Meehan (University of Oregon), Sandra Lee Pinel (University of Idaho), Fabián Méndez Paz (Universidad del Valle), Pablo Torres-Lima (Metropolitan Autonomous University), and Daniel Kammen (UC Berkeley), categorized 27 climate change research networks around the world and listed the roles of stakeholders in producing knowledge on the effects of climate change on local communities.

The goal of the project is to help define how research involving collaboration and co-production on the part of local stakeholders - from

farmers, fisherman and hunters to those simply living in areas especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change - is being done and where.

"If we're asking people to gather data, make local vulnerability maps, interpret these maps and then figure out what the implications are for [climate change policy](#), then that work is research, and it deserves some form of compensation," says Klenk.

In addition to creating a database of research networks, the team also listed the various functions they perform, from distributing knowledge about climate change to users, to co-producing knowledge with stakeholders themselves. The database is interactive and open to comment, while NGOs and other groups will be able to enter their data online making it a robust tool for collaborative climate change research going forward, notes Klenk.

The purpose of the database is to document and compare climate change research networks across the globe, but also illustrate that many networks rely extensively on collaboration, often without there being firm policies in place to define stakeholder rights, roles and responsibilities.

"It's about changing the rules of the game," says Klenk, who is an expert on the politics of knowledge co-production as well as climate change adaptation and environmental governance.

"If academics are stepping outside the ivory tower and engaging stakeholders in doing research collaboratively, the rules that govern institutional science should be changed to reflect this role."

While there are perceived ethical issues around paying stakeholders for collaborating on research, current research ethics rules were developed from the perspective of treating stakeholders as participants for

extractive research rather than as researchers. Those rules need to be revisited in cases where stakeholders do research in collaboration with scientists.

"Scientists are paid to do research assuming they work under the rules of transparency and objectivity, so why assume that if we paid stakeholders to do research there would be bias? The research would still go through the same rigorous process and accountability mechanisms."

It also ensures collaboration is not being done only with [stakeholders](#) who have time to spare, creating a more inclusive environment for collaborative research. The research, which received funding from the Fulbright NEXUS Regional Scholars program, demonstrates that ethos.

"What's unique about the Fulbright NEXUS collaboration is our global and hemispheric approach," says Professor Katie Meehan "This work springs from a desire to transform global North-South knowledge production, that is a linear model in which the North delivers 'sound science' to the South, to a more meaningful, truly collaborative atmosphere of knowledge co-production."

"The work done by these Fulbright NEXUS Fellows highlights how powerful collaborative work across the Americas can be in identifying how climate change information can be gathered and how the public sector can support climate resilience and mitigation," says Dr. Eugenia Verdaguer, Chief of the Western Hemisphere Fulbright Branch of the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The study is available online and will be published in the upcoming edition of *Science*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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