

Sustainability research needs collaboration to work

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Credit: Birduu Asanuma

The rules of good sustainability research need to change and research become more collaborative to ensure complex sustainability challenges are overcome, a new study has found.

The 10-year analysis found [sustainability](#) researchers needed to engage with local communities in order to ensure their research is relevant to

decision makers.

Study co-author Dr Lorrae van Kerkhoff, from The Australian National University (ANU) Fenner School of Environment and Society, said researchers needed to regard themselves as collaborative learners rather than independent experts.

"Sustainability solutions don't come from the blue sky or ivory tower. They come from diverse people working together with a genuine will to keep pushing these complex challenges," Dr van Kerkhoff said.

The international collaborative study examined challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss and food security and alleviating poverty.

Dr van Kerkhoff said the Federal Government's current emphasis on linking technological innovation with industry partners needs to extend to public good issues like sustainability as well.

"Research has a vitally important role to play, but it is as a partner in the ongoing search for solutions rather than as isolated experts," she said.

Researchers also needed to accept that [sustainability issues](#) were deeply political, and understand that they cannot and should not escape the politics.

"This requires a change in mindset on the part of sustainability researchers, to accept the political nature of research and to value non-academic expertise," she said.

"It also requires a shift in our academic institutions, to support engaged models of research in training and funding, and to reward collaboration that extends beyond academia. Our institutions are struggling to keep up

with the shifting demands imposed by complex, urgent sustainability challenges."

The research has been published in the current edition of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

More information: William C. Clark et al. Crafting usable knowledge for sustainable development, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2016). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1601266113](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1601266113)

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