

Listening to the voices of those most affected by climate change

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Researchers at McGill University recently supported the hosting of a major international conference on climate change to create space for the under-represented voices—and knowledge—of those most affected.

The global conversation on climate has been dominated by Western scientists. While international meetings such as those in the COP series are important venues for the exchange of knowledge that can be put into action, greater equity is essential, the researchers believe.

At [Adaptation Futures 2023](#) held in Montreal in October 2023, they found that by using creative, arts-based, and interactive methods, knowledge often overlooked at major conferences was brought to the fore.

"Meaningful action on [climate change](#), especially in the regions most at risk, hinges on having these other voices in the conversation," said Blane Harvey, Associate Professor in the Department of Education and co-author on a recent [commentary](#) in *Nature Climate Change*.

"Unfortunately, major international conferences are not equitable spaces due to limited access to visas, funding and [language barriers](#) and the use of technical forms of dialogue. Many of the communities most impacted by climate change, such as Indigenous communities in Canada, have not had access to them, nor had their knowledge represented there."

To help under-represented communities contribute actively to important conversations at global climate conferences, the researchers said universities, governments and [international organizations](#) need to plan, fund and host conferences on climate change differently. They recommend investments be made to provide [financial support](#), assist with capacity-building and fund legal representation and translation.

Drawing on the expertise of learning specialists in faculties of education is also key, the researchers said. "Transforming international meetings requires creating spaces that accommodate diverse forms of knowledge and worldviews, fostering an environment of shared learning. Insights from the learning sciences can significantly enhance our understanding

of how to achieve this."

The researchers note that groups that have long dominated the scientific conversation on climate change will need to give up [space](#) in these forums for other voices to be heard.

More information: G. Cundill et al, Engaging diverse knowledge holders in adaptation research, *Nature Climate Change* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41558-024-02056-5](#)

Provided by McGill University

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