

The role of knowledge brokers in advancing climate action

This *CDKN Essentials* summarises how the **Climate and Development Knowledge Network** defines and understands climate knowledge brokering.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has called for systems-wide transitions, resilience building and an urgent all-of-society response to address the climate change crisis.¹ While research information and its tailoring into accessible knowledge products plays an important role in informing climate decision-making and action, strong knowledge and innovation brokering are also essential to navigate a complex environment that encompasses a range of sectors and stakeholders with different values and priorities, at multiple scales.

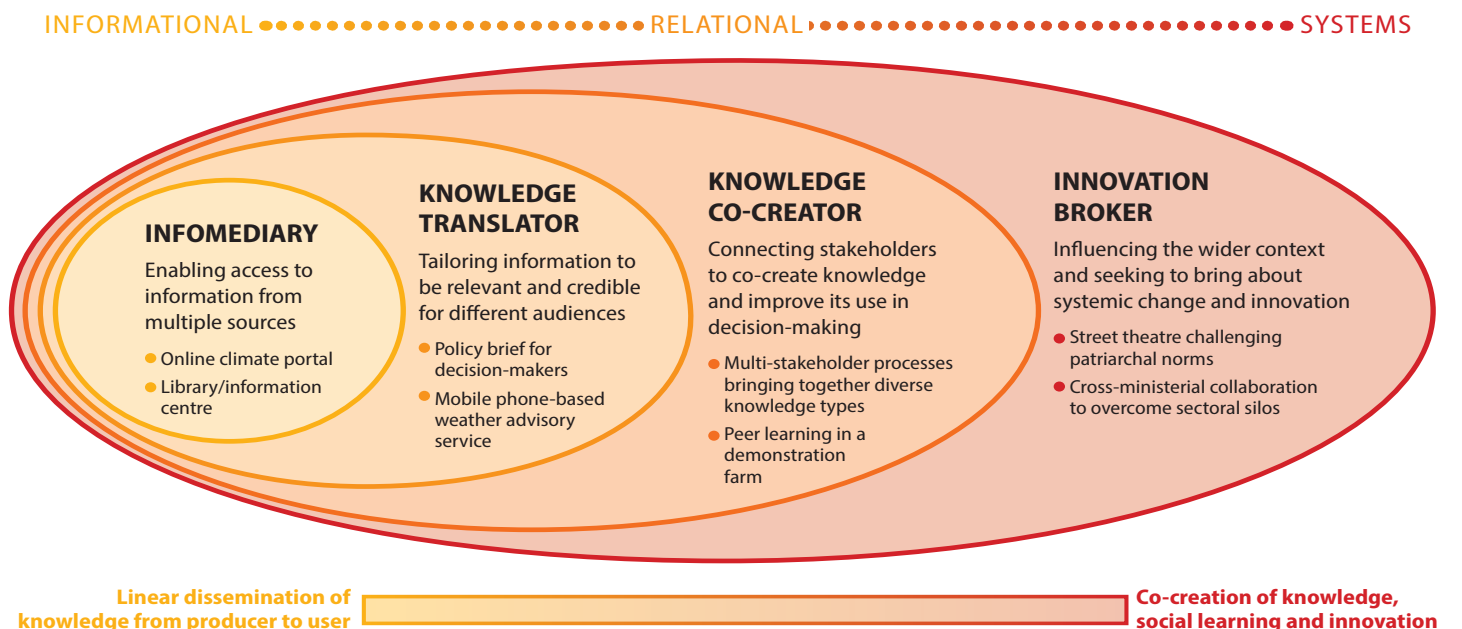
What is knowledge brokering?

Knowledge brokering is the process of moving knowledge into action, where knowledge brokers link producers and users of knowledge to facilitate the generation, dissemination and eventual use of that knowledge.² The range of activities they are involved in can be understood along a spectrum that goes from working with information flows to seeking to bring about systemic change (see Figure 1).³

- As **infomediaries**, they guide stakeholders to access, identify and filter information relevant to their needs by compiling and aggregating information.

- As **knowledge translators**, they synthesise, tailor and package information into accessible language and formats, so it is more relevant and credible for specific target audiences.⁴ They may also work with stakeholders to assist them to interpret the information and make the knowledge legitimate and actionable.
- As **knowledge co-creators**, they identify, engage and connect stakeholders to facilitate collaboration and the process of collectively making sense of, generating and facilitating the use of knowledge in decision-making.⁵ They may help stakeholders to understand each other's abilities and needs; and/or to support learning and create feedback loops between producers and users of knowledge, to identify and address further knowledge gaps.⁶ Knowledge co-creators also strengthen individual and institutional capacities, and maintain and mobilise social networks.
- As **innovation brokers**, they seek to bring about change at a systemic level, such as through re-organising social, economic or institutional practices and behaviours at different scales, including by addressing gaps tied to legislation, the market, or infrastructure.⁷ They may also seek to bridge divides and silos, such as those created by power imbalances, differing values, priorities, incentives or knowledge systems. In some cases they may also help to increase access to political support or capital through their connections and championing activities.

Figure 1: Spectrum of knowledge broker roles, adapted from Harvey et al. (2012)⁸ and Shaxson et al. (2012).⁹



Whose knowledge are we referring to?

A critical role of knowledge brokers is to bring different knowledge holders and knowledge types together. These could include western scientific knowledge generally provided by academic researchers, but also experiential, applied knowledge normally held by practitioners, technical officers or those working in the field. Furthermore, traditional, often

tacit knowledge that is owned by Indigenous communities or other local stakeholders is critical for sustainable and equitable action on the ground. Creating inclusive, safe spaces for these various knowledge holders to come together in a way that respects the value and validity of each, is essential for successful knowledge brokering.

What are climate knowledge brokers being called to do?

Although producing relevant, credible evidence is critical, it is usually insufficient on its own to foster shifts in policy and action – especially for a complex problem like climate change. Such evidence must be accompanied by activities that assist decision-makers to understand the value of the knowledge and how it can be applied to their context. Whilst knowledge brokers have often focused on making knowledge more relevant and accessible (the left-hand side of Figure 1), the scale and urgency of the climate crisis today calls for knowledge brokering practice to move towards innovation brokering (on the right side of the spectrum).¹⁰

The multifaceted nature of climate change requires action and an appreciation that relationships, power dynamics, trust and conflict management are as, if not more, important than access to accurate information. This means actively engaging with, and seeking to shift, the broader decision-making, governance, cultural and political context (at different scales) through a dynamic process in which knowledge is one of several elements at play.

Knowledge brokers need to be able to navigate challenges such as limited political will, competing interests, institutional fragmentation, bureaucracy and various types of asymmetries. In addition to overcoming barriers including limited awareness and capacities, an effective knowledge broker needs to be able to work at the interface of different knowledges, sectors, disciplines and fields, building relationships and trust across and among these. This may also mean challenging traditional perceptions of ‘producers’ and ‘users’ of knowledge, to facilitate mutual exchange and learning between actors with diverse values and knowledge types. Furthermore, knowledge brokers need to be sensitive to their position in the social hierarchy and any biases, such as those tied to their gender or socio-economic status, they may bring to the process.

In the context of the urgent climate crisis, climate knowledge brokers need to increasingly see their role as:

A facilitator of change seeking to strengthen relationships, networks and understanding on the climate challenge, based on diverse types of knowledge and experience, to ensure appropriate decisions are taken and implemented for a more climate-resilient world.

In the climate arena and more widely, there are many terms to describe activities within the ‘knowledge to action’ spectrum – what CDKN terms ‘knowledge brokering’.

On one side of the spectrum, these may include:

On the opposite side, knowledge brokering may be equated with these roles:¹¹



LESSONS

- Focus on **strengthening skills and capabilities of current and future knowledge brokers**, including by learning from and with them – particularly in the global South.
- Ensure that climate-related activities **encourage dialogue and action at multiple scales and between different kinds of knowledge- and stake-holders**. As actors begin to claim their agency and take action, accept that you will lose control of the outcome, but that it will be more sustainable and inclusive.
- Create awareness, especially among the climate change academic community, that **understanding and working with and within one’s governance and political context is as crucial** (if not more crucial) as developing and communicating ever-more refined disciplinary knowledge.
- Understand that **facilitating change requires time**, and the precise amount of time cannot be predicted at the start, so strictly bounded project timescales can undermine impact.
- Accept that there are no clear answers about how to do this ‘right’ and so we **need to be exploring, learning and sharing lessons** as we try.

Brokering knowledge and innovation in Namibia

In Namibia, the University of Namibia and their partners produced, packaged and disseminated critical knowledge about the impacts of a 1.5°C and higher temperature change on key economic sectors in the country. This highly relevant information was accompanied by a variety of activities seeking to influence decision-making and implementation of climate action, including:

- a long-term process of capacity strengthening of government officials (from national to local levels), as well as young people, journalists and the general public over the radio, to create awareness of fundamental concepts and potential responses;
- relationship and partnership building with critical allies (including various ministries and parliamentarians) who could advocate for certain issues and support implementation;
- participatory stakeholder engagement using interactive, solutions-oriented tools to produce a deeper understanding of risks, challenges and needed responses;
- the development or enhancement of platforms to bridge sectoral silos and increase collaboration between governance sectors and levels; and
- action at multiple levels of society, including with the communities on the frontlines of climate change impacts, to promote more resilient livelihoods.



Photo: Brigit Ottermann

Transformative scenario planning process in Omusati, Namibia

AUTHORS

Lucia Scodanibbio, Lisa McNamara and Michelle du Toit, SouthSouthNorth; and Georgina Cundill, International Development Research Centre

Endnotes

- 1 IPCC (2022). 'Summary for Policy-makers'. In: *Climate change 2022: Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability*. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Pörtner, H.O., Roberts, D.C., Tignor, M., Poloczanska, E.S., Mintenbeck, K., Alegría, A., Craig, M., Langsdorf, S., Löschke, S., Möller, V., Okem, A., Rama, B. (eds)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001. Retrieved from: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf
- 2 Bielak, A.T., Campbell, A., Pope, S., Schaefer, K. and Shaxson, L. (2008). 'From science communication to knowledge brokering: The shift from "science push" to "policy pull"'. 10.1007/978-1-4020-8598-7_12. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226710369_From_Science_Communication_to_Knowledge_Brokering_the_Shift_from_'Science_Push'_to_'Policy_Pull'
- 3 Shaxson, L., Bielak, A. T., Ahmed, I., Brien, D., Conant, B., Fisher, C., Gwyn, E. et al. (2012). 'Expanding our understanding of K*(KT, KE, KTT, KMB, KB, KM, etc.) A concept paper emerging from the K* Conference held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, April 2012.' Hamilton, ON: UNU-INWEH. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235930863_Expanding_our_understanding_of_K_KTKEKTKMbKBKM_etc_A_concept_paper_emerging_from_the_K_conference_held_in_Hamilton_Ontario_Canada
- 4 Cash, D. W., Clark, W. C., Alcock, A., Dickson, N. M. et al. (2003) 'Knowledge systems for sustainable development'. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 100: 8086–91. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/10732922_Knowledge_Systems_for_Sustainable_Development
- 5 Lomas, J. 2007. 'The in-between world of knowledge brokering'. *British Medical Journal*, 334 (7585): 129–132. Retrieved from: <https://www.bmj.com/content/334/7585/129>
- 6 Jones, L., Harvey, B., and Godfrey-Wood, R. (2016). 'The changing role of NGOs in supporting climate services'. *BRACED Resilience Intel Paper No. 4*. Retrieved from: <http://cdn-odi-production.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/10885.pdf>
- 7 Klerkx, L., Schut, M., Leeuwis, C. and Kilelu, C. (2012). 'Advances in knowledge brokering in the agricultural sector: Towards innovation system facilitation'. *IDS Bulletin* 43 (5): 53–60. doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2012.00363.x. Retrieved from: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/7519>
- 8 Harvey, B., Lewin, T., and Fisher, C. (2012). 'Is development research communication coming of age?'. *IDS Bulletin*, 43(5), 1–8. doi: 10.1111/j.1759-5436.2012.00356.x. Retrieved from: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/7526>
- 9 Shaxson et al. (2012). Op cit.
- 10 Scodanibbio, L., Cundill, G., McNamara, L. and du Toit, M. (2022). 'Effective climate knowledge brokering in a world of urgent transitions'. *Development in Practice*. Doi: 10.1080/09614524.2022.2159932.
- 11 Shaxson et al. (2012). Op cit.

SOUTH
SOUTH
NORTH


futuro
latinoamericano


Local Governments
for Sustainability
SOUTH ASIA

 IDRC · CRDI
Canada



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands