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Title:

Beyond preconceived positionalities in transdisciplinary research: 'Inhabitant interviewers' incubating agroecological transitions in the Indian Sundarbans Delta

Abstract

The conceptual domain of transdisciplinary (TD) research collaboration founded on the principles of interaction, communication, and mutuality, aims to foster sound knowledge generation, building mutual trust and learning opportunities, and shared ownership. ¹ In actuating so, it (un)knowingly augments a notion of positionality amongst actors while allocating roles and research commitments. Thus, specific actor groups share specific responsibilities and obligations in transformative-transdisciplinary research, classified along diverse sets of functions such as facilitation, intermediation, and moderation to coproduce knowledge and generate high-end impacts.

Emerging agroecological research especially within specific geo-cultural cartographies of the global South underscores transdisciplinary knowledge mobilization and tactics in fostering viable agroecological transitions by integrating place-based, situated adaptive practices (SAPs) with mainstream, scientific food systems strategies. This presentation will introduce a TD project [ENGAGE](#)-ing academia, NGOs, grassroots organizations, local government institutions, and communities in transboundary Sundarbans – the largest mangroves delta in the world, where the significance of community social resilience harnessing local agri-based livelihoods options is being investigated upon to discourage 'managed retreat' from this climate-vulnerable delta. ² It will specifically focus on a particular component of the project implemented in the remotest island village of Kumirmari, Indian Sundarbans, introducing 'inhabitant interviewers' in conducting ethnographic surveys to document drivers and dynamics, barriers and enablers of

¹ KPFE (Swiss Commission for Research Partnership with Developing Countries). (2018). *A guide for transboundary research partnership 11 principles*. SC NAT.

² While the conventional approach of climate change adaptation in the Sundarbans relies on top-down technical solutions and the managed relocation of communities, 'living lab' experimentations supported through this [SOR4D project](#), builds on existing SAPs with the aims of enhancing social resilience, reduce multiple risks and provide alternatives to outmigration.

agroecological provisions (inland fishing, integrated farming, etc.) in the region. This group, comprising four women and three men has been an unintended and unexpected consequence of the project process trajectory as part of the highly mobilized user groups or local communities willing to implement the survey tool and design, justifying the insiders' involvement in gathering first-hand, triangulated datasets from the neighbourhoods (*para* in Bengali) inhabited by them across generations.

The engagement of the inhabitant interviewers interrogates conventional understandings on 'intermediation' and 'positionality' in TD research, inverting the axial node of the pyramid of action from local facilitation (through intermediaries) to community mobilization and agency to the other way round. This presentation will demonstrate reflexive epistemologies from the field, identifying challenges and potential of this social experiment in facilitating agroecological transitions as the end goal.