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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Transformative Change Towards Sustainable Livelihoods - Too Big for Development-oriented Research?

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Abstract

The gap between expanding scientific knowledge and decreasing availability of natural resources is also an expression of rising global inequalities. This paradox, however, should not tempt researchers to promote transformative change as a solution without rethinking the epistemological foundation of science and technology development. Transformative change with the ability to bridge science and practice and eventually contribute to sustainable livelihoods is complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional. It confronts inequalities in access to food, shelter, wealth, and health. Therefore, transformative change is also about values, policies, politics, and power. To understand livelihood challenges in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and food, mono-disciplinary research will remain important. But such research is not applicable to address the intertwined psychological, cultural, economical and technical dimensions that underpin transformative change towards sustainable livelihoods. This has implications for researchers who engage in transformative change. Researchers must know the essence of development history rather than repeating it. Clarity of roles and labour sharing across disciplines and stakeholders are as important as sound methodologies and scientific rigor. Researchers must accept their limitations in prescribing and controlling the direction and pace of transformation change. Scientific “hit and run” operations are doomed to fail. Instead, transformative leaders must mindfully reconcile academic traditions and underlying paradigms. Doing so is easier said than done, but critical for bridging the pervasive gaps between what people know and what they do.

Keywords: Leadership, research, transformative change