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“Filling gaps and removing traps
for sustainable resource management”

Science-Policy Transfers and the Perpetual Tension between the Spheres of Activism and Academic Knowledge Production and Diffusion

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Abstract

Gradually the sanctified neutrality of scientific knowledge production, wrapped in the notions of progress, modernity and rationality, has come to a crux as the growing reach of business interests, fake news and algorithmic calculations bend the idea of “objective” science to fit their ends. This growing tension is stronger still in the murky waters that often join the spheres of activism and academic knowledge production and diffusion. On one hand, social activism still often upholds the ideals of solid, theoretically and methodologically sound scientific research which is used as a means of strengthening the discursive and political resonance of proposals or demands made by diverse social groups. On the other hand, in the ever-more interconnected world of social webs and digital platforms that feed off exposure, science-policy transfer often occurs due more to the degree of diffusion rather than the quality of the research. How to navigate the often conflicting demands of producing sound science with the need to influence public policy debates with engaging ideas is an increasingly challenging task, especially for young budding scientists who are intrigued with the idea of working as both academics and activists. In the field of modern agriculture, these issues are also prevalent, especially if we examine the scientific and discursive development of popular concepts such as the governance of agricultural value (or supply) chains and how one should understand and measure the concept of sustainable certification systems in agriculture. Daniel Hawkins will offer some reflections into how these debates and tensions interfold from within the themes of social-labour standards in the Colombian coffee and palm oil supply chains.

Keywords: Social labour, value chain