

## Diversity of societal actors

In TDR, working with diverse actors and their specific ways of knowing, doing, and being is a key element for gaining a comprehensive understanding of complex problems, discussing desirable futures, and creating effective pathways toward solutions. Disciplinary knowledge and the knowledge and experience of societal actors are well-recognized sources of diversity in transdisciplinary research. It is now well-understood that each discipline and actor brings only partial knowledge about any problem. Equally important, each discipline and societal actor favors different questions when developing new research, and is able to work toward and implement solutions depending on their role in the system, their know-how, and their respective power.

A wide range of societal-actor groups and disciplines may be considered for collaboration in TDR, e.g., local communities, government agencies, NGOs, industry, researchers from social and natural sciences, humanities and arts, and Indigenous knowledge holders. There is also diversity that cuts across disciplines and societal actors— different scientific disciplines use different language, concepts, theories, methods, and standards of evidence. It is therefore key to acknowledge how those involved in research understand the world and what they consider valid ways of knowledge production. Similarly, government entities and NGOs have different missions, responsibilities, authorities, capacities, resources, etc. In addition to these differences, other well-recognized sources of cross-cutting diversity include gender identity, age, class, race, and ability.

For each TDR project, a thorough actor and context analysis sets the basis to find out with whom to collaborate. This depends on the specific overarching aim and the context of the project: Who has an interest, who has power to make decisions, who is affected – economic power, social capital, knowledge, etc.? What are the needs, wishes, and fears of the different actors, and how are their relations structured? Where are power differences, where do we have conflict lines?

Working with principles of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) is important in all contexts, but especially when different knowledge systems are involved, e.g., Indigenous and academic ways of producing knowledge. This also includes decolonizing TD science by mitigating exclusion and marginalization of actors and knowledge systems previously viewed as outside of science. Decolonizing science involves recognizing and challenging the influence of colonial and neoliberal ideologies on research practices, knowledge systems, and power dynamics. In practice, this informs the questions of whom to involve, how to design and facilitate interaction, and how to include and carefully bridge different knowledges.

Engaging a diverse range of actors with potentially contested or conflicting interest and knowledges requires time, skills, and money. Therefore, careful considerations of the feasibility within a specific project and context are to be balanced with the aim to include all relevant actors.

## Further reading:

- Bammer, Gabriele. 2022. [Understanding diversity primer](#). Integration and Implementation Insights.
- Boisselle, Laila N. 2016. [Decolonizing Science and Science Education in a Postcolonial Space \(Trinidad, a Developing Caribbean Nation, Illustrates\)](#). *SAGE Open* 6 (1): 215824401663525.
- Chu, Ta-Wei. 2023. [Explaining Challenges That Beset Transdisciplinary Projects in the Global South: The Shift from Methodological Perspectives to a Political-Economic Dynamic Analysis](#). *World Futures* 79 (7–8): 805–36.
- 2022. [Decolonizing science toolkit](#). *Nature*.