



Stakeholder participation in hydrology: what you want may not be what you get

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In September 2008 rapid and severe flooding was experienced in the Cheviots on the border between England and Scotland. The floods had serious impacts on the rural communities in the area in socio-economic and health terms as well as on the natural environment. There was considerable anger within communities about the ways that some of the local agencies responded to the emergency. As a result Newcastle University was commissioned to carry out a rapid study with the object of capturing the immediate thoughts and feelings of those affected by flooding. Climate change predictions suggest that this region will be subject to increasing numbers of storm events in the future and the second objective was to encourage participation of local communities, to learn from the impacts of the floods, and to help support the development of adaptation and mitigation strategies. The commissioning agency was Cheviot Futures and the study was funded by the Environment Agency, Natural England and the North East Climate Change Partnership. The work was carried out by natural and social scientists working together.

In this paper we focus on the relationships between the institutional stakeholders and the lay stakeholders. We reflect on the requirements and preferences of the institutional stakeholders commissioning the work; the forms of evidence required, the nature of the immediate response to flooding and the longer term plans for engineering the river. In a number of these areas there were significant differences in the views of the lay stakeholders, their priorities, and the knowledges that they brought to the problems of flooding. We identify significant lessons learned from this experience with particular respect to the framing of flooding, what counts as evidence and the communication of evidence.

We conclude with a brief summary of the preliminary data collected from a follow on study in the Tweed catchment. In this project we use a Q methodology to capture the breadth of understandings and meaning of flooding to a wide group of stakeholders, both institutional and lay members of the community. In this way we hope to identify ways of improving communication and understanding between those working on natural flood management in the Tweed catchment.