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Using narratives to motivate climate science

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This paper presents the lessons learnt by the climate scientists within an interdisciplinary research project called 'TRACKS': Transforming climate knowledge with and for society. The project uses the climate narratives of local people in northeast Bangladesh as a basis for mobilizing high quality climate knowledge for adaptation. To ensure this high quality climate information, the project demands an interdisciplinary approach. This project is therefore a broad, but tight collaboration between climate science and perspectives from social science and the humanities. For the climate scientists involved, the aim was to do research that would provide local people with climate information that would hopefully aid adaptation. The climate research design had to consider the perceptions of the local people in northeast Bangladesh, and what aspects of the local climate that they thought were important. For the climate scientists to gain an appropriate understanding, they were fully integrated into the whole narrative research process.

The different disciplines cooperate fully in all aspects of the TRACKS project. The climate scientists were involved in planning the narrative interview survey about weather and how it impacts the lives of local people in northeast Bangladesh. The climate scientists participated in a workshop with social science colleagues from Bangladesh and Norway, to design the research questions, the interview framework, and the data management plan. The climate scientists then travelled to Bangladesh with social scientist colleagues to observe and discuss ten pilot interviews with local people, and to take part in two 'stakeholder-mapping' workshops. On the basis of these interviews and workshops, the climate scientists arranged an interdisciplinary workshop where all the project's researchers designed the climate science research questions together. The climate research questions have therefore been built around a first-hand interdisciplinary experience of the situation in northeast Bangladesh. At no point did we decide on the pertinent climatic issues independently of the local people. The success of this interdisciplinary approach so far has depended on time, patience, and humility.

In this presentation, we present the narrative approach we have initiated in TRACKS. We will look at some of local climate narratives from the full-scale survey, as well as the challenges and the research questions that resulted from the process. We will also discuss future perspectives of how we re-integrate the new climate science into the dialogue with the local people.