

URGE

Unlearning Racism in Geoscience



URGE Findings and Policies for Working with Communities of Colour for Cardiff University School of Earth and Environmental Sciences

The below was found by the Cardiff University URGE pod on Policies for Working with Communities of Colour, past experiences of such work, and plans for improved processes and/or needed resources.

School level guidance:

The school's director of fieldwork (Marc-Alban Millet) has said that there is currently no formal guidance in place for working with communities of colour. The director of fieldwork raises potential issues that are seen in the field risk assessment and asks for clarification on how these will be handled, generally this is from a safety perspective. An example given is ensuring authorisation to travel into aboriginal sites in Australia and ensuring no destruction/removal of rock from these sites. This however only happens if he were to notice a potential issue on a risk assessment.

Our school's travel authorisation form does currently include a section to record potential political/cultural risk and mitigation strategies. This is thought to be quite uncommon amongst Earth science departments and is a good first step towards recognising the intricacies of working with people from different cultures. The risk is self-assessed and sent directly to HoS for approval so we note that there is potential for risks to be under-reported. Also note that no equivalent form exists for working in the UK.

Marc-Alban raised the issue of cultural considerations during fieldwork teaching. This has been particularly tricky this year due to fieldwork being re-scheduled and coinciding with the month of Ramadan. This is currently dealt with on an individual basis through questionnaires sent to students. Recognising field teaching related issues is currently down to the organisers and although they are currently mindful of locations (e.g. Avoiding countries with a poor LGBTQ+ record) there is no formal process for identifying risks and mitigation strategies.



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Case studies from staff/students

The case studies generally reported positive experiences both with local communities and collaborators. However, it was consistent that these successful relationships were built through individual efforts, with minimal guidance from the University in nearly all cases.

Some respondents were in favour of fieldwork ethical assessments and/or training, with one reporting that they already carried this out via other institutions, and one expressing concerns about the way it could be carried out to ensure it was useful.

We continue to work beyond this week's URGE deliverable to extend this collection of case studies.

Case Study 1

Research area	South Africa
Interactions	Working with local geologists and students. Delivery of a short course on prospect mapping to southern African students and junior academics.
Interactions with local communities	Almost every exploration and mining project has very extensive consultation processes with the local communities, as well as commitment to education, community development, employment, royalties, environmental assessments.
Building positive relationships?	Sometimes this works well, but often there are nevertheless conflicts as is to be expected when the stakes are high (ie lots of money involved). The local communities are heterogenous, with different priorities etc, and so its difficult to make everybody happy. Most of this work is done by the mining and exploration companies, my role in these projects is to devise exploration guidelines, ie the technical bits.
Academic collaborations/distribution of work	In the process, many academic collaborations were established.

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Data management	Data ownership is defined by the agreements with the companies, usually they allow publication as long as they can see the interpretations first.
Guidance received	In the early stages of my career there was very little of that and I'm sure I made many mistakes. I learnt through those errors.
Ethical assessments/training	No doubt it would be useful if field work in respective areas would be preceded by an ethics assessment and some training.

Case Study 2

Research area	Horn of Africa
Interactions	Working with local agro-pastoralist communities, regional climate service organisations.
Interactions with local communities	Local communities are central to our project which is built around 'last mile' perspectives. We are working directly with rural agro-pastoralist communities to understand the challenges they face and how they make climate-related decisions. This information will feed into our modeling of future climate to support policy frameworks, but it will also contribute to the co-development of climate services (e.g., mobile phone app delivering seasonal forecast info, radio programming about climate change adaptation) that is targeted toward these communities. There are always barriers, but we are lucky to be working with a local charity, ActionAid, who has a strong presence in our target villages. This means we don't have to overcome the trust barrier to begin our research.
Building positive relationships?	Yes, but we are only beginning.
Academic collaborations/distribution of work	Yes, we have several academic partners in Europe and Africa and the contributions of each partner were discussed before we settled on a mutually agreed budget. An African climate services organization is actually the largest beneficiary.
Data management	We have to follow very strict standards based on EU protocols. We have written a lengthy data management plan.
Guidance received	Our local university and climate services organization partners help us navigate this. They have ample experience and prior interaction with the target communities.

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Ethical assessments/training	Assessments-Yes, we have already done this (via Bristol, UEA, and Action Aid) Training- Yes, but again, this is something the relevant parties already do as standard protocol.
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Case Study 3

Research area	Japan
Interactions	Local collaborators
Interactions with local communities	The main drive was from the Japanese side so from the local academics at the outset. Funding has come from both them and us.
Building positive relationships?	I consider my local contacts good friends and we are generally in touch developing projects and ideas
Academic collaborations/distribution of work	We have close collaborations, and leadership comes from both directions. Data collection is collaborative, further analyses occur both in the UK and Japan, and papers are led by both Japanese and UK team members.
Data management	A bit ad-hoc, in that data are shared as and when it's needed by anyone
Guidance received	None from the university. I had lived in Hong Kong for a couple of years, so I had some familiarity with east Asian cultures. In addition to that background, wherever I've worked, guidance from local contacts is invaluable (and particularly so for graduate students and post-docs joining projects) in understanding and knowing what local norms and habits are.
Ethical assessments/training	Lack of guidance didn't lead to issues– however, I could see how that may happen if I didn't have prior exposure to the regional cultures. In retrospect, I should probably have provided further guidance in advance to graduate students and post-docs, but I think they have also been fine with the guidance from both me and, more importantly, the local contacts. Supportive of fieldwork ethics training and assessments.

Case Study 4

Research area	Malawi
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Interactions	Local collaborators
Interactions with local communities	<p>: My interest in Malawi started from a discussion with a local survey scientists at a regional African seismicity meeting, so the ideas behind the projects there were initiated by the local (at national level) community. My first funded work was a DTP – the DTP was written with little local input, the barriers to getting input at this stage was knowing the right people (my survey contact had moved on) to ask, and not being able to promise anything concrete because proposals are not necessarily funded. Having the DTP funded led to setting up a collaboration, through writing a white paper, getting survey permissions for the work, and having a survey geologist attached to the project. For all the work we have done since, we are always accompanied by a survey geologist/geophysicist. For subsequent funding bids, there has been considerable input from local institutions, including universities as well as the survey and government departments. We now have a broad and close relationship with many local stakeholders – but, it has taken 5+ years to get there, build the contacts and build the trust.</p>
Building positive relationships?	<p>Absolutely – particularly with the Malawi survey and some of the local universities. Our key collaborators have now been to the UK to visit and work with us (both at Cardiff and with our UK partners in Bristol), and we develop projects together. During COVID-19 times, we have unfortunately not been able to visit, but we have supported our collaborators remotely and they have kept the project going.</p>
Academic collaborations/distribution of work	<p>Yes, both with the geological survey and Chancellors College. We have several collaborative papers. So far, these do end up being led from the UK, typically by post-docs or PhD students that need to develop and publish papers. The local input has been from discussion and assistance in the field, some help with data processing, and a lot of assistance with ensuring local norms and history (including geographical names and appropriate references to past work) are followed. Notably one collaborative paper (a database of Malawi fault zones) has a Malawi second author (our most active survey collaborator) who came to the UK to help put that together after working together a lot in Malawi. The barrier to first-authorship is largely time and resources to be able to take the lead on writing and collating information.</p>
Data management	<p>Shared, all data are provided to the Malawi partners (held by the survey), and we ensure all publications are open access with data accessible. Data are shared as soon as they have been collected, typically while still in the field (including data downloaded from GPS campaigns).</p>
Guidance received	<p>None from the university. I have lived in South Africa for 9 years before coming to the UK, and worked all over southern Africa, so I had the</p>

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experience and confidence to work there. In addition to that background, wherever I've worked, guidance from local contacts is invaluable (and particularly so for graduate students and post-docs joining projects) in understanding and knowing what local norms and habits are.

**Ethical assessments/
training**

As with case study 3

Case Study 5

Research area

Tanzania

Interactions

Local collaborators and communities

**Interactions with
local
communities**

Our research was always approved through the government research agency and with a letter of support from our collaborating organizations. We always collaborated with Tanzanian scientists who were able to interpret for us and advise on interactions with local communities. We met with local District Commissioners before working in any area. We met with local village representatives as well, to introduce ourselves and describe our research before starting in an area and gaining their formal assent. We paid local landowners for access. We hired many local tradespeople and services wherever possible (a lot of carpentry, for example), also as cooks, guides, labourers, security guards, to help put money into the local communities which were often very poor. We donated much kit to local communities when finishing fieldwork (e.g. tables, chairs, tents, buckets, canvases, gas lamps, and many other items) for which they were very grateful.

**Building
positive
relationships?**

Yes, we made many good friends

**Academic
collaborations/
distribution of
work**

Yes lots. The fieldwork was joint with Tanzanian scientists and technicians and we published with them after every field season and remain in close contact.

**Data
management**

Via an agreement with the Tanzanian collaborators. All our data was shared including field notebooks. More recently we have been trying to negotiate a formal Memorandum of Understanding but the red tape is unbelievable and our research has been held up for over two years. Previously it was much better as a simple written letter of support and a well-developed professional relationship.

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Guidance received

To be honest I don't think there was any for me as Principle Investigator. I built a relationship from small beginnings over many years. These excellent local contacts in Tanzania helped advise on interactions with rural communities. A lot of it is common sense and courtesy plus a little reading about the local cultural and religious sensitivities, for instance in female dress. In an ex-British Empire country it is very important to treat colleagues as equals and not as the ex colonial power. We made friends very easily at all levels of the hierarchy in Tanzania. I myself briefed the field teams on appropriate behaviour and respect and we never had any problems.

Ethical assessments/training

Fieldwork ethical assessments- I am open minded. I am not sure if it would have been of practical benefit, and principal investigators have a lot of other organizing to do to get a project off the ground. It could just end up being another tick box form to file, stating the obvious, before you can go ahead and behave sensibly and ethically as you would have done anyway.

Fieldwork ethics training- First, we can encounter many different cultures and it would certainly be good to get a briefing on a particular culture and its sensitivities. Specific information on expected behaviour could therefore be very useful, but in fact Lonely Planet guides and similar give such practical guidance, which is what I tend to use when going somewhere new (I have also worked in Indonesia, Armenia, New Zealand, Trinidad, Mozambique, various European countries, etc.) I am not aware that anyone in perhaps 8 or 10 field expeditions I organized in Tanzania or anywhere else behaved unethically or insensitively. Quite the opposite in fact, I believe the cultural as well as scientific exchange was very positive for both sides. So the answer is, only if it was very good and useful, and not a tick box exercise.

Case Study 6

Research area Southern/Eastern Africa

Interactions with local communities 1) Contract with the World Bank to redesign the geoscience curriculum at the Chancellor College of the University of Malawi, to be more focussed on mining and mineral exploration. Multiple

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stakeholders including the Malawi Chamber of Mines and Energy, higher education institutes, Ministry of Education. A persistent issue had been geologists making the first interaction with local communities at field sites. Geo-ethics training was introduced.

- 2) Together with a former student, co-led a project for investigating industrial mineral in Zimbabwe.
- 3) Work in Malawi with another Cardiff academic on seismic resilience.

Building positive relationships?

- 1) Yes – Collaborators have made visits to Cardiff. A conference with stakeholders was organised.
- 2) Yes – Delivered a short course on tectonics to students and people who worked in the industry. Had students visiting Cardiff, however COVID prevented the full extent of the collaboration from taking place (would have involved them using Cardiff analytical equipment).
Training students in Southern African countries in GIS
- 3) Yes - Workshop to present findings to academics and then to the civic community.

Academic collaborations/distribution of work

Maintained strong academic collaborations to date.

Data management

Shared amongst collaborators.

Guidance received

Partnering with academics from the region. They provide translation, local knowledge and expertise.

Ethical assessments/training

Strongly agree that these should be introduced. Learning pleasantries in local language is good first step to forming a positive relationship – useful phrases are included as part of student field course handbooks.

Other notes:

The respondent notes that during time in Zimbabwe, parachute science was a problem and constant worry. The Zimbabwean research council implemented a mitigation policy which would require foreign research projects to pay a non-trivial amount of money to conduct research and would also allow some level of oversight.

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