



## Interview with James Smith, Strategic Consultant and Community Facilitator for REEEP about the launch of the Climate Knowledge Brokers Manifesto

REEEP is an international non-profit organization that advances markets for clean energy in developing countries)

### ***Who are Climate Knowledge Brokers?***

I think that we are all knowledge brokers - not necessarily climate knowledge brokers. It is a natural human thing to do. We have inputs of information and we then accept them or not. If we do then they become part of our knowledge. And then we communicate with other people so we choose to let out knowledge as information. We are all filtering, translating or synthesising all the time. You become a 'climate knowledge broker' when the information you are communicating is related to the climate. We are not just dealing with hard climate science - it's about climate related and climate relevant information. We have organisations as part of our [network](#) that deal with the full gamut.

We are all going to become climate knowledge brokers to a certain extent because more and more of us, and probably everyone, is going to have to pay attention to the changing climate in the way that they make their decisions. It used to just be about environmentalists, activists, climate scientists and policymakers, but that is no longer the case. We though are chiefly concerned with those who take this on as part of their professional role. That is people or organisations who specifically act as synthesisers, filters, translators, or interfaces to ensure that information reaches the people who need it in order to help them make the decisions they need to make.

### ***Is there enough activity of this kind happening?***

There is not enough activity happening because the important point about doing the job well is that you have to tailor the services that you are providing to a particular user case, and there are many different user cases. We are all taking decisions that affect the climate, so the action needs to be everywhere.

### **You have just produced a Manifesto – what is it asking for?**

We are asking for recognition of the importance of the role of climate knowledge brokers. They are not necessarily called that but they exist in all sorts of different places. It is a job that needs to be done well if we are to build a climate resilient future. We need to make sure that people have the best available knowledge to take the positions that they are taking. We also want knowledge brokers to collaborate. Acting in silos is not the way for this to work. We see a CKB community of practice helping people work together and share services. So we are asking for climate knowledge

brokers who are not already engaged to engage with us and collaborate. We are also asking funders who currently fund this kind of activity to go beyond seeing one-off activities.

***This is very similar to 'sharing economy' principles***

My organisation [REEEP](#) has been promoting open data in the clean energy field. Saring data is the way to go. The Internet was originally envisaged not as a set of disparate things, but as a single huge repository. Tim Berners Lee has been calling for open data for 10 years or more. Organisations that have data should make it freely available, since makes it easier for different analyses to be done on that data. You never know what use someone else might make. If you have a global concern like climate, this is a perfect example of where we should be pooling knowledge rather than guarding it for narrow financial or political gain.

***How do you manage the quality and robustness of the information?***

You rarely get a single knowledge broker who is the only person feeding into the person making decisions. Knowledge brokers act through multiple chains and bring together information from disparate sources and synthesise. I am not overly concerned about the danger of specific interpretations being the only input. But I am concerned about deliberate movements within society of disinformation.

***What do you see as the relationship between expert and trusted knowledge, and democratic decision-making?***

There's a good example from clean energy. Professor David McKay produced a book a few years ago [Sustainable Energy without the Hot Air](#). He says that energy systems are primarily about facts and not emotions "arithmetic not adjectives". But he doesn't give one the best energy system, rather a set of different scenarios which depend on different variations of technology, energy efficiency levels. And then you can make political decisions as to which you want to go for.

***You are talking about the need for a much more deliberative democracy.***

It is the only sensible way to do it. Platforms are enabling a richer conversation. We are in a better position than we have ever been to access and use better information. We had someone from the European Space Agency at a recent CKB workshop. He was talking about how they have a current satellite which tracks climatic conditions down to 10m resolution. The amount of information, and the possibilities for improving our understanding, are increasing rapidly. The possibility to share is accelerating but people could get overwhelmed. Where do you start? That is the role for CKBs. They help people make sense of it all for the user's own situation.

***The examples in the Manifesto seem to be more about climate adaptation and not mitigation.***

There are examples in the Manifesto but it is very difficult and it will take a long time to get away from the pure politics. But we often don't know all that is happening behind the scenes. This is another case of access to knowledge. Knowing how governments make decisions, and on what basis is climate relevant knowledge.

***Sustainable development cuts across so many things so how far does climate relevant knowledge go?***

Things like jobs and health are why this matters and why we care about this stuff. There shouldn't be any boundaries. The decisions are political, but the information and knowledge isn't. The problem is that much knowledge and decision-making is in silos. If you are a minister, you have some advisors or civil servants who do some research but we are talking about incredibly complex systems. The decisions get made on the best information people are able to find in the time available. What we are trying to do is close the gap between that information and the best information that is out there.

***How might you see democracy needing to adapt in order to better enable both mitigation and adaptation?***

We think collaboration is the answer. There is much money spent on climate-related information by many organisations. Some are private sector and they are learning the value of open data and collaborative business models. Within public funded institutions, the data is being produced eg by UN, governments, development banks, academic institutions. I can't see any reasonable argument for not working collaboratively and more effectively, to reduce duplication. There are huge gains to be made - the better information you have the better decisions get made. Not many people wilfully make bad decisions. There can't be a single portal because of the multiple user needs.

***What's the role of wider participation in knowledge creation and use***

There were quite a few comments in our interviews, particularly from least developed countries, about information which is not being recorded such as how people in the past responded to drought, flood etc. It is still oral history and not sufficiently contextualised with science information. There is also a problem with international consultants turning up with no understanding of context and applying general solutions to LDC situations. They don't understand local ways of working or politics, and so solutions fail.

***So are there better ways of working?***

A focus for us is the importance of learning. People like to participate in the learning process. KBs have to understand learning since their job is not just providing information. It is decision-making support. Once you see through that lens, then you understand that you need to focus on the users' learning which is a two-way process. What do they need, what do they take into account, and how does your information fit in.

***With technological change, can more information come back from users***

One example, is weather-related insurance which was designed in a collaborative way. The [International Research Institute on Environment and Society](#) at Columbia University worked with other partners in West Africa to provide [weather-related insurance](#) and that has been a very participative process to design what works. It involves very low income people. The insurance companies went in with that understanding and worked with civil society intermediaries to ensure that products work for people. There is a lot of knowledge brokering going on at very different levels. Information comes from farmers – ie this is what it is like for us.

Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development, Floor One, 51 Southwark St, London, SE1 1RU

Email: [info@fdsd.org](mailto:info@fdsd.org) Web: [www.fdsd.org](http://www.fdsd.org)

Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development / Charity Number 1101302 / Registered in England and Wales / Company Registration Number 4869004 © 2015 FDSO