

Correspondence

Countries of the Indo-Gangetic Plain must unite against air pollution

Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh share a global air-pollution hotspot spanning the Indo-Gangetic Plain. It accounts for almost 30% of global deaths from poor air quality (<https://stateofglobalair.org>). We call for expanded collaboration across the region to increase monitoring and data sharing.

This extreme pollution is a result of local and transboundary effects and cuts average life expectancy by six years in affected countries (see go.nature.com/2yg5o3o). It reduces workforce and agricultural productivity, disrupts mobility (because of winter fogs, for example) and increases pressure on limited health care.

Air-quality monitoring is increasing in India and Nepal, but not in Pakistan and Bangladesh. This disparity hinders dialogue on the problem, frustrating mitigation efforts across the airshed.

The ongoing degradation of air quality has outpaced the 1998 Malé declaration on control and prevention of air pollution. Regional cooperation is limited to just a few background monitoring stations. Measurements are urgently needed where pollution and population intersect. Government investments would pay for themselves (see, for example, go.nature.com/2yrugba), enabling evidence-based action.

Muhammad Fahim Khokhar*

National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan.

fahim.khokhar@iese.nust.edu.pk

*On behalf of 8 correspondents. See go.nature.com/3dfgpd4

The lesson of talk over tea and cakes? Local research matters

One of us, A.D., has been part of a national effort to establish support groups for mental health across Indonesia. These groups used formal meetings to discuss people's problems, in line with research published in leading scientific journals. All except one failed. That one was much less formal and more compatible with the local culture. People gossiped (*ghibah*) and casually chatted about their lives over tea and *kueh* (cakes) while doing handicrafts. The benefits were remarkable.

Low- and middle-income countries typically reward research published in journals with a good impact factor. Those journals are predominantly from wealthy nations, as are their editors, their papers and their regions of interest. As we found with the unsuccessful mental-health discussion groups, the social science they publish largely focuses on Western society and so might not apply to different cultures. By making publication in those journals a goal for scientists in nations such as Indonesia, those countries risk funding research that could be irrelevant to them.

Instead, non-Western countries should be encouraging locally generated social-science research that better reflects their own situation. Broadening reward systems beyond Western criteria for high-quality research could then benefit their own societies.

Sandersan Onie Black Dog Institute, Sydney, Australia.
s.onie@blackdog.org.au

Ashra Daswin Jakarta, Indonesia.
daswina@who.int

United States has several programmes for early-career leaders

Your Editorial misleadingly claims that the United States is among the countries that do not have a Young Academy (*Nature* **594**, 474; 2021). The goals of national programmes for early-career science leaders can vary: some choose not to call themselves academies. The United States has had such a programme since 2018, entitled New Voices in Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

Criteria for membership extend beyond research excellence. The programme addresses important priorities of the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). These aim for a greater diversity of appointees for advisory activities and to engage young colleagues to help resolve societal challenges. The name New Voices was chosen to reflect these goals.

New Voices cohorts collaborate with other countries' early-career science organizations. NASEM also has other long-standing major programmes for early-career participants, including the Kavli Frontiers of Science symposia and the Arab–American Frontiers programme. Moreover, the US National Academy of Sciences has been supporting and encouraging the Global Young Academy since its inception.

Dalal Najib, John Boright National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Washington DC, USA.
dnajib@nas.edu

John Hildebrand University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA.

Credit local authors fairly on international research papers

As co-signatories on a consensus statement released this month (see B. Morton *et al. Anaesthesia* <https://doi.org/10.1111/anae.15597>; 2021), we call on all scientific journals to adopt a system that promotes fairness in author-contribution assessments for research done in low-to-middle-income countries by teams that include authors from institutions in high-income countries.

Our system consists of a structured reflexivity statement that asks authors a series of open-ended questions that broadly follow established authorship criteria (see go.nature.com/3aeded2). These help to ensure that researchers from low- to-middle income countries and other disadvantaged groups, such as women and early-career researchers, are properly represented.

Progress in addressing such imbalances has been slow (A. I. Obasi *Lancet* **396**, 651–653; 2020). For example, one-fifth of the papers describing COVID-19 in Africa contain no African authors and, of those that do, the first and last authors are almost always from high-income nations (A. V. Naidoo *et al. BMJ Glob. Health* **6**, e004612; 2021).

Such reflexivity statements (see also *Cell* **184**, 1–2; 2021 and go.nature.com/3degzc2) will encourage inclusive and open discussion of issues affecting equity, including capacity strengthening and research legacy in host countries.

Angela I. N. Obasi* Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Liverpool, UK.
angela.obasi@lstmed.ac.uk
*On behalf of 6 correspondents. See go.nature.com/3bfawvh