

Working toward fairer global scholarly communication

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Angel Y. Ford at the University at Albany charts working toward a more just global landscape of research output valuation and dissemination

Scholarly communication is how researchers share ideas, learn from each other, and build knowledge together. But not all scholars have the same opportunity to be part of these conversations.

Scholars from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) often face unique challenges when trying to access research or share their own work (Demeter, 2020; Ford & Alemneh, 2024). Meanwhile, researchers from wealthier countries, especially those in the Global North, tend to dominate many academic fields, even when studying issues that directly affect LMICs or the Global South.

If we were to visualize this imbalance, imagine a world map colored by participation: scholars from powerful regions might be represented in greens and blues, while those from less dominant areas would show up in oranges and reds. Right now, most of the map would be shades of green and blue, with only a few scattered patches of orange and red. In a fairer world, all colors would be present, creating a richer, more balanced picture.

This imbalance does not just affect scholars from LMICs; it affects everyone. When voices from underrepresented regions are missing, we lose valuable insights and solutions that come from different lived experiences. Often, the proposed answers to global problems are shaped by perspectives that exclude scholars from LMICs and that do not fully reflect global realities.

We know some of the reasons behind these disparities, such as differences in research funding, infrastructure, and the number of scholars in each country. But there is still a lot we do not fully understand. To truly grasp what is going on, we need to hear directly from scholars working in LMICs. What do scholars from LMICs see as the most significant barriers to participating in global scholarly communication? What do scholars from LMICs see as the best way to increase their participation so that they can more fully engage in global discourse in their academic disciplines?

What the Global Epistemic Justice Lab is working on

At the [Global Epistemic Justice Lab](#), we are digging into the real-life experiences of scholars from underrepresented regions around the world. We are working to understand why some researchers seem to more easily engage in scholarly communication through access to the current bodies

of literature, and dissemination of research findings via conference participation and publishing, while other scholars face more hurdles.

Thanks to partnerships with scholars from many countries, the Global Epistemic Justice Lab is conducting an extensive research project that includes surveys and interviews with scholars from LMICs. The qualitative approach lets participants speak for themselves and share their experiences. Their stories will help us better understand the numbers we already have, which show clear discrepancies in research access and research dissemination between countries. The data is beginning to show unique obstacles faced by scholars based on their geopolitical locations and the research cultures in which they work.

While analyzing the data, we are also looking at how existing frameworks such as epistemic injustice, feminist theory, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, etc., help explain these experiences. But we are finding that some parts of scholars' stories do not quite fit into any of these frameworks.

That is why we are also developing a new global epistemic justice lens framework. A colleague and I proposed this as we explored the current scholarly communication landscape (Ford & Alemneh, 2024). You can check out [an article](#) or [listen to a podcast](#) about this work.

This novel critical lens framework will help us better understand not just the challenges scholars face, but also how the imbalances in representation may affect science and society at large. It will offer new language and tools for furthering research and for working together across disciplines and borders in fairer, more inclusive ways. Over time, this could lead to changes in how research is shared and valued and could even make science more balanced and ultimately stronger.

Just like other critical lenses and theories have shaped many fields beyond where they started, we believe this new global epistemic justice lens will help improve global research in meaningful ways.

What we can do to make things fairer in global scholarly communication

Even though the new critical lens framework is still being developed, there are already steps we can take to help make scholarly communication fairer and more inclusive (Ford & Alemneh, 2025). Individual scholars in higher-income countries can start by being aware of how scholars from LMICs are excluded, and then by making an effort to read, cite, and engage with research from people outside their usual circles, especially those from different countries and backgrounds. Connecting at conferences or online can also help build more inclusive conversations.

University and professional organization leaders can support Open Access publishing, so research is freely available to everyone, regardless of their location. They can also work to include scholars from the Global South in collaborations and decision-making processes. Academic publishers can take a closer look at their systems and make sure

they are not unintentionally favoring scholars from dominant regions. That could mean training reviewers on bias, rethinking metrics, making editorial boards more globally diverse, and being intentional about inclusion.

Academics, policy makers, and many other stakeholders have a role to play in shaping the future of global research.

If you are such a stakeholder and are curious about this work or want to get involved, please reach out to me. Whether you are a researcher from a non-dominant region or someone who wants to collaborate fairly and thoughtfully, your voice matters.

Let's work to understand and expose biases and unnecessary obstacles in scholarly communication. And then let's work to build a more balanced and inclusive knowledge-sharing landscape!

References

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