

Neil Adger, awardee in the Climate Change category (13th edition)

My sincere thanks to the Award Committee and the BBVA Foundation for this fantastic award for Frontiers of Knowledge in the area of climate change.

I am deeply honoured and deeply flattered to receive this award alongside Karen O'Brien and Ian Burton.

I will do everything I can to live up to the honour and seek to work further at the frontiers of knowledge. We all need to, because climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the age.

In some ways it is deeply frustrating to be a scientist in this area. Throughout my career I have helped to chart the impacts of climate change and pointed to ways that would help us avoid the worst catastrophes. Yet people are experiencing floods, storms, wildfire, heatwaves and droughts in greater numbers than ever before. What were once seen as once-in-a-century events are being experienced multiple times in the same places. Some people have been displaced from their homes, and many live with unacceptable risks.

In some ways we have collectively charted the decline in environments around us, but remained powerless in the face of vested interests and intransigence, both in dealing with these risks and in causing climate change through our systemic adherence to the fossil fuel based economy.

Yet the allure of social science is precisely that it overcomes such frustrations and applies systematic knowledge to understand both how society thinks and acts.

Work across the disciplines identifies principles of interventions that increase resilience to many types of risks.

Social science gives systematic voice to the voiceless, even through apparently bland statistics or through the power of narrative.

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It also shows, at its best, how to bend the arc of history towards a sensible world but also fairer world.

So despite the frustrations it has been a privilege to help bring social science to bear on the human dimensions of climate change that others perhaps believe to be too challenging or too long term to matter.

We are very grateful to the prize committee for recognizing the human dimensions of climate change through this award to Karen, Ian and myself. We represent a large and diverse global community of scholars. My personal thanks to Kate, my soul mate, from whom I have learned so much, and to every student, collaborator and friend who has made this possible in my case.

My parents were both farmers, and my grandparents before them, in Ireland. They always looked keenly at the weather, and saw how their lives were embedded in places that meant the world to them. Perhaps some of this rubbed off: I am so grateful to the ancestors.

So let us take up the challenge of making the world fairer and safer in the face of climate change that promotes a dignified life for everyone in the places they know and love. This seems to me to a grand ambition for science.

Many thanks to the Foundation, once again.