

Camila Bustos on Speed-Dating for Activists and Academics

During speed-dating for researchers and activists, a small group discussed ways in which both activism and research can support each other, the tensions and challenges that arise from time to time and opportunities for increasing impact in the future.

We discussed how research could have an increasingly practical dimension if researchers and academics are actively engaged in problem solving as opposed to just responding to the problem or studying it. An example of what we meant was raised through the field of medicine since it is not only active in the academic sense of research and innovation, but it is innately engaged in impact as a professional practice. The question we raised was: are we doing research just for research's sake or are we doing it for impact?

We also discussed some of the challenges that contribute to the gap between researchers and activists such as the asymmetries in legitimacy, funding and authority that exist. Furthermore, we questioned some of the politics involved (both at academic institutions as well as large non-profit organizations) in terms of the agenda's design and objectives.

Finally, we touched upon language and ways to enhance communication between activists and researchers since academic jargon often hinders the alliances that can emerge between researchers and activists – although another recurring issue is that these relationships can sometimes be seen as questionable or unscientific in some fields.