

GCRF Process Evaluation Report, Stage 1b

Challenge Leaders Initiative Process Evaluation

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List of acronyms

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ARUA	African Research Universities Alliance
BEIS	Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CL	Challenge Leader
CLGF	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
CM	Challenge Manager
Co-I	Co-Investigator
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DFID	Department for International Development
DP	Delivery Partner
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
GESIP	Gender, Social Inclusion and Poverty
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GNI	Gross National Income
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDC	International Development Committee
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
IR	Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMIC	Low-to-Middle-Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEQ	Main Evaluation Question
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PI	Principal Investigator
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
RMT	Research Management Team
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ToC	Theory of Change
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	United Kingdom Research and Innovation
UKRSA	UK Research Staff Association
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
VfM	Value for Money
WRI	World Resources Institute

Executive Summary

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is a £1.5 billion fund overseen by the United Kingdom’s (UK’s) Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). GCRF supports pioneering research and innovation that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. The GCRF evaluation examines the fund’s Theory of Change (ToC), from activities to impacts, over a five-year period running from 2020 to 2025. This report is part of the second stage of the evaluation, Stage 1b, which examines GCRF’s large-scale, strategic initiatives (2021–22). It focuses on the Challenge Leaders (CLs) initiative, a GCRF ‘signature investment’ aimed at improving the targeting and strategic direction of UK Research and Innovation’s (UKRI’s) GCRF portfolio.

The evaluation found that the CLs initiative had partial success as a strategic structure with a clear vision and as intellectual leaders for thematic portfolios; the CLs worked well as a cohort. Their personal networks were seen as key assets contributing to progress towards key GCRF outcomes. However, ambiguity about the role and unclear structures for delivering on the vision constrained the potential for stronger strategic coordination across the complicated GCRF delivery architecture.

GCRF evaluation

The purpose of GCRF’s evaluation is to assess the extent to which GCRF has contributed to its objectives and impact. The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the life of the fund. The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. This report focuses on Stage 1b (2021–22), involving six process evaluations of GCRF’s signature investments, including the CL initiative. It seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question: *How are GCRF’s signature investments working, and what have they achieved?*

Overview of the CL initiative

In 2017 UKRI introduced six distinct interdisciplinary GCRF portfolios on global health, food systems, conflict, resilience, education and

sustainable cities. This was partly in response to the Rapid Review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), published in 2017, criticising the apparent lack of strategic focus and scattered portfolio of projects. As part of this, nine CLs were appointed to provide intellectual and strategic leadership for each strategic research portfolio and to strengthen the coordination across multiple delivery partners (DPs).¹

Evaluation findings

A clear vision for the CLs was only partially supported by structures and processes to support challenge-led research and innovation (R&I) with development impact. Key successes included working well as a cohort and supporting effective cross-portfolio work on equitable partnerships, although ambiguity

¹ Challenge Leaders <https://www.newton-gcrf.org/gcrf/challenge-leaders/>

about the CL role constrained the potential for stronger strategic coordination. (EQ 1)

There was a clear sense among stakeholders about the broad vision for the initiative. However, structures and processes were not well defined, for both CLs and Challenge Managers (CMs). This ambiguity led to considerable variation in processes followed by different CLs. While this allowed them to respond to the needs of the portfolio, there were some perceptions that the challenge areas were too closely tied to CLs' own interests and networks.

CLs developed effective structures for working as a cohort, which led to effective cross-portfolio work, such as the UKRI Collective Programme – a series of calls reflecting GCRF development considerations – and effective, agile response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While CLs advocated strongly for more equitable partnerships with low-to-middle-income country (LMIC) institutions, their ability to effect meaningful change was constrained by UK dominance of financial and leadership structures.

Strengthening R&I capacities in LMICs and the UK was not a significant feature of the CLs initiative, despite some clear needs identified early on, and this led to some missed opportunities. (EQ 2)

Capacity building was not a significant feature of the CLs ToC. Analysis from the 2017 ICAI review and an initial portfolio analysis highlighted capacity needs, including cross-research council working, research ethics, interdisciplinary, challenge-led research design, and research governance capacity. There was some evidence of CLs addressing capacity needs at individual and project levels, but not at institutional or organisational levels. In addition, there was no clear evidence that fairness considerations were factored into capacity building work, despite advocacy for equitable partnerships in other areas of CLs' work.

The selection of academics solely from the Global North was seen as a missed opportunity to bring in more diverse perspectives and networks from the Global South. (EQ 3)

The introduction of the CLs initiative at a later stage has contributed to the confusion about the

role and scope of the CLs. The CL initiative was driven, in part, by the ICAI review to bring about coherence across the fund, and the appointment of CLs was a quick way to address the gap. Their personal contacts and networks were seen as a key asset and a factor contributing to the achievement of GCRF outcomes. In terms of fairness of structure and processes for UK and LMIC stakeholders, some stakeholders questioned the rationale for appointing CLs solely from the Global North.

Although there have been some constraints – some structural and some from the Covid-19 pandemic – the CLs initiative has contributed to progress towards short-term outcomes in the GCRF ToC, including widening networks of researchers and stakeholders in the UK and LMICs. (EQ 4)

The CLs initiative has made progress towards short-term outcomes; however, the results are concentrated on a few outcomes from the ToC. Evidence of contribution to results is most visible in the short-term outcomes from the initiative's ToC: 'Increased awareness of GCRF within UK, LMIC and globally'; 'Research by cluster members informs policy and practice decisions'; and 'New strengthened relationships with researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders'. Covid-19 disrupted plans where work was either put on hold or stopped altogether. On the other hand, the pandemic also created new ways of working that further enhanced equitable partnerships with those in the Global South, although this was not universal.

There is evidence that the lack of clarity of roles and communication worked against the effective integration of CLs into GCRF's architecture, creating barriers for effective joint working and achieving desired outcomes. (EQ 5)

CLs were appointed as UKRI staff, and needed to integrate into the complicated architecture of GCRF to promote coordination across UKRI and other DPs. There was evidence of some tensions between CLs and DPs, brought about by the ambiguity around roles, communication and a lack of formal authority and decision-making powers. The tensions were less where there was alignment of academic disciplines between the CLs and the research councils, contributing to

more positive working relations. Overall, however, while CMs were a mitigating factor to help orient and integrate CLs into UKRI's structure, the extent to which this has been successful is mixed.

GCRF funding was seen as unique in its scale, scope and flexibility, with notable successes in promoting interdisciplinarity work and equitable partnerships between UK and Global South institutions, although the impact potential was inevitably undermined by the budget reductions in 2021. (EQ 6)

GCRF is seen as an early leader in its championing of equitable partnerships and interdisciplinarity. Its convening power is difficult to match by any individual delivery partner. The size and scope of the fund and the flexibility it offered were seen as unique and instrumental for achieving development outcomes. There was little awareness of equivalent or alternative funding to GCRF. Where alternative funding was sought or secured, it was on a smaller scale, focused on a specific discipline, and involved more competition for funding.

The cuts were reported to have a deep and far-reaching impact. Informants, almost unanimously, said that the cuts were reputationally damaging and undermined the trust they had built with partners. Furthermore, the opportunity to secure a legacy for GCRF was lost due to the cuts, particularly where projects were just at a point to firm up the next steps.

Conclusions, lessons and recommendations

By drawing on the findings from this process evaluation, we aim to answer the main evaluation question (MEQ) *'How well are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?'* within the context of the CLs initiative. We found while there was a clear sense among respondents of the broad vision and purpose for the CLs initiative, how CLs were intended to fulfil this vision was not well defined. Moreover, the extent to which CLs have integrated themselves into UKRI and provided coherence across DPs remains a key sticking point. Yet in spite of the lack of clarity and support mechanisms, the CLs worked well as a cohort and their personal contacts and networks were seen as a key asset and factor contributing to the achievement of GCRF

outcomes. Overall, the CLs initiative has made early progress towards its desired outcomes. However, funding cuts and lack of clarity and support structure have impeded potential areas of achievements or expected outcomes.

Lesson 1: Ambiguity around roles, responsibilities and authority can lead to slower starts and tensions in cross-fund relationships as well as affecting knowledge flows between CLs and other key roles.

Recommendation 1: Define the scope, responsibilities and performance expectations of specific roles, such as those of CLs and CMs, to strengthen strategic positioning, coherence, relevance and positioning for use.

Lesson 2: To work effectively with others in a complicated delivery architecture, roles such as CLs require clear managerial mandates and authority vis-à-vis other strategic roles, and appropriate seniority is needed for effective convening of external and internal stakeholders to promote impact.

Recommendation 2: Reassess the positioning and managerial authority of leadership roles, such as those of CLs, to more effectively provide thought leadership and coordination of multiple DPs.

Lesson 3: CLs bring personal networks and connections to catalyse new ideas. However, if all CLs are UK-based, there is a potential risk of concentrating efforts around a narrower set of topics networks, which can lead to biases in portfolios and missed opportunities.

Recommendation 3: Recruit LMIC partners into strategic and leadership roles where possible alongside UK-based academics.

1 Introduction

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) evaluation examines the fund's Theory of Change (ToC), from activities to impacts, over a five-year period running from 2020 to 2025. The evaluation is structured into three stages owing to the complex nature of the fund. This report is part of the second stage of the evaluation, Stage 1b, which examines GCRF's large-scale, strategic GCRF initiatives. It focuses on the Challenge Leaders (CLs) initiative, a GCRF 'signature investment' aimed at improving the targeting and strategic direction of United Kingdom Research and Innovation's (UKRI's) GCRF portfolio.

1.1 Overview

GCRF is a £1.5 billion fund announced by the United Kingdom (UK) government in late 2015, an unprecedented investment into pioneering research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. GCRF forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment and aimed to contribute to the achievement of the UK's 2015 aid strategy's goals.

GCRF aims to harness UK science in the search for solutions to the challenges faced by developing countries while also developing the UK's ability to deliver cutting-edge research and innovation (R&I) for sustainable development. GCRF is implemented by 17 of the UK's R&I funders, which commission R&I as delivery partners (DPs).

GCRF's ToC sets out GCRF's expected impact, to emerge over a 10-year period:

'Widespread use and adoption of GCRF-supported research-based solutions and technological innovations enables stakeholders in LMICs [low-to-middle-income countries] to make progress at scale towards addressing complex development challenges. These efforts will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, enhancing people's wellbeing, improving equality for people of all genders, promoting social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability in developing countries. These improvements will be sustained into the future by enduring equitable research and innovation partnerships between the UK and LMICs, and enhanced capabilities for challenge-oriented research and innovation in all regions'.

The GCRF strategy sets out three objectives to support this impact:

- Promote challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, including the participation of researchers who may not previously have considered the applicability of their work to development issues.
- Strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership with excellent UK research and researchers.

- Provide an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.

Through these objectives, GCRF aims to contribute to realising the ambitions of the UK aid strategy and to making practical progress on the global effort to address the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). As a secondary objective, GCRF also aims to build the position and role of the UK R&I sector as global leaders in addressing global development challenges. GCRF's ToC and the ambitions set out in its the strategy provide the overall framing for the evaluation to assess progress.

GCRF's evaluation, Stage 1b: Understanding GCRF's processes and early results

The purpose of GCRF's evaluation is to assess the extent to which GCRF has contributed to its objectives and impact. The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the life of the fund (see Annex 1). The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. The evaluation started in 2020, when GCRF was in the final year of its first phase of five years (2016–20). Stage 1a (2020–21) examined the foundations for achieving development across the fund, addressed through four modules: management; relevance and coherence; fairness; and gender, social inclusion and poverty (GESIP).

Stage 1b began in April 2021, with six process evaluations of GCRF's 'signature investments' – large-scale programmes that aim to deliver on GCRF's strategic objectives and where there has been considerable investment into programme management processes to promote excellent ODA R&I with development impact. A fund-wide survey and a value for money (VfM) assessment were also conducted in this phase.

This stage seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question (EQ):

How well are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?

Box 1. What is a 'programme' in GCRF?

In the GCRF context, programmes are designed and managed by GCRF's DPs. They involve the allocation of an amount of funding for the commissioning of a specific portfolio of grants. A set of specific objectives guides commissioning of projects to contribute to GCRF's goals. Programmes often specify ways of working, e.g. in partnership with institutions in low and middle-income countries, through interdisciplinary work and involving stakeholder engagement. Research topics and countries are not usually specified although, in the innovation programmes, development challenges and geographies are framed and awards are commissioned to respond to these. The 'signature programmes' involve more hands-on management of the portfolio by the funder than other calls, in order to optimise the portfolio's development impact potential. This programme management includes elements such as policies and frameworks that have to be met, such as gender, equity and inclusion, detailed monitoring and reporting, cohort-linkages, support for skills building from the programme level, and links to wider networks of collaborators and research users.

This report focuses on the process evaluation of the CLs initiative.² The CLs initiative aimed to provide intellectual and strategic leadership for a series of strategic research portfolios and to strengthen the coordination across multiple DPs.

² During this phase, six process evaluations of signature investments were carried out, including: GROW (UKRI); Interdisciplinary Hubs (UKRI); FLAIR (Royal Society); International Partnerships Programme (UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA)); Challenge Leaders and portfolios (UKRI); and the Four Nations Funding Councils' awards to UK higher education institutions.

Overview of the CLs initiative

In 2017, UKRI introduced six distinct interdisciplinary GCRF portfolios on global health, food systems, conflict, resilience, education and sustainable cities. This was partly in response to the rapid review by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), published in 2017, criticising the apparent lack of strategic focus and scattered portfolio of projects. This investment therefore aimed to improve the targeting and strategic direction across GCRF portfolio.

Nine CLs were appointed to provide intellectual and strategic leadership for each strategic research portfolio and to strengthen the coordination across multiple DPs.³ CLs were tasked with bringing coherence to the grants within their portfolio, providing strategic oversight and leadership across the fund as a whole, facilitating links between DPs and networks for interdisciplinary, challenge-led research, developing interdisciplinary calls, and positioning research outputs for real-world uses. CLs were seconded to UKRI for 40%–60% of their time over a two-year period, with a possible one-year extension.

A second position, the Challenge Manager (CM) role, was also created at design stage. CMs were existing research council staff. Two CMs, each from a different research council, were allocated to each portfolio, with the objective of supporting CLs in their work. It was felt that CMs' position within the research councils, and their knowledge of the UKRI architecture, would facilitate delivery of the initiative.

In addition, as the CLs initiative was new when the GCRF ToC was first developed, a ToC was developed specifically for the initiative.

Error! Reference source not found. shows the appointment of CLs across each of the six challenge portfolios and respective council and university affiliations.

Table 1: CLs

Portfolio	Council/DP leader(s)	CL(s)	Affiliation
Global health (SDG3)	MRC	Prof. Helen Lambert	University of Bristol
Food systems and security (SDG2)	BBSRC	Prof. Nicola Lowe Dr Tahrat Shahid	University of Central Lancashire University of Oxford
Protracted conflict, refugee crises and forced displacement (SDG16)	AHRC	Dr Neelam Raina Dr Laura Hammond	Middlesex University, Assoc. Prof. SOAS University of London, Dept. Development Studies
Education (SDGs 4&10)	BA & ESRC	Dr Kelsey Shanks	Ulster University
Resilience to environmental shocks and change (SDGs 13&15)	NERC	Prof. Mark Pelling Dr John Rees	King's College London, Dept. of Geography
Cities and sustainable infrastructure (SDGs 9&11)	ESRC	Dr Jaideep Gupte	Institute of Development Studies

³ Challenge Leaders <https://www.newton-gcrf.org/gcrf/challenge-leaders/>

1.2 Aims and scope of the CLs process evaluation

The CLs process evaluation is focused on main evaluation question (MEQ) 2: *How well are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?* More specifically, it aims to understand how the signature investment (i.e. programme) as a whole is working and what it has achieved in terms of early results (effectiveness). This has involved gathering data from CLs themselves, staff in DPs and selected award holders.

We reviewed ODA R&I management processes, including: scoping and framing of initiative for relevance and coherence; ToC and shared vision; commissioning and selection of portfolios, and awards within portfolios, to deliver against challenge; risk factors identified and mitigated; hands-on portfolio management; flexibility to respond to events and emergencies; addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working; promoting coherence between portfolios; facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy; and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and regular reporting.

The evaluation sets out a series of sub-EQs and criteria that aim to capture processes and structures that we would expect to see in an ODA challenge fund such as GCRF, building on the findings from Stage 1 (section 2.1).

The time frame for this evaluation begins with the introduction of the CLs initiative in 2018 and goes through to the end of 2021.

Evaluation users

Our evaluation design is grounded in a utilisation focus. This requires having clarity on who the different stakeholders of the evaluation are at the start of the evaluation, as well as how and when they want to use the findings. The evaluation is designed in such a way that it engages stakeholders at the most appropriate moments in the process. Ultimately, a utilisation-focused evaluation should be judged on its utility and actual use.

The primary users of the evaluation are the various teams at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), including the Science and Research Analytics Team; the wider ODA team in Swindon and London offices, including the Research Management Team (RMT); D-MEL Team and Programme Management Office; and the DPs involved in the delivery of GCRF.

The next section sets out some key changes in the strategic and policy context for GCRF and how they have impacted on the evaluation through 2021–22.

1.3 Strategic and policy context

The first years of GCRF's evaluation, 2020–22, have seen significant changes in the strategic, policy and economic context of GCRF. These include a new policy framework that integrates defence and foreign policy, including ODA, and significant budget cuts for 2021–22 as a result of a reduction in the UK's ODA commitment from 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) to 0.5%, following the budget impacts of the UK government's large-scale response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, the policy decision was made to wind down GCRF by 2025, with implications for the evaluation.

The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IR), published in March 2021,⁴ sets out the broader UK policy vision for foreign policy, including ODA, to 2030. This vision includes an increased commitment to security and resilience in the context of UK national interests in collaboration with other nations. The review had an explicit focus on defence, homeland security and the application of science and technology to grow the UK's cyber power. Although it emphasises a focus on multilateral solutions, the IR does not focus in detail on international development, the strategy for which has not yet been published at the time of writing, but which is due in 2022. It nevertheless now guides the work of the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) (formed in August 2020 by merging the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID)), and that of all ODA-spending departments, including BEIS, which funds GCRF.

As the outcome of the IR, a new strategic framework outlines the government's national security and international foreign policy objectives. The framework includes four dimensions: sustaining strategic advantage through science and technology; shaping the open international order of the future; strengthening security and defence at home and overseas; and building resilience at home and overseas, prioritising efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.⁵

Science and technology are central to achieving the policy objectives, with a focus on emerging technologies in particular and the translation of innovation into practical applications, including in developing countries. In this sense, GCRF continues to remain relevant. Further, the national Research and Development (R&D) roadmap outlines that ODA will continue 'to support R&D partnerships within developing countries sharing research expertise in support of the SDGs', with Science and Technology remaining one of the UK's strategic priorities for ODA spending.⁶

The review also sets out seven priorities for UK aid, including supporting open societies and conflict resolution, humanitarian preparedness and girls' education, with climate change a high priority. The review reiterates the UK's commitment to the SDGs and states that poverty reduction will remain central to the work of FCDO.

Geographically, the IR describes a pivot in the UK's interests towards the Indo-Pacific region, although Africa and other developing regions remain a priority. As an ODA fund with an emphasis on low and middle-income countries, GCRF's main focus has been on Africa, and to a lesser extent Asia. The Indo-Pacific region has had less coverage. However, the breadth and diversity of GCRF should enable its continued relevance to this new geographical tilt.

Alongside a new foreign policy and international development framework, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on ODA spending and management, with resulting cuts to the GCRF budget in 2021–22. The economic recession and resultant fiscal policies have affected the Spending Review that was carried out in autumn 2020, limited to a one-year time frame. Reflecting the economic impact of the pandemic, the ODA commitment was reduced from 0.7% to 0.5 % of GNI as a temporary measure.⁷ While the IR commits to 'spend 0.7% of GNI on development when the fiscal situation allows', the ODA reduction in 2021 resulted in

⁴ 'Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', March 2021. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global Britain in a Competitive Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf)

⁵ As above.

⁶ 'UK Research and Development Roadmap', July 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896799/UK_Research_and_Development_Roadmap.pdf

⁷ 'Spending Review: Reducing the 0.7% aid commitment Insight', Thursday, 26 November 2020. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/spending-review-reducing-the-aid-commitment/>

spending cuts for ODA-spending government departments – including BEIS, with consequential cuts to GCRF and the budgets of its DPs.⁸

On 11 March 2021 UKRI stated that the BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI ‘has reduced significantly in planned ODA expenditure for FY21/22, leading to a £125m budget and a £120m gap between allocations and commitments’.⁹ The implementation of these sudden budget reductions, which amounted to around 70% of committed spend, affected all GCRF’s DPs and investments across the board, with grants being delayed, reprofiled or, in some cases, terminated. In March UKRI, as the largest DP involved in GCRF, stated that it would be unable to provide new GCRF funding beyond July 2021.

September 2021 saw a return to a three-year Spending Review and an improved picture for GCRF after the turmoil of the coronavirus pandemic, although – in response to the new policy framework – the decision was made to wind down BEIS’s ODA funds, GCRF and Newton by 2025. Following this budget, BEIS’s ODA allocation stabilised and some improvements were seen. Existing GCRF commitments are now able to be met until March 2025, which means that commissioned projects, including the large-scale flagship programmes, will be supported for the remainder of their terms to 2025. The cuts from 2020/21, however, will not be reimbursed, so projects are having to accommodate net budget reductions by reducing their scope.

The policy decision to wind the fund down by early 2025 means that spending in 2022–23 is on a declining trajectory, from £124 million in 2022–23 to £77.9 million in 2023–24 and £14.6 million in the final year, 2024–25. These circumstances represent a curtailment in the original ambition envisioned for GCRF in its ToC, which was to maintain investment in development R&I over a 10-year period.¹⁰ The assumption at the time the ToC was developed (2017–18) was that there would be a second, impact-oriented, phase of GCRF from 2021 to 2025. In this phase, it was expected that many of the larger awards (notably UKRI’s Interdisciplinary Hubs) and other investments would shift focus on to impact activities. With the winding down of the fund, these investments will now not take place, with implications for the achievement of GCRF’s midterm outcomes and impact.

Effectively, there are only two years of remaining R&I activity, as in the final year programmes will be focused on finalising outputs. Award teams and, potentially, partnerships will disband and move on. BEIS has decided nevertheless that the evaluation will continue to track GCRF up to its close in March 2025. For Stage 1b, the evaluation has been adjusted to take these challenges into account, with specific EQs focusing on the impacts of Covid-19 and budget reductions. For future phases, the evaluation is in the process of being refocused to reflect the winding down of the fund and the need to capture lessons and document GCRF’s accomplishments and legacy for LMICs and the UK.

1.4 Structure of the report

The structure for this report is as follows:

⁸ ‘Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’, March 2021. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf

⁹ UKRI Official Development Assistance letter 11 March 2021. <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/ukri-oda-letter-11-march-2021/>

¹⁰ Barr, J. *et al.*, 2018, GCRF Foundation Stage Report. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-foundation-stage-evaluation>

Section 1 provides an introduction to the CLs initiative and provides an overview of the process evaluation. It sets out the context of the wider evaluation process as well as situating it within the strategic and policy context for this specific evaluation.

Section 2 describes the approach and methodology, including EQs and criteria, as well as the data collection instruments, sampling approach and analysis.

Section 3 presents the findings against EQs 1–6.

Section 4 provides conclusions, lessons and high-level recommendations for the design of similar initiatives.

2 Approach and methodology

The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the projected 10 years of the fund. For Stage 1b, we developed an evaluation framework to assess how well ‘ODA excellence’ has been supported in the signature investments, drawing on the findings from Stage 1a, GCRF’s ToC and the literature on challenge funds. This section provides an overview of our approach and the EQs and criteria that the process evaluation aims to answer. It also summarises the data collection method, sampling, data analysis and our key strengths and limitations.

2.1 Overview of approach

The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the projected 10 years of the fund (see the Inception Report 2020 for more details). The Stage 1b process evaluations (together with the survey and VfM assessment) provide an opportunity to test the early stages of the GCRF ToC and its assumptions to understand how the signature investments have integrated the key processes and strategies proposed in the ToC into their programmes in order to optimise the ODA excellence and impact potential of their awards.

Stage 1b of the GCRF evaluation focuses on MEQ2: *How well are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?* While the focus is on process, the evaluation also seeks to capture insights on context, causal mechanisms and early-stage outcomes.

Conceptual framing of ‘ODA research excellence’ in GCRF

From April to June 2021, the evaluation completed a scoping phase to finalise the approach and method for Stage 1b. To deliver on its ambitions, GCRF goes beyond considering research excellence alone, to promoting challenge-led, excellent research with impact. This incorporates a wider understanding of what GCRF as an ODA fund should strive towards, which we term as ‘ODA research and innovation excellence’.

However, in Stage 1a the evaluation found that some investments in the portfolio are more aligned with ODA challenge-led R&I than others. The evaluation concluded that approaching GCRF more explicitly as an ODA R&I challenge fund would provide more insights into ‘what good looks like’ for GCRF’s performance (see Box 2).

Box 2. Findings from Stage 1a, 2020–21

The process evaluations build on the findings from Stage 1a. The Stage 1a Management Review and Synthesis Report on the integration of relevance, fairness, gender, poverty and social inclusion on GCRF were published in February 2022.¹¹ Overall, the Stage 1a

¹¹ Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): Stage 1a evaluation. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-stage-1a-evaluation>

evaluation found that GCRF is making clear progress in terms of establishing the foundations for development impact – becoming relevant, coherent, well-targeted, fair, gender sensitive and socially inclusive. Strengths were seen especially in the ‘signature investments’ such as the International Partnerships Programme (IPP), GROW, Interdisciplinary Hubs and Future Africa Leaders’ Programme (FLAIR). However, inherent challenges in the fund’s size and complicated delivery architecture meant that progress has been varied across the portfolio, and important gaps remain, especially around managing for development impact and how poverty is addressed. The evaluation recommended that GCRF do the following:

- **Establish a more consistent challenge fund identity, with the cultures, shared ownership and management structures to support this.** A challenge fund identity and associated processes was seen most strongly in the signature investments, with the need to explore this in more depth in Stage 1b process evaluations through specific criteria.
- **Establish quality standards for ‘ODA R&I excellence’ to optimise the combination of excellent research and innovation with development impact.** The synthesis identified an unresolved tension that at times privileged conventional research excellence and took a lower, compliance approach to the fundamentals of development impact. The need to integrate and promote both dimensions of excellence in ODA R&I was brought into the Stage 1b process evaluation framework to understand in more depth if this had been achieved in the signature investments.
- **Establish a collective, fund-wide monitoring and learning process that supports learning between BEIS, the DPs and award holders to support adaptive management at different levels.** This is a fund-wide challenge but was also brought into the process evaluation framework to investigate the extent to which monitoring and learning were supported in the signature programmes.

A consistent request from BEIS has been for the evaluation to illustrate what ‘good looks like’ for a challenge fund such as GCRF. Therefore, to better frame GCRF’s ambitions from the challenge fund perspective, and to define the key characteristics of a fund of this nature, we conducted a rapid scan of the literature for challenge funds in international development and mission-oriented R&I (see the Stage 1b Approach Paper, 2021).

Building on this review, the GCRF ToC and the findings from Stage 1a, a **single overarching evaluation framework** was developed for all six process evaluations and the fund-wide survey (set out in Section 2.2). The evaluation framework in Section 2.2 sets out the EQs and the combined criteria for assessing ODA excellence in design and delivery of GCRF’s signature investments. The specific features of each signature investment will be captured via tailored criteria within the evaluation framework (see Section 2.2 for the full evaluation matrix).

Summary of the evaluation method

The detailed methodology is set out in subsequent sections. In summary, the evaluation has examined the EQs through an iterative three-step approach:

1. **Examining the programme level to achieve a broad overview of the signature investment and its processes**, informed by a document review and analysis of the programme-specific subset of survey data.

2. **A deeper, qualitative dive into a sample of awards from within each investment to gain deeper insights into processes and early results from the programme**, informed by key informant interviews (KIIs) and triangulated with specific documentation from each award.
3. **A holistic assessment of the overall programme**, examining the extent to which programmatic approach has enabled the awards to work as a portfolio that is more than the ‘sum of the parts’.

Triangulation was the main approach to strengthen the evidence across all three levels:

- **Examples and triangulation within interviews:** Triangulation was applied within interviews to explore issues from different angles and elicit examples to support reports of achievements. These examples were then cross-checked with other data sources.
- **Triangulation between stakeholder types in both quantitative and qualitative data collection:** BEIS staff, DP programme managers, award holders and partners, increasing the number of different perspectives on a project/programme.
- **Triangulation between interview data, survey data, award and programme monitoring information and other documentary sources:** This included project annual reports, reporting through ResearchFish and programme review documentation that helped us to validate stakeholder testimony about processes and project achievements.

The CL process evaluation has taken place mainly at the ‘programme’ level, as CLs do not commission awards, unlike the other programmes. However, CLs do oversee portfolio areas, so we selected a sample of awards within each portfolio to provide a holistic assessment. The full sampling, data collection and analysis approach is set out in the sections which follow.

2.2 Evaluation questions and criteria

All Stage 1b process evaluations utilise a single overarching evaluation framework, which draws on the GCRF ToC outcomes and assumptions as well as insights from the literature on challenge funds and mission-oriented R&I in international development (see Annex 1). The overarching EQ has been broken down in the evaluation framework into seven EQs and associated criteria to support the assessment of the ODA R&I processes.

These EQs were updated from the original Terms of Reference to reflect the findings of the Stage 1b evaluation, a rapid literature review of challenge funds. The EQs were also adapted to reflect the structural and contextual changes around Covid-19 and an overall reduction in ODA funding that affected GCRF in 2021–22.

Table 2: below sets out the detailed evaluation framework. Through criteria EQs 1–2, we examine the structures and processes that we would expect to find in a challenge fund to deliver ODA R&I with impact. EQ 3 examines the extent to which processes and structures have been efficient and timely and fair to partners; EQ 4 looks at the evidence for what has been achieved and emerging outcomes; EQ 5 explores the unique features of the signature programmes that have enabled them to overcome barriers in the thematic and geographical contexts; EQ 6 aims to establish the uniqueness and additionality of GCRF funding. Finally EQ 7 captures lessons for future funds.

Table 2: Evaluation matrix

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
<p>EQ 1. To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research and innovation with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?</p>	<p>1a. ODA R&I management (at programme and award levels):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence ▪ ToC and shared vision ▪ Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge ▪ Risk factors identified and mitigated ▪ Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort building, aggregate-level R&I into use) ▪ Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19 ▪ Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working ▪ Promoting coherence between awards ▪ Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy ▪ M&E and regular reporting <p>1b. ODA R&I excellence in design and implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevance + coherence in design and delivery ▪ Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity ▪ Negative consequences mitigated and a ‘do no harm’ approach ▪ Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes ▪ Inclusiveness addressed within design and research processes ▪ Capacity needs identified and assessed ▪ Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement ▪ Positioning for use in design and delivery (‘fit for purpose’ engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users) 	<p>Data sources:</p> <p>KIIs with CLs, CMs, Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) members, UKRI central GCRF team staff, DPs, award holders and external partners</p> <p>Programme documents</p> <p>Methods:</p> <p>Document reviews</p> <p>KIIs with CLs</p> <p>KIIs with CMs</p> <p>KIIs with SAG members</p> <p>KIIs with UKRI central GCRF team staff</p> <p>KIIs with DPs</p> <p>KIIs with award holders</p> <p>KIIs with external partners</p>
<p>EQ 2. To what extent are structures and processes in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clear ToC for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes ▪ Analysis/understanding of local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs 	

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&I infrastructure ▪ Fairness considerations integrated 	
EQ 3. To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented: are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Efficiency and timeliness of processes ▪ Efficiency and coherence ▪ Fairness for partners 	
EQ 4. To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes /impacts, and what evidence exists of these? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples ▪ Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress ▪ Unintended outcomes (positive and negative) 	
EQ 5. What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maturity of the field ○ Research capacity strengthening ○ Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research) ○ Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves) ○ Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures) ○ Examples of success factors e.g. the necessary factors proposed in the GCRF ToC for navigating barriers/facilitators 	

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Networks, credible evidence/innovation and new capabilities mobilised to amplify change ○ Iterative engagement by GCRF programmes and projects, responding to opportunities to amplify change ○ Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model 	
<p>EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted ▪ Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality etc (as defined in the VfM rubric) ▪ Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding ▪ Other aspects that GCRF funding is instrumental for 	
<p>EQ 7. What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of signature investments akin to the Challenge Leaders initiative?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific insights and lessons from the initiative that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from, success factors, reasons why ▪ Capture also specific areas for improvement in the initiative, areas of underperformance and reasons why 	

2.3 Selection and sampling

This section outlines the sampling strategy for data collection. We sought to interview all CLs past and present. We also had a sample of CMs to provide us with further insight on the initiative, particularly on the day-to-day portfolio management. We approached the UKRI GCRF team to understand the initial set-up, selection and management of the initiative, and SAG members who provided the overarching perspectives. We interviewed a sample of DPs and award holders. It is worth noting that, unlike other process evaluations, there are no awards underneath CLs. However, CLs oversee portfolio areas, so we selected a sample within each portfolio. We also interviewed external partners, involving the UK government and other co-funders to triangulate the extent to which CLs were strengthening international engagement and promoting high-level dialogue with a wide range of international development actors.

Table 3: Data collection sampling

Key informants	Target	Contacted	Achieved
Current and past Challenge Leaders (CLs)	10	10	10
Challenge Managers (CMs)	7	7	7
Central RCUK/UKRI GCRF team	2	3	2
Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)	5	10	6
Delivery Partners (DPs)	7	7	6
Award holders	16	39	12
External partners	5	10	6
Total	52	86	49

2.4 Data collection and overview of the evidence base

The CLs process evaluation is informed both by secondary data and KIIs with selected stakeholders. The CLs initiative was less documented than other GCRF programmes, so the secondary data was limited to approximately 20 documents. These included key strategy and policy documents covering the design of the initiative, its rationale and its main objectives. There was only limited information on budget available, relating to salary costs and the value of calls shaped by CLs. There was some documentation relating to CLs' activities, and some knowledge products arising from these. GCRF SAG meeting minutes were included where relevant to the initiative.

In interviews, owing to the number of criteria to cover, we sought a balance in the questions asked of key informants across a large range of issues. Therefore, not all key informants were asked questions related to all processes or criteria. Instead, we targeted areas that informants were most able to comment on, with the aim of achieving reasonable coverage of the issues in scope across the interviews as a whole.

2.5 Data analysis

For the CLs process evaluation, the team reviewed documents and secondary reporting data using the following process. Documentation was initially reviewed and categorised as data,

context or evidence. All documents categorised as evidence were further coded in MaxQDA¹² using a common codebook structured to reflect EQs.

For the KII data, we analysed the KIIs through the following process:

- First, interview notes were written up into a structured template linking back to the main themes EQs and criteria.
- Interview write-ups were then coded using MaxQDA, using the evaluation criteria as the structural codes (see Annex 2 for codebook).
- Coded interview data was then extracted and analysed for patterns including similarities and differences in responses by sub-groups of stakeholders.

The programme analysis template was the main tool used for integrating data from different sources and assessing confidence in the evidence. The analysed data was combined for each EQ and evidence was triangulated to build the evidence base. We used established techniques from qualitative analysis: identifying and interpreting themes, developing explanations, translating emerging themes and explanations back to test against the source data, juxtaposing and exploring contradictory findings, and triangulating findings between the three evidence sources to answer the EQs.

In the programme template, analytical narratives for each EQ were written up, and the supporting evidence was documented. Our confidence in the evidence was then rated (see Annex X). In our analysis of each EQ, we considered how confident we were in the strength of evidence underpinning our judgements. This is based on how strongly the evidence emerges from the individual sources, as well as the degree of triangulation possible between the sources.

2.6 Strengths and limitations of our approach

Overall, our approach and sampling has worked well, enabling us to understand the structure and implementation of the CLs initiative. It has also allowed us to triangulate our findings and be aware of the perspectives of different stakeholders involved. Moreover, we have used rubrics to indicate how confident we are in the strength of our evidence to ensure that our findings are robust.

We, however, faced a number of challenges that limited our findings and these include: approaching informants in UKRI; interviewing award holders; and gaps in documentation. In relation to the first, we identified key informants at UKRI to better understand the initial set-up and vision behind the initiative. Due to the restructuring that was taking place, those identified had either left the organisation or were in the process of doing so. However, we were able to speak to staff at UKRI who were able to provide us with information, which was triangulated with data from other key informants interviewed.

The greater challenge was to secure interviews with award holders. We had approached DPs and CMs to request the Principal Investigator (PI)¹³ or Co-Investigators (Co-Is)¹⁴ within their portfolio. However, several award holders we contacted either did not respond or declined the interview, saying that they had no knowledge of CLs or had no engagement with them. We then extended the data collection period and contacted more award holders. We had a target

¹² MAXQDA is qualitative and mix methods analysis software <https://www.maxqda.com/>

¹³ A Principal Investigator has primary responsibility for the research, providing intellectual leadership and management.

¹⁴ A Co-Investigator working in partnership with the Principal Investigator to support management and responsibility for research.

of 16 award holders; we contacted 39 award holders and secured 12 interviews. We see the level of responsiveness as a finding in and of itself (see Section 3.1.5).

There were some notable gaps in the documentation. For instance, there was little or no information on the scope or coverage of each portfolio, which might have enabled a more detailed analysis or comparison of each challenge area, reporting on CL activities or progress. The document review, while limited, is therefore as comprehensive as was possible.

3 Findings

This section sets out the findings against the seven EQs for the CLs initiative, in order to answer the overarching evaluation question: *'How well are GCRF's investments working and what have they achieved?'*

3.1 EQ 1: To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led R&I with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?

Box 3. EQ 1 summary

Despite a clear sense among stakeholders about the broad vision for the CL initiative, key structures and processes were not well defined for both CLs and CMs.

This ambiguity led to considerable variation in processes followed by different CLs. While this allowed them to respond to the needs of the portfolio, there were some perceptions that the challenge areas were too closely tied to CLs' own interests and networks.

CLs developed effective structures for working as a cohort, which led to effective cross-portfolio work, such as the collective programme – a series of calls reflecting GCRF development considerations – and effective, agile response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There were also effective processes for connecting, networking and convening with different stakeholder groups, including external stakeholders and research partners. Communication processes with CMs and other DPs were not always so effective, leading to some missed opportunities for joined-up working.

While CLs advocated strongly for more equitable partnerships with LMIC institutions, their ability to effect meaningful change was constrained by UK dominance of the initiative's financial and leadership structures.

EQ 1 is focused on the extent to which the CLs initiative has supported excellent ODA R&I, a key aspect of MEQ 2, which is to understand how the signature investment is working. Our approach to answering EQ 1 is to explore the structures and processes in place, using the ODA R&I criteria relevant to the CLs initiative to document and discuss our findings. This section first considers the design: the vision for the initiative, and the structures put in place to achieve this. It next explores the management of the initiative: the ways in which CLs worked towards key objectives, and the processes used to do this. Finally it examines the extent to which these structures and processes reflected and promoted GCRF development considerations.

Design: developing a vision and establishing structures

3.1.1 Scoping and framing of initiative for relevance and coherence

The design of the CL role itself was a fundamental aspect of setting up the initiative, and there was mixed evidence on the effectiveness of scope and pitch of the job description, as defined by senior UKRI leaders in conjunction with BEIS, and by members of GCRF's SAG.¹⁵

The choice to establish CLs as UKRI employees at 0.4–0.6 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) enabled them to retain their academic and research positions¹⁶ and was seen by key informants from UKRI as an effective way to bridge gaps between Research Councils and academic circles. Others, including CLs, did not see it in this way. Some expressed that CLs were 'not career grant makers', ie: responsible for disbursement of research funding, and that as they were not working full time for UKRI. This meant that information did not flow to CLs as it could have done.¹⁷

Evidence was likewise mixed on whether candidates had been recruited at the right level. The intention of the panel was to recruit experienced and well-regarded researchers, with relevant intellectual leadership experience and networks in relevant SDG-related policy spaces.¹⁸ UKRI stakeholders acknowledged that this was ambitious. There was some evidence that the salary was not high enough to attract candidates with the experience and standing that the panel sought.¹⁹ Some DPs, UKRI central team and SAG informants felt this had prevented earlier career CLs from being as effective in terms of their capacity to convene and their understanding of the relevant fields.²⁰

Consistent evidence emerged from KIs that the scope of the CL role was not that well defined early in the initiative, though this had its benefits and challenges.²¹ Some stakeholders, largely CLs themselves and UKRI staff, saw this as a benefit, in that it allowed them to respond to the particular needs of their disciplines and portfolios.²² Others felt, however, that this lack of clarity in defining the scope caused confusion among DPs in understanding how to work with CLs. There was also a sense that the lack of clarity on the role affected the initial phase of some of the CLs' work, as they needed to invest time in determining the scope of their role.

'The jobs were not very well defined. That's a reflection of the different portfolios – they needed different things – so this was beneficial.' (CL)

[I had to navigate] 'labyrinthine complexities without much initial steer from the top on what I need to do this role effectively – a poorly described role which is quite frustrating.' (CL)

The CM role was also a fundamental part of the initiative, designed to support and facilitate the management of each portfolio and of the initiative as a whole.²³ Two CMs were assigned to

¹⁵ CL2, CL3, CL8, CL12, CL20, CL30, CL33, CL86; documents 8, 9, 11.

¹⁶ Document 4.

¹⁷ CL3, CL9, CL86.

¹⁸ CL2, CL4, CL8, CL12, CL20, CL86; documents 9, 11.

¹⁹ CL12, CL33.

²⁰ CL12, CL20, CL30.

²¹ CL2, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL7, CL9, CL12, CL31.

²² CL2, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL7, CL9, CL12.

²³ CL2, CL3, CL4, CL12, CL13, CL14, CL15, CL17, CL18, CL19, CL31, CL32, CL33, CL34, CL86; documents 4, 17.

each portfolio. They were existing research council staff from two different research councils. This supported CLs in navigating research councils, and facilitated collaboration between councils. The role was seen as particularly useful during an initial portfolio analysis; CMs had good knowledge of the existing grants and stakeholders. Some delivery partner interviewees saw the CM role and contribution as equally, or more, important than that of CLs.²⁴ CMs also played a significant role in this in terms of supporting links between CLs and their portfolios. It is unclear from the evidence how much this was intended as part of their job description and how much this responsibility evolved with the initiative.²⁵

Feedback on the effectiveness of CM and CL working relationships was mixed, with strong evidence that there were some tensions in the relationship between CLs and CMs. CLs and UKRI staff generally described the CM role as a key contribution to the initiative. CMs and research council staff had some criticisms of the relationships, with some CMs feeling excluded from CLs' decision-making processes in a way that prevented them doing their job as they wanted.²⁶ This is also part of broader tensions between CLs and research councils, which are discussed in more detail in EQ 5.

CMs are 'in a way more crucial than the CLs because they have to design, deliver and make things happen. You could argue that in the absence of a CL, we would still have had ideas from our own strategic advisory committee'. (DP)

3.1.2 ToC and shared vision

The evidence shows that there was a shared vision of the initiative from its inception. The CL initiative was designed, in part, in response to ICAI criticism that GCRF's investment lacked coherence and strategic oversight and was unlikely to achieve SDG-aligned research impacts.²⁷ The central purpose of the CLs was to provide this kind of leadership and direction. There was strong evidence across informants that this broad vision was communicated effectively, understood and shared by different stakeholder groups, with almost every informant able to articulate the key elements of the vision.²⁸

'The one overarching objective [of CLs] was to bring coherence to the fund. This was in part in response to criticism from ICAI on the fact that the fund seemed quite disjointed'. (UKRI stakeholder)

The CL ToC, developed in early 2019, was not used by CLs or DPs in their work, and did not provide a meaningful structure for translating the shared vision into clear pathways to achieving the initiative's objectives.²⁹ The ToC was developed by UKRI in consultation with a small stakeholder group during the first year of the initiative, after UKRI identified a need for more granular objectives. While some stakeholders found this a useful process,³⁰ there was

²⁴ CL31, CL32, CL33, CL34.

²⁵ CL1, CL6, CL10, CL12.

²⁶ CL13, CL15, CL17, CL18, CL33.

²⁷ Documents 3, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19.

²⁸ CL1, CL2, CL3, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL8, CL9, CL10, CL12, CL13, CL14, CL16, CL17, CL18, CL19, CL20, CL21, CL24, CL26, CL28, CL30, CL33, CL36, CL37, CL47, CL54, CL59, CL86.

²⁹ CL2, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL9, CL10, CL12, CL13, CL16, CL17, CL18, CL19, CL20, CL21, CL24, CL26, CL28, CL30, CL33, CL86; document 4.

³⁰ CL5, CL9, CL10, CL12, CL13, CL20, CL86.

very strong evidence that the majority of CLs, CMs and other DPs were either unaware of the ToC or only vaguely recalled seeing it.³¹

'We had a GCRF ToC, but within the CL programme there wasn't a precise ToC' (CL)

'I have to say, I haven't seen it in a long time.' (CM)

3.1.3 Risk factors identified and mitigated

UKRI implemented a conflict of interest policy to mitigate the risk of CLs' dual role as GCRF award holders and portfolio leads. The evidence suggests this remained an unresolved issue throughout the life of the programme.³² Some CLs were already GCRF award holders when appointed as CLs, and many applied for, and were awarded, GCRF grants during their tenure. Both UKRI central team and individual research councils introduced clear protocols precluding CLs from applying for calls that they had designed or where they were involved in review panels.³³ Despite these measures, there was some evidence from DPs and UKRI central team that this remained a governance challenge throughout the programme.³⁴

A second risk identified was that individual CLs would focus too narrowly on their existing network, disciplinary expertise and research interests, rather than pulling together a portfolio based on an analysis of GCRF and UKRI's strategic needs. Consultation exercises mitigated this to a certain extent, but did not fully address the problem.³⁵ A portfolio analysis, undertaken early in CLs' tenure, was effective in mapping awards and developing strategy. Consultations and panels were set up to shape the content and direction of calls. As an additional risk mitigation measure, review panels did not include CLs in final award decisions. Evidence also shows that in some cases CMs, with knowledge of research councils' priorities, were able to support a broader focus within portfolios. SAG members, involved in a strategic and oversight capacity, did not find that portfolios had been too narrowly shaped by CLs.³⁶ DPs and UKRI central team expressed more concern that there was considerable variation between CLs, that CLs were not sufficiently aware of the potential risks, and that there were enduring perceptions of unfairness in calls and awards.³⁷

Management: implementing processes to support delivery

3.1.4 Commissioning and selection of portfolios to deliver against challenge

As the CLs began work after GCRF investments were in place, a portfolio analysis was conducted in each of the six portfolio areas to structure a coherent response. CLs then framed calls based on GCRF priorities and on identified gaps.³⁸ There was some evidence that the portfolio structure used in the initiative allowed CLs to shape calls and commission research effectively.³⁹ A few key DPs and external stakeholders felt that as research councils'

³¹ CL2, CL6, CL7, CL10, CL13, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL18, CL19, CL21, CL32, CL33.

³² CL12, CL13, CL14, CL16, CL18, CL19, CL20, CL22, CL30, CL33, CL34, CL36, CL37, CL86; document 8.

³³ CL12, CL14, CL30.

³⁴ CL12, CL13, CL19, CL30, CL33, CL34, CL86.

³⁵ CL7, CL12, CL13, CL14, CL19, CL20, CL22, CL30, CL33, CL34, CL36, CL37, CL45, CL50, CL54, CL86.

³⁶ CL20, CL22.

³⁷ CL12, CL30, CL34, CL36.

³⁸ CL1, CL2, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL9, CL10, CL12, CL14, CL20, CL21, CL28, CL32, CL69; documents 3, 9.

³⁹ CL15, CL26, CL50, CL63.

interests and strategic priorities were already in place, it was hard for some CLs to lead this process.⁴⁰

‘The most impactful, significant work is when they feed into the funding calls – which is seen as a key part of their work.’ (DP)

3.1.5 Hands-on portfolio management

Promoting coherence between portfolios was a key aspect of the CL initiative, built into the role at design stage. CLs’ collegiate approach to their work helped to ensure a harmonised approach across all six portfolios. CLs held regular meetings as a group – both according to a formal schedule, and informally as needed. This enabled CLs to co-author publications and communications pieces, contribute to each other’s events, and develop the collective programme (and associated calls).⁴¹

‘One of the big risks with the initiative was ending up with six programmes – that risk was never realised – they worked collegiately. One of my doubts about the whole approach was that we were looking to deal with six poles of work that didn’t communicate – but this didn’t happen.’ (UKRI stakeholder)

The CLs worked effectively as a team to develop the collective programme – a series of calls reflecting GCRF development considerations, situated both within each portfolio and cutting across them.⁴²

Table 4: Challenge Leaders collective programme calls

Global Challenge area	Value (£ million)
Cross-portfolio calls	£20
Cities calls	£14.3
Conflict calls	£12.3
Education calls	£14.5
Food Systems calls	£7
Health calls	£3.1
Resilience calls	£7.4
Total	£78.6

Source: UKRI, 2022

There was agreement across stakeholder groups that this contributed to better interdisciplinary working. Many examples were shared of projects and programmes funded through collective programme calls.⁴³

⁴⁰ CL31, CL59.

⁴¹ CL1, CL2, CL3, CL4, CL6, CL7, CL8, CL9, CL10, CL12, CL19, CL86; documents 9, 11, 12, 22, 25.

⁴² CL2, CL3, CL5, CL8, CL9, CL13, CL14, CL33, CL86; documents 3, 22, 25.

⁴³ CL1, CL3, CL5, CL9, CL14.

CLs regularly liaised with DPs, research councils and academies, and external organisations – e.g. the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), FCDO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) – to facilitate the design and delivery of calls, to promote inter-council and interdisciplinary working, and to act as a bridge between academic and policy stakeholders.⁴⁴ This included regular meetings with research councils and, to a lesser degree, academies. CLs also sat on review and selection panels within councils and academies. Some DPs and award holders found that this gave them links with external stakeholders that they would not otherwise have had.⁴⁵ Some DPs and CMs found that CLs did not always communicate their knowledge of external partners in a helpful way – and felt that the potential to create research council contacts within those spaces was now lost.⁴⁶

‘Occasionally, the Challenge Leaders were almost a barrier between ourselves and the research community and the research activity in the projects... almost like a gatekeeper. A researcher or FCDO/UN stakeholder might go to a Challenge Leader but that information or insight was not necessarily shared. So there was a disconnect between what CLs were doing externally and what they were doing internally.’ (DP)

There was a large amount of evidence that CLs’ work to support and convene researchers, practitioners and award holders was a major aspect of portfolio management, though evidence is unclear about the extent of their influence.⁴⁷ Roadshows and events were held in the UK to promote the collective programme and offer support and advice about application process. Special interest research groups were convened to create and strengthen networks between researchers with common interests. Workshops, meetings and other events were held across Global South partner countries for networking and to support researchers to apply for collective programme calls. There were mixed levels of awareness among award holders about this aspect of CLs’ role. Many of those contacted by the evaluation team said they have had no contact or even knowledge about them. Some award holder interviewees reported a great deal of useful involvement with CLs,⁴⁸ while others had very little interaction.⁴⁹ Some DPs and CMs felt that the more experienced, recognised CLs had more success in this aspect of their role.⁵⁰

‘During those events, [the CLs’] chairman and leadership of them, because [they are] such a well-respected member of the community already, a lot of people want to come and listen to what [they’ve] got to say and, you know, [they’re] really good at encouraging people to do more of that collaborative working.’ (CM)

⁴⁴ CL1, CL2, CL5, CL7, CL8, CL14, CL17, CL28, CL31, CL32, CL54, CL59; documents 3, 26.

⁴⁵ CL17, CL33, CL59.

⁴⁶ CL17, CL33.

⁴⁷ CL1, CL2, CL4, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL8, CL13, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL18, CL26, CL28, CL34, CL36, CL37, CL42, CL45, CL50, CL53, CL58, CL62, CL63, CL65, CL69, CL73, CL77; documents 3, 13.

⁴⁸ CL42, CL45, CL77.

⁴⁹ CL44, CL45, CL47, CL73.

⁵⁰ CL13, CL14, CL18.

3.1.6 Positioning for use in design and delivery

There was strong evidence across stakeholder groups that CLs brought with them networks of high-level policy, multilateral and government stakeholders, and that they worked to develop and maintain these further during their tenure. Interviewees largely described this as an effective mechanism for dissemination and engagement.⁵¹ There was some evidence that CLs acted as conduits from researchers to policy spaces – connecting relevant researchers to high-level actors, and in some cases ensuring that research outputs shaped policy.⁵² CLs also sat on or convened a number of thematic and policy working groups or discussion forums, utilising these to promote engagement with portfolio researchers and their work. One CL noted that these groups had been a useful mechanism to give an overview of funding, which helped to feed into the GCRF research activities, such as the design of the call in response to Covid-19.

‘We worked with many organisations – UNDRR, UNDP, WB, DFID, through the UKCDR (Collaborative Development Research) ...we worked very widely and went to international meetings, marketing what we could do. We worked to facilitate join up with many partners.’ (CL)

‘Funded research from the portfolio poured right into it through me into the [World Bank’s five-year fragility, conflict and violence] strategy document.’ (CL)

There was also strong evidence that CLs regularly organised, supported or facilitated a range of different events to allow researchers to disseminate their work, and to share learning with colleagues in relevant thematic or research areas. Examples of these events included town hall meetings on education in conflict, a series on anti-microbial resistance and Covid. In particular, there were several events around COP26 – where researchers were able to share their work.⁵³

There are some examples of knowledge products supported or produced by CLs and used to share or disseminate learning and research outputs from portfolios.⁵⁴ The CLs co-authored a piece for *The Lancet* about challenge areas and challenge research, which gave them an opportunity to present a shared message across portfolios.⁵⁵ Guidelines on the ethics of conducting research in fragile and conflict-affected settings were developed as part of the Education portfolio. Mapping and gap analysis on research in education in emergencies was used to build an evidence platform established on the INEE website. A technical report was written based on a UK–Kenya Symposium on Healthy Cities.⁵⁶

‘The work that came out of [a] series of EiE workshops (mapping evidence on education in emergencies) – we are now in the process of finalising a

⁵¹ CL1, CL2, CL3, CL4, CL6, CL7, CL8, CL24, CL33, CL42, CL57, CL59; documents 1, 6, 29.

⁵² CL1, CL3, CL7.

⁵³ CL1, CL7, CL24, CL28, CL30, CL34, CL42, CL45, CL57, CL58, CL65, CL69, CL73; documents 10, 15, 24, 29.

⁵⁴ KIIs 4, 9, 12, 28, 57 ; documents 12, 16, 20.

⁵⁵ Document 12.

⁵⁶ Document 20.

report which is a synthesis of learning across the three workshops. This will be produced in the five INEE languages.’ (External partner)

While there is strong evidence that the CL role was a mechanism for positioning for use, the scope or extent of their influence was not completely clear. Some DPs, award holders and external partners were not aware of CLs’ role in positioning research for use, or felt that other non-GCRF partners had been more instrumental in events they had attended.⁵⁷ FCDO and UNESCO interviewees felt that CLs had not been proactive in facilitating links for engagement – and had not communicated effectively.⁵⁸ One DP had not seen any examples of CLs carrying out dissemination activities, and felt it was too large a task to expect of an individual.⁵⁹

3.1.7 Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies: Covid-19 response

There was good evidence across stakeholder groups that CLs were able to support a transition to different ways of working in response to Covid-19.⁶⁰ The flexibility in the CL role, and their proximity to the research community, allowed them to understand the impacts of Covid-19 and pivot rapidly to new working methods. They convened groups to share learning around remote working for researchers and research councils. They supported researchers in managing delays, reallocating unused travel and fieldwork budgets, or applying for no-cost extensions.

CLs were able to put in place an agile call to fund research and projects responding to Covid-19.⁶¹ Again, the flexibility of their role was key to ensuring that they were able to respond quickly, and in a way that researchers needed at the time. CL networks and knowledge of research on the ground helped ensure that projects that could respond effectively were funded. The impact of Covid-19 on early outcomes of the CL initiative are discussed fully below in EQ 5.

3.1.8 Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working

Some KII evidence emerged that tensions existed between scientific and social science approaches to research, and that this created a barrier to interdisciplinary working.⁶² Stakeholders with a scientific background, including CLs, research council staff and award holders, felt there was too much emphasis on a social science approach, with some resistance to scientific approaches.⁶³ The same group of stakeholders were also more likely to note that some CLs were too focused on their own interests and were not open enough to interdisciplinary working which included science in some form.⁶⁴ Where CLs mentioned research councils being resistant to working in interdisciplinary ways, they used science-focused research councils as an example. One external agency stakeholder echoed this.⁶⁵ Two

⁵⁷ CL30, CL31, CL47, CL53, CL58, CL59, CL63.

⁵⁸ CL58, CL59.

⁵⁹ CL30.

⁶⁰ CL2, CL6, CL13, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL19, CL26, CL28, CL32, CL33, CL36, CL42, CL47, CL65; document 19.

⁶¹ CL1, CL8, CL14, CL17, CL20, CL26, CL86; document 1.

⁶² CL1, CL2, CL7, CL19, CL33, CL34, CL36, CL59.

⁶³ CL7, CL34, CL36.

⁶⁴ CL19, CL33, CL34.

⁶⁵ CL1, CL2, CL7, CL59.

stakeholders thought that having more than one CL in a portfolio helped mitigate against this – where one was science-focused and the other social science-focused.⁶⁶

‘Different disciplinary perspectives meant that actually you got a much stronger sense that they were looking across the whole piece, and the interdisciplinarity was a natural flow from that... they complimented and challenged each other.’ (DP)

3.1.9 Facilitating learning for sustainability and legacy

There was little evidence of clear processes for CLs to share contacts, networks and knowledge with CMs and research councils. It is therefore difficult to draw a judgement about the extent to which the networks and connections CLs brought will be sustained by DPs. Two research council stakeholders found that CLs did not include CMs in conversations with external stakeholders. They saw this as a missed opportunity to maintain connections with new external networks, as they had been built by the CLs and not communicated effectively to research councils.⁶⁷ However, a CL said that they do not take the networks with them when they are finished, but that once they make the introduction, new connections are established.

3.1.10 M&E and regular reporting

The evidence shows two main mechanisms for monitoring CLs’ work. CLs had a line manager within UKRI, with whom they had regular meetings. There was also an appraisal process in place for CLs.⁶⁸ One SAG member mentioned being consulted on one occasion about a CL appraisal. A DP reported that this process did not include CMs, to their detriment. There was very little KII evidence, and no documentary evidence, about the appraisal process or how this supported CLs to carry out their roles effectively.

GCRF Development considerations: promoting fairness, inclusiveness and gender responsiveness

3.1.11 Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement

Despite the CL and GCRF commitment to equitable partnerships, some interviewees across stakeholder groups noted an imbalance in the fundamental design of the CL initiative, with decision-making processes and leadership structures virtually based in the UK, with little LMIC consultation.⁶⁹ One DP noted that there was no LMIC involvement in the design of the programme or of the CL selection and recruitment process. No CLs based in LMICs were considered; all CLs were based in UK institutions. The SAG initially had no LMIC members. After a recruitment drive in December 2020, two people based in institutions in Brazil and Kenya were added, out of a committee of 14 (as of October 2021).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ CL7, CL33.

⁶⁷ CL17, CL33.

⁶⁸ CL12, CL19, CL24, CL69.

⁶⁹ CL8, CL30, CL45, CL65, CL69, CL86; documents 27, 28.

⁷⁰ CL30; documents 27, 28.

‘One question I’d ask myself now which I didn’t think of [at the start of the initiative] – why should these CLs all be British? That shows the journey that we took. When we started, it was about the UK contribution to helping the rest of the world. Now we have become a more globalised institution and our funding portfolio extends well beyond Britain. Open question – if we were to do it again, should we have Challenge Leaders from South America, Africa, etc., and would that change the dynamic?’ (UKRI stakeholder)

Within these structures, however, the CL role was a mechanism to highlight existing inequities and to promote and encourage fairer, more equitable partnerships with LMICs.⁷¹ CLs offered vocal support for LMIC involvement at all stages of the research process – involving LMIC partners in research review panels, ensuring their involvement as PIs, and advocating for them as first authors as a matter of routine. Calls developed by CLs included criteria promoting fair engagement. One example was shared of CLs supporting LMIC institutions with governance/due diligence in order for them to participate.

‘The Challenge Leaders... I worked with... really really do understand that you have to challenge the idea that the Global South scholars are inadequate or don’t have enough knowledge, or are riskier.’ (Award holder)

3.1.12 Gender responsiveness addressed in design and delivery

Gender was included as a cross-cutting theme running through all CL portfolios, with one CL appointed after the initiative had begun to have oversight of gender across the initiative in addition to their portfolio.⁷² Gender and intersecting vulnerabilities were identified as a weakness in the portfolio analysis exercise carried out by CLs. A Network Plus grant was established in 2019 in response as part of the collective programme. The main emphasis was on network building, rather than research funding, to demonstrate the demand for gender and intersectionality to be a systematic consideration in UKRI processes. There was not enough evidence to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of this approach.

Led by the gender specialist, CLs sought to go beyond the UK government requirement for a gender equality statement in all international development research and instead built gender equality considerations into the criteria for all GCRF research proposals.⁷³ Some award holders mentioned this as an important part of their research process. A small amount of evidence also showed the gender specialist CL building capacity of the research community to address gender and intersectionality – through workshops, events and talks – and one example was shared of specific support to find a gender expert for a research project.⁷⁴

3.1.13 Inclusiveness (SEDI) and poverty addressed within design and research processes

Issues of inclusiveness and poverty were largely addressed through the focus on equitable partnerships with LMIC countries. Interviewees from all stakeholder groups confirmed that CLs functioned as advocates and facilitators of more equitable research partnerships.⁷⁵ This

⁷¹ CL10, CL12, CL20, CL50, CL69, CL73.

⁷² CL2, CL13, CL15, CL18, CL24, CL26, CL32, CL50, CL52; documents 22, 25.

⁷³ CL2, CL15, CL36, CL58, CL59, CL65, CL69.

⁷⁴ CL2, CL58, CL59, CL65.

⁷⁵ CL3, CL7, CL8, CL12, CL16, CL21, CL28, CL31, CL32, CL33, CL42, CL47, CL50, CL54, CL73, CL77.

was widely seen as a core GCRF principle that was clear in CLs' work – built into every call, and required to be part of every research proposal submitted. Recruiting CLs with experience of development research or practice was key to ensuring that they were able to support this GCRF development consideration. Some CLs saw their role as contributing to decolonising research – actively and explicitly trying to address a power imbalance and the resulting inequalities within the research system. There was a small amount of mixed feedback on the extent to which processes allowed this to take place.⁷⁶

'Equitable partnerships were the central pillar to everything that was being done.' (CL)

'The principle of equitable partnership was important – there are lots of reasons why GCRF wasn't great but this was the first step in doing something special which is ongoing – decolonising development research.' (CL)

There was clear recognition that this principle of equitable partnership was hampered by UKRI's funding structure.⁷⁷ The evidence suggests that this allows only UK institutions to act as budget holders, which stakeholders felt meant they retained much of the power in the partnership. CLs were also only UK-based. Interviewees found this limited GCRF capacity to be equitable.

'Some of our systems were set up to undermine our principles.' (CL)

3.2 EQ 2: To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?

Box 4. EQ 2 summary

Capacity building was not a significant feature of the CLs ToC.

Analysis from a 2017 ICAI review and an initial portfolio analysis highlighted capacity needs, including cross-research council working, research ethics, interdisciplinary, challenge-led research design and research governance capacity.

There was some evidence of CLs addressing capacity needs at individual and project levels but not at institutional or organisational levels.

There was no clear evidence of how fairness considerations factored into capacity building work, despite advocacy for equitable partnerships in other areas of CLs' work.

EQ 2 is focused on the structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and within the UK. Our approach to answering EQ 2 is to explore the structures and processes in place, using a set of criteria relevant to the CLs initiative to document and discuss our findings. These are provided below.

⁷⁶ CL2, CL3, CL4, CL8.

⁷⁷ CL4, CL6, CL9, CL24, CL28, CL30, CL45, CL50, CL69.

3.2.1 Clear ToC for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes

The CL ToC does not include any activities explicitly linked to capacity building, despite being developed after the start of the initiative when CLs had conducted their initial portfolio analysis.⁷⁸ Although CLs had identified some capacity needs through this exercise (see Section 3.2.2 below), these were not included in the ToC. The portfolio analysis itself is included in the ToC, but seems intended to identify strategic priorities rather than capacity needs. CLs in fact used it to carry out both of these activities. No stakeholders mentioned capacity building when discussing the ToC.⁷⁹ There is some evidence that no formal capacity needs assessment took place after the mapping exercise; this was integrated into the CL role as an ongoing component. However, this is not included in the ToC.

3.2.2 Analysis/understanding of UK and local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs

The 2017 ICAI review identified a need for more harmonised working across GCRF DPs, including research councils, academies and other partners. UKRI's own analysis of the UK ecosystem echoed this. A key component of the CL role was therefore to understand the dynamics and priorities of different DPs and to design calls that would promote more coherent, collaborative working.⁸⁰ Situating the CM role within research councils was also designed with this capacity need in mind.⁸¹

[The role] 'was initially to get comfortable with research councils, teams, academies, agencies that were involved with the disbursements and find links to bring them together in way possible.' (CL)

The initial portfolio analysis undertaken by CLs was another important process in terms of understanding the specifics of the grants and research teams involved in each portfolio. CLs, UKRI central team and other DPs described this as a vital part of identifying more specific capacity needs. Firstly, research ethics in fragile and conflict-affected contexts were identified as a capacity need, and were addressed through consultations, workshops with researchers across regions, and a research paper.⁸² Secondly, GCRF criteria around interdisciplinary proposals were new for many academics at the start of the CL initiative. CLs organised workshops and offered support for the development and application process for interdisciplinary, impact-led proposals which conformed to the equitable partnerships requirement.⁸³ A final major area of need identified was in research governance capacity, both of UK research councils to have risk and due diligence processes in place for working in LMICs, and of LMIC institutions to have sufficient governance structures in place to meet UK requirements.⁸⁴ In terms of research governance, however, evidence on the extent of CLs' contribution to positive change in these areas is unclear. It is difficult to unpick whether this impact relates to GCRF or to CLs specifically.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ CL2, CL4, CL7, CL8, CL9, CL16, CL19, CL20, CL28, CL42, CL63, CL65, CL69, CL77; documents 2, 6, 26.

⁷⁹ CL2, CL6, CL7, CL10, CL13, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL18, CL19, CL21, CL32, CL33; document 4.

⁸⁰ CL2, CL6, CL12, CL13, CL18, CL30, CL86; documents 3, 9, 11.

⁸¹ CL2, CL3, CL4, CL12, CL13, CL14, CL15, CL18, CL19, CL31, CL32, CL33, CL34, CL86; document 4.

⁸² CL4, CL12, CL16, CL28, CL63, CL73.

⁸³ CL2, CL7, CL9, CL28, CL42, CL77; documents 2, 6, 26.

⁸⁴ CL8, CL9, CL20, CL65, CL69, CL77.

⁸⁵ CL2, CL8, CL11, CL12, CL20, CL77.

‘Initially there weren’t many research councils who were prepared to allow LMIC countries to be budget holders – governance and audit concerns were an issue. The perception is that LMICs don’t have the financial systems in place, so that has been problematic – and that’s why research councils were reluctant. This is changing, and GCRF has been part of this process. Capacity building has been a huge emphasis – not just on the research and academic side – but also research governance.’ (CL)

3.2.3 Capacity support that aligns with good practice

There were some examples of effective capacity support to individual award holders. The extent of this support, and how well this aspect of the role was communicated to award holders, is hard to judge, based on the evidence. Commonly cited examples included roadshows, events, and individual interactions which supported development of impact-led, interdisciplinary research. These occurred both in the UK and in LMICs.⁸⁶ Some award holders reported a lot of interactions, but during data collection many award holders contacted for interview had no awareness of CLs or their role. Award holders were not always aware that they could have expected capacity support from CLs, even where they had had some contact.⁸⁷

On the other hand, there is no clear evidence of CL capacity support at organisational or infrastructure level. There is good evidence of CL influence at this level – through networking, advocacy for equitable partnerships, or policy influence (see Section 3.1) – but it is not clear whether this was capacity support. Additionally, the ToC makes clear that influence at this level was considered beyond the scope of the initiative. ODA cuts also curtailed CL activity earlier than the design or ToC⁸⁸ anticipated. (See Section 3.5 below for fuller discussion.)

3.2.4 Fairness considerations integrated into capacity support

While there is good evidence that CLs advocated for fairness in terms of equitable partnerships to the extent possible within GCRF structures, there is little evidence to show how fairness was integrated into capacity support. CLs advocated for, and encouraged research councils to develop, better research governance processes in order to work on a more equitable basis with LMICs. However, there is no real evidence of them practically supporting the process of developing capacity to do this. There are a couple of examples of CLs offering capacity support to LMIC institutions to meet the criteria set for a GCRF grant, as in the case of an institution from Afghanistan which had not previously received UK funding.

3.3 EQ 3: To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented, are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?

Box 5. EQ 3 summary

The introduction of the CLs initiative at a later stage has contributed to the confusion about the role and scope of the CLs. At fund level, there was insufficient lead time between grant approval

⁸⁶ CL1, CL2, CL4, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL8, CL13, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL18, CL26, CL28, CL34, CL36, CL37, CL42, CL45, CL50, CL53, CL58, CL62, CL63, CL65, CL69, CL73, CL77; Documents: 13.

⁸⁷ CL45, CL47, CL73.

⁸⁸ Document 4.

and implementation to develop ideas and partnerships; sufficient time is crucial when working in an interdisciplinary manner.

The CL initiative was driven, in part, by the ICAI review to bring about coherence across the fund, and the appointment of CLs was a quick way to address the gap.

In terms of fairness of structure and processes for UK and LMIC stakeholders, some stakeholders questioned the rationale for appointing CLs solely from the Global North.

EQ 3 is focused on the extent to which processes to support challenge-led research are efficiently implemented and whether they are proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders. Our approach to answering EQ 3 is to explore how processes were implemented, using a set of criteria relevant to the CLs initiative to document and discuss our findings. These are provided below.

3.3.1 Efficiency and timeliness of processes

While there is limited reference on efficiency and timeliness of processes, there is evidence that the introduction of the CLs at a later stage was seen as a barrier. Moreover, ToCs were developed a year after the initiative was launched. Given the confusion about the clarity of roles and scope of the CLs reported by stakeholders⁸⁹ (see Section 3.1.1), the timing for when the CLs were brought on board has played a contributing factor and likely affected CLs' working relationships with their CMs and DPs (see Section 3.5.1).

'That is because they came in halfway through. If it had been written into the governance from the start, it would have been different' (CM)

3.3.2 Efficiency and coherence

The CL initiative was driven, in part, by the ICAI review to bring about coherence across the fund. While their role began after GCRF investments were in place, CLs have quickly filled in the gap. They have worked together as a cohort, drawing on their personal networks and building dialogue with their DPs. They began by conducting a portfolio analysis for each of the six portfolio areas to structure a coherent response in order to develop calls (see Section 3.1.5). They worked together across challenge areas to develop the collective programme. They held regular meetings, co-authored publications and contributed to each other's events (see Section 3.1.7). In the absence of comparable alternatives, it is arguable that their recruitment and the effectiveness of their work as a cohort was an efficient way to bring about coherence within GCRF.

3.3.3 Fairness for partners

Although the CLs initiative was designed to operate at a strategic level, some stakeholders questioned the rationale for appointing CLs solely from the Global North⁹⁰.

'Ludicrous to say they promoted LMICs partnerships in any way – none of them were based in an LMIC institution so added nothing better than us British people sitting in RC.' (Award holder)

⁸⁹ CL2, CL3, CL8, CL12, CL20, CL30, CL33, CL86; documents 8, 9, 11.

⁹⁰ CL30, CL45

At fund level, there is some evidence that progress was being made to make processes fair for partnerships, but informants also said more could be done⁹¹. Calls developed required applicants to detail how they involved local communities to make them more relevant and inclusive. There is also evidence of CLs advocating for more equitable research partnerships (see 3.1.13). There is also strong evidence that research funding panels were diverse, involving experts from LMICs. However, there were reports of stringent funding and reporting requirements that were not appropriate for southern partners. A SAG member said that they felt there was less consultation with communities in the Global South.

‘Part of the challenge is with the money coming from the UK, and with UK PIs being the budget holders. It gives UK partners a lot of power, whether they like it or not – they have the power.’ (CL)

3.4 EQ 4: To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes/impacts, and what evidence exists of these?

- **How signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19**

Box 6. EQ 4 summary

The CLs initiative has made early progress; however, the results are concentrated on a few outcomes from the ToC.

Evidence of contribution to results is most visible in the short-term outcomes from the programme ToC: ‘Increased awareness of GCRF within UK, LMIC and globally’; ‘Research by cluster members informs policy and practice decisions’; and ‘New strengthened relationships with researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders’.

Covid-19 disrupted plans where work was either put on hold or stopped altogether. On the other hand, the pandemic also created new ways of working that further enhanced equitable partnerships with those in the Global South, although this was not universal.

EQ 4 is focused on the extent to which the CLs initiative has made early progress towards the desired outcomes/impacts. This responds to the broader MEQ 2 by looking specifically at what this signature investment has achieved and providing evidence for this. Our approach to answering EQ 4 is to look at some of the achievements, including expected results, and to show the evidence for it. We also explore adaptations to Covid-19 and to other intended and unintended outcomes. Our findings are documented and discussed below.

3.4.1 Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples of how these have been met

There is evidence of early achievements aligned with several outcomes from the CLs ToC. However, the evidence for the results is concentrated on a few outcomes from the ToC. This further supports our earlier finding that, while there is a shared vision for the initiative, it did

⁹¹ CL8, CL10, CL12, CL20, CL26, CL36, CL42, CL45, CL65, CL73

not translate into clear pathways for achieving the initiatives objectives (see Section 3.1.2). Evidence of results supported the following short-term outcomes from the CL ToC:

- **Short-term outcome: Increased awareness of GCRF within UK, LMIC and globally⁹².** CLs' work in COP26 was cited by informants as a key achievement. At the conference, CLs and CMs were involved in showcasing GCRF-funded research, including an exhibition stand in the green zone and social media use to engage external audiences and increase awareness of GCRF globally. A series of events were reported, such as:
 - *'Urban informality and inequity: a call for climate justice'*, co-hosted with Cities Alliance and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). The event, coordinated by CMs and supported by CLs, had an opening address by the Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone, and included speakers from Brazil, Ghana and India. The session took place on the main stage with an audience of more than 100 in person, 300–400 online and a further 4,300 who watched the recording on YouTube.
 - The *GCRF Peak Urban* events took place for official delegates in the blue zone. The Peak urban team presented in the Global Environment Facility Pavilion alongside senior FCDO representation, the World Resources Institute (WRI) chief executive officer (CEO) and the Managing Director of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). This partnership was facilitated by a CM and CL.
 - CLs were also involved in the *Climate adaptation and resilience* series of events, in which a CL developed a core set of questions to frame the series.⁹³ The CL was said to have 'a huge network of good friends in the community and so they're all very willing to work with [the CL] over a couple of weeks to develop this set of core questions'.

In addition to COP26, CLs co-authored publications, including an article for *The Lancet* entitled '*Covid-19 as a global challenge: towards an inclusive and sustainable future*'.⁹⁴ Within the first year of publication, the article was in the 97th percentile for citations.⁹⁵ Another included a report on Mapping Evidence on Education in Emergencies, which emerged from workshops held in Amman, Bogota and Dhaka.

There is evidence of social media use, blogs and interviews with the media to promote the work of GCRF and to disseminate findings. However, these were more ad hoc and centred around key events. A CL reported that external messaging was limited as the communications team was under-resourced and that they often had to do it themselves. A SAG member was also in agreement with the resourcing comment but saw this as CLs not doing enough to pull together a narrative and promote the work and 'early impact of the programmes'.

'That early results showing and demonstrating impact and utilisation are critical and can't be just sort of an add-on [at a] later stage.' (SAG member)

⁹² CL4, CL5, CL9, CL13, CL17, CL19, CL20, CL24, CL31, CL34, CL57

⁹³ <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/responding-to-climate-change/ukri-towards-cop26/climate-adaptation-and-resilience-online-events/>

⁹⁴ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(20\)30168-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(20)30168-6/fulltext)

⁹⁵ The percentile is indicative of how an article compares with other articles or reviews published in the same year.

- **Short-term outcome: Research by cluster members informs policy and practice decisions.** There is emerging evidence of how CLs are influencing and informing policy and practice. One example is of how the CL helped to shift the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction from managing disasters to managing risks. This was verified by a UN official involved in the Sendai Framework⁹⁶.
- **Short-term outcome: New strengthened relationships with researchers, policymakers and other stakeholders⁹⁷.** There is strong evidence of partnerships with academics, policymakers and other stakeholders, e.g. the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Network, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), FCDO, UNESCO, UNDP, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat), INEE and local governments. Some examples include CLs putting together events for the International Development Committee (IDC), a cross-party parliamentary committee, to promote and discuss aspects of GCRF's work with policymakers. There is also strong evidence of CLs building contacts for DPs to showcase research projects they have funded.

'[The CL] was really key in enabling us to access that audience...[their] contacts have been really helpful in enabling us as councils to join in those activities and benefit from them' (CM)

3.4.2 Expected progress

There is also strong evidence further down the results chain, where outcomes are expected to contribute to short-term outcomes⁹⁸. For example, we found strong evidence supporting the outputs *'Proposals for calls co-developed with DPs and address strategic gaps'* and *'CLs support effective call development and decision making'*, which are expected to contribute to short-term-level outcome from the CL ToC: ***'High quality research is funded that supports Challenge Portfolio aims'***

A wide range of stakeholders spoke about CLs setting up programmes that met a research gap (see Section 3.1.3 and Section 3.1.5). This improved the quality of calls as they were better informed.

'Through [the] collective programme, we have developed programmes which wouldn't have happened without CLs – I'm 100% on that' (CM)

'We did really innovative programmes. Typically within UKRI when councils work together it's under strict parameters, and they'll only fund researchers from certain areas, while this [GCRF collective fund] was completely open – innovative in that sense.' (UKRI staff)

However, one DP informant did not agree that the calls for proposals were 'revolutionary or aspirational', saying that the research councils would have achieved this without the CLs.

⁹⁶ CL7, CL53, CL

⁹⁷ CL3, CL5, CL6, CL9, CL12, CL13, CL32, CL86

⁹⁸ CL2, CL4, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL9, CL12, CL20, CL28, CL34, CL57, CL58, CL7, CL9, CL12

3.4.3 Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19

The main impact of Covid-19 was the disruption to plans and programmes where work was either put on hold or stopped altogether⁹⁹. In some cases priorities shifted¹⁰⁰; for example, scoping work to identify gaps was set aside and the focus became more about maximising the impact of existing research. While there is strong evidence of how stakeholders adapted in order to continue working during the pandemic (see Section 3.4.4), it was also reported that programmes that were put on hold due to Covid-19 became easy targets when funding was cut¹⁰¹.

‘Everybody actually just kind of transitioned to that new way of working, and very positively.’ (DP)

Covid-19 created new ways of working that enhanced equitable partnerships with those in the Global South, although this was not universal¹⁰². Several informants spoke about the transition from face-to-face meetings to a virtual way of working. Some reported putting more resources online or holding public webinars. A CL said they looked at how they could work differently, such as conducting data collection safely outdoors, which was the case in South Asia. Some felt that this helped ‘democratise the process’ in that they were able to engage with more people from the Global South. This was particularly the case where PIs from UK universities were unable to travel and local researchers were relied on to deliver the work.

‘I can remember the Challenge Leaders saying, you know, this really boosted our principle of equitable partnerships because they have just had to do more instead of looking to London or Oxford or Newcastle.’ (SAG member)

However, this was not always the case; there were reports of stakeholders who were further disadvantaged, particularly in areas where Internet connectivity was poor.

‘Covid was an earthquake. It certainly affected how universities work. All grant holders have been affected by C19 – global programmes and ODA programmes even more so. Collaborative work has been affected. The up side is that remote working has been internalised and normal. Some aspects of coordination have been made easier. It shows in research too – ICT has brought people together. This is not universal around the world – not every university has world class broadband capability – like everything else – not everybody is as equal as others.’ (Award holder)

There was flexibility with GCRF spend and deliverables¹⁰³. Stakeholders said that GCRF responded flexibly by providing extensions or re-profiling their budgets, e.g. using travel budgets for online dissemination; delivering outputs through webinars or training in-country; remote interviewing. One informant reported additional funding provided for a UK-based

⁹⁹ CL3, CL6, CL8, CL14, CL24, CL28, CL37, CL42, CL47, CL57

¹⁰⁰ CL1, CL14

¹⁰¹ CL1, CL5, CL54

¹⁰² CL2, CL8, CL13, CL16, CL17, CL28, CL32, CL33, CL42, CL45, CL47, CL51, CL86

¹⁰³ CL3, CL8, CL13, CL15, CL17, CL19, CL42

team. CLs were said to be supportive of award holders and that they helped to generate learning from the pandemic.

‘Challenge Leaders were quite instrumental to making sure that we did learn some lessons.’ (CM)

CLs put forward an Agile Response call to address Covid-19¹⁰⁴. Its purpose was to address and mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 in LMICs. A SAG member remarked that the call was an important adaptation to leverage the fund to respond to the situation. Another SAG member added that the GCRF Agile Fund was able to get off the ground very quickly because of the established relationships with partners in areas where the impact of Covid-19 was most acute. This view was supported by CMs.

‘[It was] undoubtedly the case that the GCRF networks allowed people to set up the programmes more effectively and, well, and their results have, as it were, you know, come in ahead of others.’ (SAG member)

3.4.4 Adaptation to unintended outcomes (positive and negative)

There is some evidence, though limited, of positive adaptation to unintended outcomes¹⁰⁵. One reported instance relates to the research ethics work that was not designed to be CLs’ primary purpose but which has resulted in better policy within UKRI. CLs shifted research use of standard ethical procedures to a broader understanding of research ethics – from how it is presented in funding applications to how research is conducted within communities. This was corroborated by a wide range of stakeholders. There is also some evidence that **UK universities are now working in an interdisciplinary manner**. A CL talked about how UK universities are starting to go outside their Research Excellence Framework (REF) star publications to think about working in an interdisciplinary manner by building structures to support and manage grants from GCRF in way that was not possible in the past. However, there was limited evidence to support this claim.

There is also some evidence of negative adaptation to unintended outcomes. This aspect was largely addressed at award level within each portfolio rather than by the CLs initiative directly. Informants, CLs and award holders expressed their frustration with UKRI’s response when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan.¹⁰⁶ As part of one CL portfolio, several GCRF-funded research projects were under way in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control. Researchers working on the projects were at serious risk of harm from the Taliban as people who had accepted British money. Some had to move to safe houses following death threats. This was a difficult situation as, it was felt by respondents that UKRI structures had not responded effectively to this situation, UKRI had no legal authority to act.

¹⁰⁴ CL1, CL6, CL8, CL14, CL15, CL17, CL19, CL20, CL26, CL86

¹⁰⁵ CL3, CL6, CL8, CL12, CL30, CL45, CL86

¹⁰⁶ CL3, CL4, CL86.

3.5 EQ 5: What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)

Box 7. EQ 5 summary

The tension between CLs and research councils, brought about by lack of clarity of roles and communication, has created a barrier for effective joint working and achieving desired outcomes.

While CMs were a mitigating factor to help orient and integrate CLs into UKRI's structure, the extent to which this has been successful is mixed. There is some evidence that alignment of academic disciplines between CLs and DPs has contributed to positive working relations.

EQ 5 is interested in the features of the CLs initiatives that have made a difference in overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes. Our approach to answering EQ 5 is to look at the key barriers emerging from our findings and explore evidence of specific features to overcome these barriers. Our findings are documented and discussed below.

3.5.1 Working relationship between CLs and research councils

A key purpose of the CLs initiative is to bring about coherence and coordination across grants and multiple DPs. However, the limited extent to which CLs have been able to integrate themselves into the UKRI structure, without formal authority or decision-making power in order to, has proved to be a barrier for achieving the desired outcomes¹⁰⁷. CLs expressed there being a sense of 'resistance' from certain research councils. This can be partly attributed to a lack of authority or decision-making power. One CM described it as a 'hostile environment' for CLs to work in. Some saw the lack of clarity of roles as a factor contributing to the tension (see Section 3.1.1). The timing for when CLs were introduced did not help (see Section 3.3.1), as some DPs felt that the new CL roles were thrust upon them and it was not always clear what CLs were bringing to the table. One DP asked CLs what their big ideas were but 'we weren't getting much back from them'. It was also unclear what opportunities there were to engage together, as the CLs were introduced at a later stage (see Section 3.3.1). Some DPs saw CLs as a 'gatekeeper' between the research community and the research councils, blocking the flow of information (see Section 3.1.5).

CMs were a key mitigating factor in the design of the initiative, to help bridge the gap between the CLs and the respective research councils and to temper the risk of CLs following personal objectives over strategic ones¹⁰⁸. This was important, as it is evident from our interviews that some CLs found the UKRI structure difficult to navigate.

'I didn't understand at all there is a big gap between [the] umbrella institution of UKRI and GCRF as a UK-wide portfolio, and individual RC, and other GCRF partners like academies, and it is [an] extremely complex environment'. (CL)

¹⁰⁷ CL1, CL2, CL4, CL7, CL8, CL12, CL13, CL17, CL19, CL30, CL31, CL33, CL34, CL59, CL63

¹⁰⁸ CL4, CL13, CL17, CL31

'It's very hard for [CLs] to actually integrate themselves into the structure and get kind acknowledgement/recognition [...] but, I mean, we, the Challenge Manager have been the main mitigating factor for that.' (CM)

There is evidence of CLs, CMs and UKRI also supporting the importance of the CM role complementing the CLs. Some DPs felt that the CM role was more crucial than that of CLs (see Section 3.1.5). However, their concern was less about CLs' ability to navigate UKRI and more that they found CLs to be more interested in research rather than being strategic or policy-focused. Another DP reported CLs' decisions as driven by more personal than strategic objectives, while another said that they pushed for the role of CM as a way of mitigating this risk. There were other strategies and processes to mitigate the risk of CL conflict of interest and bias (see Section 3.1.4 and Section 3.5.2). Overall, the effectiveness of CMs to integrate CLs into UKRI is mixed.

Alignment of academic disciplines between CLs and DPs positively influenced the nature of their working relations¹⁰⁹. This was supported by a range of stakeholders (CLs, CMs and DPs). Informants said that where CLs were from a different academic background, they were 'speaking a different language' from their DPs, and this made joint working difficult. One DP expressed concerns about the focus of CLs as too narrow and said that they struggled to work across subject areas. However, where the disciplines were aligned, it was reported that there was strong buy-in from the research council.

Stakeholders reported that, over time, the relationships between CLs and DPs improved¹¹⁰. It is unclear precisely what contributed to the changes. Some CLs and CMs acknowledged that there were pre-existing barriers but that, by engaging diplomatically to show that they were an asset rather than a threat, they were able to build trust over time.

3.6 EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:

- **the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?**

Box 8. EQ 6 summary

GCRF is seen as an early leader in its championing of equitable partnerships and interdisciplinarity. Its convening power is difficult to match by any individual research council. The size and scope of the fund and the flexibility it offered were seen as unique and instrumental for achieving outcomes.

There was little awareness of equivalent or alternative funding to GCRF. Where alternative funding was sought or secured, it was on a smaller scale, focused on a specific discipline, and involved more competition for funding.

The cuts were reported to have a deep and far-reaching impact. Informants, almost unanimously, said that the cuts were reputationally damaging and undermined the trust they had built with partners. Furthermore, the opportunity to secure a legacy for GCRF was lost due to the cuts, particularly where projects were just at a point to firm up the next steps. The cuts also had a

¹⁰⁹ CL1, CL7, CL34, CL36

¹¹⁰ CL7, CL18, CL26, CL32, CL34, CL54

significant impact on the CLs, who were representatives of GCRF and in the forefront of engagement with academics and stakeholders.

EQ 6 is focused on the added value or uniqueness of GCRF funding. In contrast to other PEs, it is more difficult to disentangle the Challenge Leaders initiatives from GCRF itself. For instance, it was not possible to discuss the substitution of funding for CLs outside the context of GCRF. Therefore, our approach to answering EQ 6 is to look at the ‘uniqueness’ of GCRF and the extent to which it can be substituted, using a set of criteria relevant to the CLs initiative. We also explore the impact of the funding cuts including on the CLs. Our findings are documented and discussed below.

3.6.1 Uniqueness of GCRF and extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted

GCRF was seen as an early leader pushing for equitable partnerships with strong evidence of how GCRF shifted traditional practices of engagement with southern partners for DPs¹¹¹.

GCRF formalised capacity building to increase research proposals from southern partners; for some stakeholders, this was seen as novel. One CM said their research council had a ‘no international Co-I’ policy, with the exception of GCRF. They believed that this way of working has set a precedent. CLs were also acknowledged as playing a role in facilitating these relationships and processes (see 3.1).

‘Lots of learning [about equitable partnerships] has been taken to other funders – GCRF led the way for others – showing that we need to do this differently, to recognise northern dominance. Perhaps this was the unexpected consequence. GCRF maybe didn’t intend it, but it did end up influencing wider funding community and taking first steps in disrupting northern dominance.’ (CL)

In addition to new ways of working, GCRF had the ability to bring together different actors in a way that would be difficult to do for individual research councils.¹¹² There is also evidence of how it has engaged less traditional ODA participants. Informants said that GCRF reached different actors and audiences that FCDO do not traditionally engage with.

‘This would be difficult to achieve with other funding models – individual research council led models don’t and can’t do this in the same way – the front and centre recognition of global challenges that need different actors – and actual communities who experience these challenges – this is really quite important as [it is] very distinctive’. (CL)

The size and scale of budget and research scope as unique was cited by several stakeholders¹¹³. The value of the GCRF brand was that it was underpinned by a significant budget and strong core values. This was believed to have opened doors for serious discussions and partnerships with external stakeholders.

¹¹¹ CL1, CL3, CL4, CL5, CL6, CL7, CL8, CL9, CL12, CL13, CL14, CL20, CL26, CL28, CL30, CL32, CL33, CL34, CL36, CL37, CL42, CL45, CL47, CL53, CL54, CL57, CL58, CL62, CL63, CL65, CL77, CL86

¹¹² CL1, CL3, CL5, CL8, CL33, CL63

¹¹³ CL6, CL9, CL31, CL45, CL50, CL57, CL58,

GCRF was also seen as distinctive in the way that it offered a level of openness and flexibility with how it funded.¹¹⁴ A SAG member said that in their experience, GCRF operated in a way that was distinct to other funds and projects, such as funding pump priming, capacity building and network building. The stakeholder also remarked that it is highly unusual for UK funds to hire people abroad. CLs, DPs and award holders also reported their experience of openness with how GCRF is funded.

3.6.2 Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality, etc. (as defined in the VfM rubric)

Stakeholders were not aware of equivalent or alternative sources of funding¹¹⁵. One CL was more optimistic that there will be other forms of funding but did not specify what these were. An award holder said that money was there but values have changed:

‘It’s disappointing – the UK aid programme is contracting. Even more frustrating than that is the loss of confidence that everybody has... Everybody is much more insecure, risk averse and conservative and those things run counter to the character of GCRF. I’m frustrated more by the impact on values, than the financial issues. Money will always be there somewhere, but damage to values matter - things will be more small scale and more obvious now.’ (Award holder)

Some stakeholders were able to secure some funding towards their projects; however, these were ‘partial’ alternatives and not at the level of GCRF funding.¹¹⁶ There is evidence that some research councils, such as the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), were looking to continue supporting the work. However, the amount of money was smaller, which implies greater competition for resources. An award holder added that although there is some funding available, they would be required to follow more routine research council processes that do not cater for international cooperation and partnerships. There is also mention of universities plugging the gap in funding following the cuts, but the evidence is patchy.

3.6.3 Impact of funding cuts

‘Short answer: Covid has been a challenge; the ODA budget cuts have been catastrophic.’ (CL)

The future of programmes is uncertain; some have stopped entirely as a result of the cuts¹¹⁷. There was a level of uncertainty about how programmes would continue following cuts as deep as 70%. There is evidence of scaling down of ambition and scope of programmes, including learning and dissemination events. In several cases, programmes were cut altogether. There were limited cases where stakeholders were not affected by the cuts either directly or indirectly.

¹¹⁴ CL20, CL21, CL31, CL33

¹¹⁵ CL4, CL8, CL21, CL69, CL86

¹¹⁶ CL32, CL47, CL63, CL73

¹¹⁷ CL1, CL2, CL16, CL8, CL18, CL20, CL26, CL30, CL37, CL54, CL77, CL78, CL86

The impact has affected partners in different ways, including the loss of jobs or livelihoods¹¹⁸CLs, CMs and award holders spoke about partners in LMICs who had been told that they had funding and a job and suddenly found themselves in a precarious position. Some were partners who did not have regular jobs in institutions.

‘The ODA cuts threw the principle of equality under the bus.’ (CL)

Reputational damage to GCRF, UKRI and UK and the undermining of trust as a result of the cuts was cited by a wide number of stakeholders¹¹⁹. Some extended the reputational damage to the UK government, citing examples of countries they were working in where other donors continue to provide a high level of funding.

The impact of how the cuts were communicated was seen to further undermine the trust that had taken time to develop with partners¹²⁰. Some felt that the way the cuts were communicated did not take into account the difficulties and implications for the partners.

‘We had gone out and built relationships of trust. UKRI – we could have handled our comms more sensitively. GCRF has a heart behind it. All of that was removed.’ (CM)

‘The way it was managed was disgraceful and shameful – to withdraw those funds that had already been allocated was shameful. It really really undermined so much of the good work that the GCRF programme had achieved.’ (CL)

‘We conduct due diligence and then renege on our commitments through these cuts’ (Award holder)

An opportunity to secure a legacy for GCRF was lost¹²¹. A wide range of stakeholders said they were just at the point of thinking about the legacy of the project once it came to a close; however, the abruptness of the cuts did not allow for such planning to take place. Some talked about the loss of contacts and the time and energy invested in them. There was also a loss of opportunity to showcase, disseminate or promote research findings.

However, there was some, though limited, evidence of respondents who were more optimistic about the legacy of GCRF. They felt that the interdisciplinarity and equitable partnership that GCRF began will not be lost with the investment.

The cuts also had a direct impact on CLs¹²². Stakeholders who worked more closely with CLs said that the CLs were on the forefront dealing with individuals from the research community who were upset. There was confusion about the role of CLs: due to their strategic involvement in directing the fund, it was misunderstood as also carrying fiduciary responsibilities for cutting programmes. This was particularly difficult where CLs had played an active role in encouraging individuals to apply. One CL resigned as a result of the cuts.

¹¹⁸ CL3, CL4, CL8, CL19, CL69

¹¹⁹ CL3, CL4, CL6, CL8, CL13, CL45, CL63, CL77, CL78, CL86

¹²⁰ CL4, CL8, CL15, CL16, CL17, CL26, CL34, CL73

¹²¹ CL1, CL3, CL15, CL17, CL30, CL32, CL86

¹²² CL1, CL2, CL3, CL5, CL8, CL12, CL13, CL14, CL15, CL17, CL18, CL28, CL31, CL37, CL54, CL63, CL65, CL86

*‘Because they have been quite public representatives, ambassadors for GCRF, and have brought in lots of their contacts working on it [...] only to find that a lot of our investments have been cut and a lot of work we’ve done for the last three years has been damaged by those cuts [...] I think it was a huge disappointment and a bit of a public embarrassment as well’
(CM)*

Moreover, CLs were kept out of communications about the cuts. There is some evidence to suggest that this was deliberate as UKRI was looking to ‘shield’ CLs. Others said they were not included as they were too close to projects. One CL said that they were perceived as a liability due to their relationships with academic communities. The lack of clarity in UKRI communications about how cuts were made thereby contributed further to already strained relationships.

4 Conclusions

By drawing on the findings from this process evaluation, this section aims to answer the MEQ *'How well are GCRF investments working and what have they achieved?'* within the context of the CLs initiative.

While there was a clear sense among stakeholders of the broad vision and purpose for the CLs initiative, the structures and processes for how CLs would carry out this vision were not well defined. The CL initiative came about partly in response to ICAI criticism that GCRF lacked coherence and strategic oversight. However, the lack of clarity in defining the scope of the role, and particularly the mechanisms for how the CLs would work with the DPs, resulted in a degree of tension in their relationship with the research councils, including CMs. The tension was particularly evident where CLs were seen to operate in a way that excluded CMs or their DPs in decisions or in relationship building with external stakeholders.

Moreover, the extent to which CLs have integrated themselves into UKRI and provided coherence across DPs remains a key sticking point. There was confusion about the scope of the CL role as they reported directly to UKRI but did not have the level of authority or decision-making powers. There is also evidence of issues of alignment between the academic expertise of the CLs and the research councils they were working with. This has created barriers for CLs to generate support and buy-in from DPs. This further points to the lack of support structures in place to help CLs to achieve their objectives.

Yet, in spite of the lack of clarity and support mechanism, the CLs worked well as a cohort. Together they developed processes for cross-portfolio work, such as the collective programme and the Agile Response call to address the Covid-19 pandemic. They met regularly, participated in each other's events and co-authored publications. To some extent, the ambiguity in the roles allowed them to respond to the needs of the portfolio, and gave them flexibility to develop a coherent approach as a team.

The personal contact and network of CLs is seen a key asset and factor contributing to the achieving GCRF outcomes, but there were missed opportunities owing to a lack of formal processes. There is strong evidence that CLs brought their personal contacts and networks to their role to enable them to deliver the portfolio, be it other academics or experts, partners from the Global South or policymakers. They drew on their networks to develop calls, build partnerships, disseminate findings and influence policies. However, as there were no formal processes for how these contacts were utilised, it led to some missed opportunities for more joined-up work with the DPs and UKRI. There were also perceptions that the challenge areas were too closely tied to CLs' own interests and networks.

Overall, the CLs initiative has made early progress towards its desired outcomes. However, funding cuts and the lack of clarity and support structure have impeded potential areas of achievements or expected outcomes. The CL initiative has its own 'nested' ToC aligned with the GCRF ToC. While it was not used as a reference point, there is evidence of contributions to some ToC outcomes. CLs have raised the profile of GCRF, advocated strongly for more equitable partnerships and created opportunities to share messages, such as the *Lancet* article. Progress was also made towards short-term outcomes, but some remain at the output level. This is partly attributed to funding cuts, which resulted in work being either cancelled or

curtailed. However, there are also broader structural issues such as clarity, positioning and support for CLs to bring DPs on board.

4.1 Lessons and recommendations to inform improvements in the future delivery of signature investments akin to the CLs Initiative (EQ 7)

Box 9. Summary

Recommendation 1: Define the scope, responsibilities and performance expectations of specific roles to strengthen strategic positioning, coherence, relevance and positioning for use, such as those of CLs and CMs.

Recommendation 2: Reassess the positioning of leadership roles, such as those of CLs, to more effectively provide thought leadership and coordination of multiple DPs.

Recommendation 3: Recruit LMIC partners in strategic and leadership roles where possible – both as CLs and on the SAG.

EQ 7 looks at lessons that can inform future delivery of similar signature investments, such as the CLs initiative, and promote learning across GCRF. It provides the following recommendations, taking into account the lessons from this initiative.

4.1.1 Recommendation 1: Define the scope, responsibilities and performance expectations of specific roles, such as those of CLs and CMs, to strengthen strategic positioning, coherence, relevance and positioning for use.

Greater clarity on CLs' role is needed for any similar scheme in the future. While flexibility in the role allowed CLs space to shape their work to their portfolio, there was too much ambiguity. Stakeholders, and CLs themselves, were unclear on the scope and extent of the role. This meant that CLs were slower to get started with their roles, and it contributed to confusion and tense relations with DPs. It also means that it is difficult to judge what 'good performance' looks like in the role. Similarly, the CM role requires careful consideration. The CL and CM roles became too hierarchical rather than complementary. This meant that CMs' grant making and call designing experience was not fully utilised. In addition, the exclusion of CMs from some strategic and networking activities or communication meant that knowledge and connections were not transferred as effectively as they could have been. In particular, processes for creating links between CLs networks and research should be intentionally established.

4.1.2 Recommendation 2: Reassess the positioning and management authority of leadership roles, such as those of CLs, within the UKRI architecture or beyond, to more effectively provide thought leadership and coordination of multiple DPs.

It was evident that CLs' academic expertise and connections to the wider research community were seen as an asset by stakeholders. However, the positioning of CLs created obstacles in their working relationships with the DPs. They were operating at a strategic level as paid UKRI staff, working closely with the research councils related to their portfolio, but without any formal authority and decision-making power. It was also unclear how they were expected to

work with the DPs, and this became a barrier in generating buy-in from some of the research councils. This created confusion not just at the onset but further along, such as when funding cuts were announced and there were questions among wider stakeholders about what the role of CLs was. There were also questions about whether candidates were recruited at the right level with the capacity to convene and network in relevant policy spaces. While there are several options for future models, it is important to think carefully about the central aims of such a role in order to create the right incentives for attracting prospective candidates and to enable such leaders to work effectively within the architecture.

4.1.3 Recommendation 3: Recruit LMIC partners in strategic and leadership roles where possible alongside UK-based leaders – both as CLs and on the SAG.

CLs relied on their own international networks and connections to catalyse new ideas. However, as all CLs were UK-based, there was an unmanaged risk of concentrating efforts around a narrower set of personal networks. If similar investments are to ensure greater fairness and equity in structures at fund level, it would be important to position LMIC partners in strategic positions such as CLs or on the SAG, alongside UK-based academics. This would help to mobilise a broader and more diverse range of global networks to enrich the strategic and thought leadership in the fund. The commitment to equitable partnerships was undermined to some extent by fundamental structures such as the emphasis on UK-based strategic leadership.

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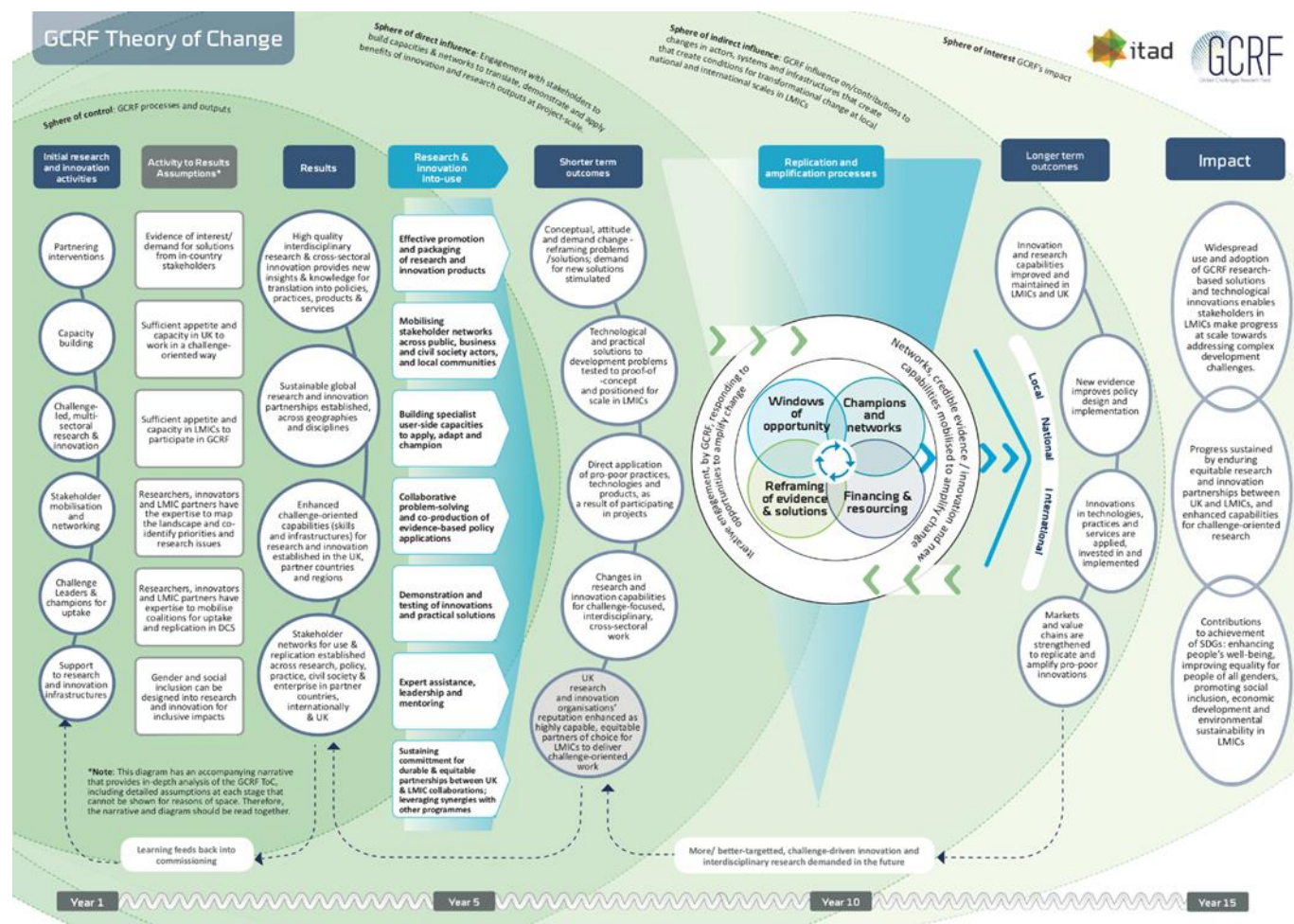
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Annexes

Annex 1: GCRF Theory of Change



Annex 3: Research tools

Annex 3a: KII topic guide

Instructions

Topic guides will need to be contextualised for individual stakeholders.

- **Build your own topic guide:** You should select questions from here and contextualise them to the Process Evaluation specific area.
- **This template should also be used as the KII Write-Up Template** – save a copy of each template with the name of the KI, and save in your folders.
- **Consent:** Please give respondents the introduction and ensure that you have gained explicit consent.

Topic guide

Programme/Award	
Interviewee name	
Position and organisation	
Interviewer name	
Date of interview	

Introduction

Background:

- We are evaluators from Itad, RAND Europe and NIRAS-LTS – a UK-based consortium of research organisations with specialisms in evaluation.
- We have been commissioned by BEIS to carry out an evaluation of GCRF.
- The purpose of this interview is to understand [adapt as relevant].
- The interview will last around 45–60 minutes.

Consent

- As this is an independent evaluation, all interviews are confidential, anonymised and non-attributable. Everything you tell us will be confidential, and your name will not be used in any of our reports. We may use quotes from the interview in our reporting, but all quotes will be non-attributable.
- Do you have any questions about the research, or concerns you would like to raise before we start?
- Do you consent to be interviewed on this basis? [Y/N]

Recording consent [only if you choose to record]:

- We would also like to record the interview to facilitate note-taking and later analysis. The recording would not be accessed by anyone beyond our team and would be deleted following analysis.
- Do you consent to being recorded on this basis? [Y/N]

TOPIC:			
1. Structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes			
	SUB-TOPIC	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS FOR CRITERIA
1	Selection and set-up processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Could you tell us a little about your role within [name of programme]? 2. Why was [insert name of signature investment here] set up and what are its goals? 3. How was the ToC developed and who was involved? 4. How was the scope of the call defined and who was involved? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Were priorities developed based on existing research and stakeholder needs? If so, how? b. How was coherence? 5. What were the eligibility criteria for applicants? Were any particular applicant groups targeted? 6. What were the timelines for application? How long were calls issued for? 7. How are proposals evaluated? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Who is involved in the evaluation process and how are they selected? b. What are the criteria for selection? c. How long does the evaluation process take and what were the demands on different groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence • ToC and shared vision • Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge • Framing of eligibility of applicants and target groups • What gender and poverty dimensions were integrated in the call • The process of identifying the gender and poverty dimensions, e.g. access to experts • Was there a fund-specific gender equality commitment outlined at the outset or were any gender/inclusion dimensions integrated with the call's objectives? [Translates into dedicated resources]
RESPONSES HERE:			

<p>2</p>	<p>Design and Implementation processes (ODA research excellence)</p>	<p>1. How are specific development considerations built into the process of call development and proposal evaluation? For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gender responsiveness b. Poverty and social inclusion c. Equitable partnerships and wider fairness d. Relevance to local needs e. Coherence with the wider portfolio (in the programme, in GCRF, elsewhere) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance + coherence in design and delivery • Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity • Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes, e.g. gender in context analysis • Gender balance/composition of the evaluation team • Inclusion of 'gender experts' as part of the evaluation team and in the design of the calls for proposal? • Target for women applicants? • Evaluation criteria – gender equality scoring • Gender balance in the research team? • Gender expertise in the team? • Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes • Capacity needs identified and assessed • GESI considered in stakeholder engagement and dissemination design
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RESPONSES HERE:			
3	Management of the programme and awards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you manage your portfolio to ensure it is coherent and take advantage of synergies where they exist? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do you coordinate and interact with other parts of GCRF? b. How do you make your portfolio work together, both within the programme itself and within GCRF? c. What opportunities are there for networking between award holders? d. How do you support interdisciplinary research? 2. How do you manage the award/programme to ensure that development considerations are integrated into delivery in an ongoing way? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Gender responsiveness b. Poverty and social inclusion c. Equitable partnerships and wider fairness d. Relevance to local needs 3. How do you manage and adapt to changing circumstances? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What did you do to manage COVID-19? b. What did you do to manage the funding cuts? c. Are there any other circumstances in which you have had to be agile? Do awards have flexibility to change in response to circumstances once they have started? 4. How, if at all, do you consider the potential negative consequences of the award/programme? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are the potential risks and how do you mitigate them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort-building, aggregate-level R&I into use) • Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19 • Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working • Promoting coherence between awards • Negative consequences mitigated and a ‘do no harm’ approach • Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy • Guidelines/capacity building on the integration of gender analysis into research/innovation cycle • Engagement with gender experts • M&E and regular reporting • Programme level - how are they monitoring gender, e.g. track applicants, track minorities and how much grant was sought, how much grant was awarded, female researchers tend to ask for less funding and get less

		<p>b. How do you ensure you do no harm?</p> <p>5. What are your monitoring and evaluation processes?</p> <p>a. How do you ensure the information helps inform learning and improvement, within awards, within the programme, across GCRF?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do they have a gender equality strategy, how are they tracking that, systems and monitoring across awards?
<p>RESPONSES HERE:</p>			

4	Capacity development	<p>1. How is capacity strengthening delivered in the programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How do you assess capacity needs? For LMIC partners and for UK partners. ○ How do you ensure capacity strengthening is supported? ○ How do you assess it? ○ At which levels does capacity strengthening occur (in both directions)? ○ How are fairness considerations included in your capacity strengthening? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear Theory of Change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes ● Including capacity development for UK partners as well as LMIC partners ● Analysis/understanding of local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs ● Gender and inclusion analysis of capacity needs, both LMIC and UK ● Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&I infrastructure ● Fairness considerations integrated ● Tracking of GESIP and Fairness aspects
RESPONSES HERE:			

5	Engagement	<p>How do you ensure the work you support is well positioned for use?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What are your engagement and dissemination strategies? How do you build and maintain relationships with potential users of research? How much happens at the programme level and how much is left to award holders? Is Gender and inclusion factored into the development of engagement strategies? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement Positioning for use in design and delivery ('fit for purpose' engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)
RESPONSES HERE:			

TOPIC: 2. Efficiency, proportionality and VFM of processes to support challenge-led research			
	SUB-TOPIC	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
1	Efficiency, proportionality of processes Fairness for partners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent are processes efficient and proportionate? Why/why not? To what extent do processes promote VfM and cost-effectiveness? How/how not? To what extent are processes fair for LMIC partners? Why/why not? 	Efficiency and timeliness of processes Fairness for partners Processes promote a focus on GESIP

RESPONSES HERE:

TOPIC:			
3. Early progress towards desired outcomes/impacts			
	SUB-TOPIC	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
1	Key outcomes and achievements	<p>What have been the key achievements and outcomes of the programme?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How well do these align with your ToC and vision for the programme? b. Have there been any unintended or unexpected outcomes (positive or negative)? <p>2. What impact has Covid-19 and the funding cuts had on your ability to achieve these outcomes?</p> <p>3. Beyond Covid-19 and the funding cuts, what have been the barriers to delivering on your intended outcomes? For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Risks in the research environment (organisation, support for research) ii. Risks in the political environment (underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of issues) iii. Risks in the data environment (data availability and agreements) <p>4. What factors have helped overcome barriers and achieve the intended outcomes? For example:</p>	<p>Results and outcomes from programme ToCs</p> <p>Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress</p> <p>Unintended outcomes (positive and negative)</p> <p>GESIP-related outcomes</p> <p>Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maturity of the field • Research capacity strengthening • Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research) • Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves) • Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Organisational capacity (support from IPP, own institution) ii. Wider networks 	<p>Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model</p> <p>Enablers or challenges in applying GESIP guidance to your innovation or research?</p>
RESPONSES:			

TOPIC:			
4. Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding			
	Sub-topic	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
1		<p>Given the Covid-19 impacts AND funding cuts, to what extent do you think GCRF funding can be substituted?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What alternative sources of funding exist for this award/programme? 2. What aspects/interventions within the award/programme relied on GCRF funding? Are there alternatives? 3. What are the next steps for the award/programme, e.g. will you be pursuing a new funding strategy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which GCRF funding can be substituted • Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality etc (in VfM rubric) • Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding/response to Covid-19

RESPONSES HERE:

Topic			
5. Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF			
	SUB-TOPIC	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
1	Lessons for award holders Lessons for funders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What have been the key lessons learned for you as award holder/programme manager? 2. What improvements could future ODA project/programmes make? 	
RESPONSES HERE:			

Annex 3b: Common codebook – Stage 1b

*Note: VfM-specific data needs are mapped in blue against this framework to show where these fit, but also to flag a request for looking at **resource allocation to southern partners and rationale for this** [sub-code 2.2: ‘fairness to partners’].

PARENT CODE	SUB-CODE	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
1. Structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes	1.1 Selection and set-up processes	Presence of and description of the ToC/vision for the programme; information on how the call was defined and who was involved, and on how projects were selected and the review process (and who was part of that)
	1.2 Design and Implementation processes (ODA research excellence)	The ways in which, and the extent to which, development considerations are built into calls and proposals (gender responsiveness, poverty, social inclusion, equitable partnerships; relevance and local needs) <i>(VfM: allocation of resources to LMIC partners)</i>
	1.3 Management of the programme and awards	Any synergies or approaches to identifying synergies across the programme, or GCRF portfolio (coherence); management processes to ensure that development needs are met, reviewed and integrated (gender responsiveness, poverty, social inclusion, equitable partnerships; relevance and local needs); approach and flexibility of management processes in changing circumstances or with changing research/stakeholder priorities; any considerations of negative impacts of the research/process; monitoring and evaluation processes
	1.4 Capacity development	Approach to capacity strengthening – understanding capacity strengthening needs (and for who), and the extent to which, and how, capacity is being considered or approached; and what

		considerations are driving capacity strengthening (needs of LMIC/UK researchers)
	1.5 Engagement for delivering research	Approach to engagement with local researchers or other projects/programmes operating in the context, and with non-research stakeholders (coherence)
	1.6 Engagement with users	Any engagement with intended users of the research; stakeholder identification; targeting to user needs; dissemination strategies (for uptake)
2. Efficiency, proportionality and VfM of processes to support challenge-led research		
	2.1 Efficiency, proportionality of processes	Whether processes are efficient and whether they are (dis)proportionate to the scale/scope of funding or ambitions. Any reflections on whether the processes are cost-effective (or not)
	2.2 Fairness for partners	Processes that support (or not) LMIC partners VfM: allocation of resources to LMIC partners and rationale for this
3. Early progress towards desired outcomes/impacts		
	3.1 Key intended outcomes and achievements	Intended (ToC) results and outcomes (VfM: research knowledge-into-results)
	3.2 Key unintended outcomes and achievements	Unintended results and outcomes (VfM: research knowledge-into-results)
	3.3 Impact of Covid-19	Effects of the pandemic on delivery and results from the programme
	3.4 Impact of funding cuts	Effects of the spending review funding cuts on delivery and results from the programme
	3.5 Barriers within the context	Risks: in internal/institutional support for research; data availability; political environment and awareness of the challenge/issues; the need for research capacity strengthening (VfM: risks – identification and management)

	3.6 Enabling factors	Factors helping to overcome barriers and deliver outcomes e.g. research capacity; programme support; wider networks
4. Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding	4.1 Alternative sources of funding	Other funding bodies, or programmes, supporting similar research
	4.2 Aspects unique to GCRF funding	What can't be replaced, e.g. in terms of funding scope or scale (VfM: 'additionality')
	4.3 Changes to funding strategy	Reflections on where funding may come from in the future to progress the research or support new research (if not GCRF)
5. Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF	5.1 Lessons for award holders	Capturing any key lessons learned and improvements for future awards
	5.2 Lessons for funders	Capturing any key lessons learned and improvements for future programmes

Annex 3c: Assessment rubrics for EQs 1–4

Table 5: Rubric for EQ 1

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p>Beginning: There are some indications that the programme is meeting a few of the management criteria but, overall, structures and processes are nascent or underdeveloped and unlikely to effectively support challenge-led R&I.</p>	<p>Developing: There are some indications that the programme is meeting several of the management criteria but, overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to effectively support challenge-led R&I.</p>	<p>Good: There are several indications that the programme is meeting most of the management criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support challenge-led R&I.</p>	<p>Exemplary: There are several indications that the programme is meeting almost all of the management criteria and that, overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting challenge-led R&I and put the award at the cutting edge of managing challenge R&I for development impact.</p>

Table 6: Rubric for EQ 2

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p>Beginning: There are some indications that the award is meeting a few of the capacity strengthening criteria but, overall, structures and processes are nascent or underdeveloped and unlikely to support effective R&I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p>Developing: There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the capacity strengthening criteria but, overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to support effective R&I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p>Good: There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the capacity strengthening criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support R&I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p>Exemplary: There are several indications that the award is meeting almost all of the capacity strengthening criteria and that, overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting R&I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK, and put the award at the leading edge of capacity strengthening practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.</p>

Table 7: Rubric for EQ 3

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p>Beginning: There are some indications that award processes are efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but, overall, structures and processes are nascent or underdeveloped to meet the criteria.</p>	<p>Developing: There are some indications that award processes are meeting the criteria – efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money – but, overall, structures and processes require further strengthening to meet the criteria effectively.</p>	<p>Good: There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners.</p>	<p>Exemplary: There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria and that, overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners, and put the award at the leading edge of practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.</p>

Table 8: Rubric for EQ 4

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p>Beginning: There are some indications that the award has made some progress to its ToC but, overall, progress is at an early stage (reflect on whether this is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why).</p>	<p>Developing: There are some indications that the award is progressing along its ToC and meeting early milestones, but further efforts are needed to build up progress to meet as anticipated in the ToC and to ensure that it is well supported and adaptive (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why).</p>	<p>Good: There are several indications that the award is progressing well along its ToC, is meeting milestones as anticipated and adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19, and that progress is well supported (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why).</p>	<p>Exemplary: There are indications that the award is surpassing expectations of progress along its ToC, is meeting milestones and adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19, and that progress is well supported and puts the award at the leading edge of performance.</p>



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