

# GCRF Process Evaluation Report, Stage 1b

## GROW Process Evaluation

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## List of acronyms

African SWIFT	African Science for Weather Information and Forecasting Techniques
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
CEPHaS	Strengthening Capacity in Environmental Physics, Hydrology and Statistics for Conservation Agriculture Research
Co-I	Co-Investigator
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCP	Development Corridors Partnership
DFID	Department for International Development
DP	Delivery Partner
DSA	Daily Subsistence Allowance
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
ETCR	Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
GESIP	Gender, Social Inclusion and Poverty
GNI	Gross National Income
GROW	Growing Research Capability
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IR	Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMIC	Low-and Middle-Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEQ	Main Evaluation Question
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council

NGI	Non-Governmental Organisation
Ni3	None in Three
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEAK	Building Capacity for the Future City in Developing Countries
PI	Principal Investigator
PO	Project Officer
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
R4D	Research for Development
R4HC	Research for Health in Conflict
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
RECAP	Research Capacity Building and Knowledge Generation to Support Preparedness and Response to Humanitarian Crises and Epidemics
RMT	Research Management Team
RQ+	Research Quality Plus
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STFC	Science and Technology Facilities Council
SUNRISE	Strategic University Network to Revolutionise Indian Solar Energy
TCCP	Tobacco Control Capacity Programme
TIGR2ESS	Transforming India's Green Revolution by Research and Empowerment for Sustainable Food Supplies
ToC	Theory of Change
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	United Kingdom Research and Innovation
UKRSA	UK Research Staff Association
VfM	Value for Money

# 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 Growing Research Capability (GROW) programme, a GCRF 'signature investment' aimed at growing research capacities across the globe.

The evaluation found GROW has largely delivered on its vision to build capacities for interdisciplinary, challenge-led research. It did this through the development and strengthening of research partnerships, as well as through engagement with local stakeholders, breaking through silos between countries, disciplines and generations of researchers, and successfully building links between researchers and wider communities in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

## 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 GROW programme. It seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question: *How are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?*

## Overview of the GROW programme

The call for this programme, launched by United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) in 2016, had the primary aim to grow research capacities across the globe by strengthening capacities in developing countries, building and enhancing research collaborations, and increasing the engagement of the UK research base with development challenges.

A total of £225 million was invested in a portfolio of 37 projects ranging in value from £3 million to £8 million, involving over 60 countries and focusing on a wide range of challenge areas, e.g. inclusive education, conflict reduction and affordable sustainable energy. GROW awards were funded for four years (2017–21). Several of these projects received a three-month no-cost extension until March 2022 in order to compensate for delays due to Covid-19.

## GCRF evaluation

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*investments working, and what have they achieved?*

### Evaluation approach

The GROW process evaluation has taken place at two levels: the programme as a whole and its individual awards. Following an initial portfolio-wide desk review, a sample of 13 awards was selected for in-depth analysis. Methods included secondary data and document review, key informant interviews (KIIs) at the programme and award level, and analysis of a GCRF fund wide survey.

### Key Findings:

**GROW's processes and structures are well aligned with the GCRF strategy and have supported challenge-led interdisciplinary research, particularly with strong practices to promote fairness of opportunity, process and benefits in partnerships with LMIC institutions; gender responsiveness could have been more strongly supported from the programme level. (EQ 1)**

GROW is well aligned with the GCRF strategy, and in particular it plays a key role in relation to the second strategic objective (*'Strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership with excellent UK research and researchers'*). The framing of the GROW Funding Call closely reflects the programme's vision and ToC.

The governance and management structure of GROW awards appear generally adequate, although their specific configuration varies significantly across the portfolio, as does the level of human resources dedicated to management. Clearer and greater guidance from UKRI in a number of areas would have been welcomed by award holders.

Research collaborations between UK and Southern institutions were an essential requirement of the GROW call, as a key dimension to fulfil the programme's vision of growing research capabilities for challenge-led research. Across the portfolio, significant thought and effort have gone into promoting fairness in partnerships, in terms of opportunities, process and benefits. Overall, however, the evaluation found that short

timescales for design and set up meant GROW awards tended towards nurturing already established Southern partnerships than creating new ones.

GROW has encouraged award holders to embrace interdisciplinary ways of working, including, in many cases, breaking silos between natural and social sciences. While the breadth and depth of interdisciplinary collaboration varies across the portfolio, many GROW academics spoke of their 'interdisciplinary learning journey' as one of the most valuable and unique features of the programme.

Gender responsiveness, namely integrating measures for promoting gender equality, appears generally low in most awards, with the exception of those where gender is an explicit focus of the research. In general, awards made an effort to ensure gender balance in the team and in governance bodies, as well as in terms of panels for workshops and symposia. There is often, however, little reflection on how the development challenges tackled through the awards had different gender manifestations and implications.

**GROW has been notably successful in delivering on its vision, with clear results in terms of strengthened research and innovation capacity in both LMICs and the UK, often going beyond academia to support local stakeholders' capacities. Wider impact of the programme on the research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem in the Global South needs further exploration in later stages of the evaluation. (EQ 2)**

Capacity development was central to the GROW vision. The primary beneficiaries of capacity development were early career researchers (ECRs). ECR programmes were set up in different shapes across the portfolio, providing opportunities for exchanges, mentoring, training, collaboration, networking, and support for further funding. This focus on 'passing the baton to the next generation' was seen by many as the real value added of the programme. Although there was criticism that GROW awards tended to narrowly equate 'ECR' with a 'post-doc' role, which has minimal correspondence in Southern research contexts.

While most capacity development happened at an individual level, there are also interesting examples



of projects building capacities of Southern institutions in specific areas.

Capacity development efforts have also gone beyond academia, with many awards working to build capacities of local stakeholders, including local communities. In these cases, ethical issues relating to engaging with local communities had to be carefully navigated and managed.

The GROW programme had a recognised impact on UK academia – changing modes of working and increasing the capacity of academics and their institution to conduct challenge-led interdisciplinary research for development impact. In this respect, engaging with local communities in ways that were fair also played an important role in building the capacity of researchers (both UK and Southern partners) for ‘doing research differently,’ namely seeing the problem from the perspective of local communities and helping to overcome disciplinary siloes.

Overall, however, there has been little systematic reflection at the programme level on the impact of GROW on the overall research ecosystem in the Global South (beyond the institutions that are directly involved with the GROW awards). While the GROW Funding Call encouraged building ‘new’ partnerships as well as strengthening existing ones, a number of factors (primarily the limited time available at the application and set-up stage) have made GROW more conducive to nurturing a limited number of existing partnerships than to establishing new one. This has implications for contextual fairness, namely in terms of disproportionate capacity development support and funding going to a small proportion of organisations and researchers in the Global South.

**Management and reporting processes generally appeared to be proportionate and not overly onerous, while more guidance on Value for Money (VfM) would have promoted a more consistent approach across the portfolio. (EQ 3)**

Issues related to the management of finance, such as payment in arrears, posed a particular challenge for many Southern partner institutions.

No specific guidance was provided around assessing VfM, and awards generally followed their lead institution’s procurement guidelines. As a result, the way in which VfM was understood and

reported focused mostly on the dimensions of ‘economy’ and ‘efficiency’. More reflection and guidance are needed on how to incorporate wider considerations of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘equity’ in assessing VfM of collaborative research projects.

**GROW awards have made significant progress towards their intended impact, and have been able to successfully respond and adapt to the unexpected and unprecedented challenges of Covid-19, thanks to a large extent to the flexibility provided by the funders. (EQ 4)**

The GROW awards have a variety of different proposed pathways to impact – involving policy uptake, influencing practice and private investments, and providing direct benefits to local communities. Capacity development is an important component of all these pathways.

Covid-19 and related restrictions significantly affected the progress towards impact for all GROW awards. Thanks to leadership and the commitment of research teams, most awards were able to adapt their research methods and continue to progress towards their intended impact, albeit with inevitable delays. In some cases, GROW team members and partner institutions took on additional responsibilities (outside the project) to support their government’s pandemic responses. UKRI was also responsive to the needs of the awards, for example with respect to requests for budgetary allocation changes. This flexibility was crucial for projects to continue to work during the pandemic.

However, the no-cost extension accorded to the awards to compensate for these delays was generally considered insufficient, and many award holders noted with disappointment that the projects were coming to an end just when impact was starting to show.

**GROW awards have generally been successful in overcoming barriers (both contextual and project-related), thanks to funder flexibility, strong leadership, and the high level of commitment of research teams. (EQ 5)**

For all awards, Covid-19 was the main barrier to achieving progress towards impact. Other challenges had to do with in-country political situations, environmental factors, and the

mismatch between the programme requirements and the reality of Southern partner institutions, particularly around due diligence and financial management.

Funder flexibility was a key enabling factor for overcoming barriers and achieving impact. In general, respondents felt that UKRI had been responsive to the needs of the awards, allowing awards to adapt and respond to the impacts of Covid-19 and other contextual challenges. Commitment of the research team, strength of partnership and leadership were crucial enablers for impact.

**GROW had several characteristics of ‘uniqueness’ in the current funding scenario, which align it well with GCRF vision and objectives. However, the funding cuts – and the way in which they were communicated – significantly affected some of the core features of GROW. (EQ 6)**

There is a strong consensus among award holders that GROW is a unique programme in the current funding scene. Several Southern partners remarked that GCRF funding arrived at a time in which public funding in their countries was rapidly declining and that this type of funding for open-ended research would be difficult, and perhaps impossible, to replace.

GROW funding seemed to be ‘the right size’ – large enough to allow for ambitious research scope as well as time dedicated to building partnerships and stakeholder engagement, and yet still small enough to allow for working relations to develop into friendships.

In relation to Covid-19, GROW awards had already been under way for over two years; this fact certainly made a significant difference in their ability to cope. At that point, partnerships had already been established, and data collection was already under way. Many award holders could use the lockdown time to focus on data analysis and publications.

The Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding cuts affected GROW awards to various degrees. In some cases, the negative impact was partially compensated by Covid-related savings, funding from different sources, or contributions from lead UK institutions. However, the cuts were widely

seen as causing reputational damage in relations with Southern partners and wider stakeholders, and the uncertainty that surrounded them led many team members to leave the award to take on jobs elsewhere.

One area in which the potential uniqueness of GROW has remained untapped is the connection between awards. Opportunities for networking and sharing learning between awards have remained very limited. Most Principal Investigators (PIs) reported little or no interaction with other GROW awards; or, in cases where there was collaboration, this was sought out by award holders themselves rather than being centrally organised.

### Conclusions, lessons and recommendations

GROW was a large and ambitious GCRF investment, focused on building capacities for interdisciplinary, challenge-led research, through the development and strengthening of research partnerships, as well as through broader stakeholders’ engagement. Our analysis shows that GROW has largely delivered on this promise, despite the considerable challenges posed by a global pandemic. Our analysis confirms the insight, which emerged from Stage 1a, that the signature investments are closely aligned to the GCRF’s underpinning vision and values.

GROW appears to have broken down barriers in different ways – between countries (through international partnerships), between disciplines (through a promotion of interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary research), between generations of researchers (through the capacity development and empowerment of ECRs) and between academia and the outside world (through stakeholders’ engagement and work with local communities).

A number of lessons emerge from our analysis, along with related recommendations:

#### **Lesson 1: Size, scale, length and flexibility of funding matter.**

One of the key elements of GROW’s success has been its size, scale, and flexibility of funding. Its size was large enough to allow for flexibility and adaptive management but still small enough for

personal connections to be established. GROW has also demonstrated that having funding to match its ambitions was crucial to achieving programme objectives. The length of funding (2017-2022) while sufficient to allow meaningful and sustainable partnerships and networks to emerge (which, it is hoped, will last beyond the length of the award) did not accommodate a sufficiently long enough inception phase to encourage new partnerships to be built. In addition, GROW awards would have benefited from longer no-cost extensions to adequately build on impact activities in the latter stages (particularly given the delays to research activities arising from the impacts of Covid-19).

#### Recommendations:

- *Future research for development (R4D) investments should build on the strengths of GROW and consider the importance of having substantial funding proportionate to the scope and ambition of the programme. An adequate funding period is important to allow for the development of equitable partnerships, and to engage with stakeholders, and foster research networks.*
- *Consideration should also be given to the two 'ends' of the research timeline: the inception period (with adequate time for project set-up and partnership building) and the final stage (with time dedicated to synthesis, dissemination, impact activities and legacy).*

#### **Lesson 2: Fairness in partnerships is not only about 'who participates' but also 'who is left out'.**

While the assessment of fairness of partnerships at award level is generally positive, there are potential issues of 'contextual fairness', by which GCRF funding may contribute to reinforcing inequality within the Global South research ecosystem. GROW awards were more successful in nurturing well-established relationships than creating new ones. This may potentially lead to disproportionate capacity development and support going to a small proportion of Southern institutions that are already historically well-connected with institutions in the UK widening the gap between a limited number of well-established, well-connected institutions on the one hand and

the majority of Southern research institutions on the other.

#### Recommendation:

- *In order to encourage new partnerships, more time should be allocated at the application stage to allow new partners as well as established partners in the Global South to co-design the project. Funding for partnership building should be considered. A longer phase of project set-up should also be encouraged in order to establish the foundation for fair process and distribution of benefits, particularly for Southern institutions without previous experience of international collaborations.*

#### **Lesson 3: The experience of GROW award holders has shown the importance of setting clear expectations and providing guidance in a number of key areas.**

As GROW was one of the first GCRF calls to be launched, there was a general sense among grantees that requirements were still at some level a 'work in progress', expectations were not always clearly communicated, and guidance was not always consistent. While award holders generally appreciated the flexibility of the funders and the role played by project officers (POs), many of them would have welcomed greater support and guidance on a number of areas, including: the administrative requirements; monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL); finance management and financial risk; and VfM.

#### Recommendation:

- *Funders should provide clear and consistent guidance in the areas outlined above.*

#### **Lesson 4: GROW demonstrated the importance of crossing the divide between natural and social sciences for challenge-led research.**

The GROW programme 'pushed' interdisciplinarity more than would have been the case otherwise – particularly with regard to bridging the divide between natural sciences and social sciences. The transformative value of interdisciplinary research was considered by several award holders as lying

in its potential to catalyse a change in the culture of UK academia and promote challenge-led research.

#### Recommendation:

- *Future investments for challenge-led research should continue to promote 'wide' interdisciplinarity, breaking silos between natural and social sciences.*

#### Lesson 5: Gender and equity perspectives do not necessarily 'come up' in research processes, unless such a lens is explicitly incorporated.

Many GROW awards have not fully integrated a gender and equity lens in their questions, methods and approaches. With a few notable exceptions, gender is thought about mostly in terms of male/female parity in teams, governance structures and events.

#### Recommendations:

- *UKRI could facilitate a collective reflection and learning exercise, looking (with hindsight) at how gender dimensions emerged in the tackling of development challenges, which were not necessarily anticipated at the outset.*
- *Funders should provide greater emphasis and guidance on gender and social inclusion during the project design stage.*

#### Lesson 6: Career progression in research in UK and LMIC contexts takes different routes and the term 'early career researcher' should be understood against the backdrop of the research capacity needs of LMIC institutions as well as UK institutions.

The emphasis on ECRs appears to be the distinctive feature of GROW and an area of unquestionable success for the programme. One consideration is that the idea of who an 'early career researcher' is was possibly overly influenced by the idea of the 'postdoc', a position which is prominent in UK academia but which does not necessarily have a correspondence in many other academic environments in the Global South. Many non-UK partners saw the exclusion of direct funding for a PhD as a missed opportunity.

#### Recommendation:

- *Future R4D investments should consider a broader and context-specific definition of 'early career researcher', to go beyond postdocs and potentially provide funding for PhDs, master's students, or even slightly more senior mid-career researchers.*

#### Lesson 7: A structured approach at the programme level is needed to share learning and encourage collaboration across the portfolio.

The lack of opportunities for networking and sharing learning between awards at the programme level appears to be a lost opportunity, in particular given the thematic and geographic overlay among many of the GROW awards.

#### Recommendation:

- *Systematic guidance and convening by the funder are recommended to enable strong cross-award collaboration and knowledge sharing. Opportunities for in-person and virtual gathering, with inclusion and funding for non-UK partners, should be encouraged.*

# 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 Growing Research Capability (GROW) programme, 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?***

This report focuses on the process evaluation of the Growing Research Capability (GROW) programme,<sup>1</sup> which aimed to grow research capacities across the globe by strengthening

#### **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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

capacities in developing countries, building and enhancing research collaborations, and increasing the engagement of the UK research base with development challenges.<sup>2</sup>

### Overview of the GROW programme

GCRF's GROW call had the primary aim to grow research capacities across the globe by strengthening capacities in developing countries, building and enhancing research collaborations, and increasing the engagement of the UK research base with development challenges.<sup>3</sup>

The GROW call was launched in August 2016. The deadline for the submission of expressions of interest was 25 October 2016, with full proposals to be submitted by 6 December 2016. Shortlisted applicants were invited for an interview. The call attracted a significant number of applications, with 187 full proposals being submitted by the call deadline. These proposals covered a total of 131 countries (or 90% of countries on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list).

GROW is a £225 million programme consisting of 37 projects, which cover a wide spectrum of development challenges. Projects ranged in value from £3 million to £8 million. Most GROW projects ran from 2017 to 2021, with a number of awards receiving a three-month no-cost extension until March 2022 in order to compensate for delays due to Covid-19.

The GROW programme was administered by UKRI, with awards being funded through one or more Research Councils. Research Councils have strict regulations around funding only what was in their remit, so GROW awards focusing on more than one challenge areas were co-funded by multiple Research Councils. The majority were co-funded by two Research Councils (17 awards) or three Research Councils (16 awards). Three awards were funded by only one research council (two by the Medical Research Council and one by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council). One award was funded by four Research Councils. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) led on the highest number of awards (12). Thematically, Sustainable Health and Well-being was the challenge area with the highest number of awards (13), and most awards touch on multiple challenge areas.

Each award is led by a UK institution which has established a number of partnerships with institutions in the Global South (see Table 2 in Chapter 2), with an expectation that the partnerships will outlast the life of the award, ensuring sustainability of impact. The geographical scope of the awards varies widely, from single-country awards to awards spanning up to ten countries in different regions.

Overall, 60 LMICs were included in successful project proposals, either as partners or geographies where research was to take place. Of these, the majority were low-income countries (25), and the rest lower middle-income countries (15) or upper middle-income countries (20).<sup>4</sup>

, The majority of awards focus on sub-Saharan Africa (23), followed by Southern Asia (21), Latin American and the Caribbean (13), Central Asia (7), and Middle East and North Africa (4). Several awards cover more than one region.

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<sup>2</sup> GROW Call.

<sup>3</sup> GROW Call.

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank defines 'Low-Income Countries' as countries with a per capita gross national income (GNI) of less than \$1,026; 'Lower-Middle Income Countries' as countries with a per capita GNI between \$1,026 and \$4,035; and 'Upper-Middle Income Countries' as countries with a per capita GNI between \$4,038 and \$12,475. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/low-income-countries>

India is specified as a target country by the highest number of projects (11 projects), followed by Kenya and South Africa (8 projects each), Tanzania and Uganda (7 projects each), Colombia and Ghana (6 projects each), Brazil and Malawi (5 projects each).

## 1.2 Aims and scope of the GROW process evaluation

The GROW process evaluation aims to answer the main evaluation question (MEQ) *How well are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?* by investigating structures and processes involved in commissioning, managing and implementing GROW awards, the extent to which these have promoted excellence in ODA R&I, and their early results. The GROW evaluation encompasses all R&I investments made in the programme since its inception in 2018. It also looks at the programme processes and how these have cascaded to and been applied at award level, in order to develop a holistic assessment of the programme and its portfolio (see Section 1.1 for an overview of GROW).

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 1a (Chapter 2, Box 2).

Data collection took place from July to November 2021, with analysis taking place from November 2021 to January 2022.

### 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 Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), including the ODA R&I Analysis 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 who deliver GCRF.

## 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 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,<sup>5</sup> 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. 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 & Development Office (FCDO) (formed in August 2020 by merging the Foreign and 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.

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.<sup>6</sup>

**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.

**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.<sup>7</sup> While the IR commits to 'spend 0.7% of GNI on development when the fiscal situation allows', the ODA reduction in 2021 resulted in spending cuts for ODA-spending government departments – including BEIS, with consequential cuts to GCRF and the budgets of its DPs.<sup>8</sup>

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'.<sup>9</sup> 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,

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<sup>5</sup> '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)

<sup>6</sup> '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](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896799/UK_Research_and_Development_Roadmap.pdf)

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

<sup>8</sup> '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)

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

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.<sup>10</sup> 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 onto 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:

**Section 1** provides an introduction to the GROW programme 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 evaluation 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.

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

## 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 MEQ 2: *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 was published in February 2022.<sup>11</sup> Overall, the Stage 1a 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 International Partnerships Programme (IPP), GROW, Interdisciplinary Hubs and Future African 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.

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.

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

## 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’.

To increase the credibility and validity of evaluation findings, we used triangulation, which involved collecting data using a number of different methods and cross-verifying data across a number of sources. For example:

- **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.

## 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 MEQ 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 1: below sets out the detailed evaluation framework. Through detailed 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 1: High-level evaluation framework**

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&amp;I management (at programme and award levels):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence</li> <li>▪ ToC and shared vision</li> <li>▪ Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge</li> <li>▪ Capacity needs assessed and identified</li> <li>▪ Risk factors identified and mitigated</li> <li>▪ Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort building, aggregate-level R&amp;I into use)</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19</li> <li>▪ Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working</li> <li>▪ Promoting coherence between awards</li> <li>▪ Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy</li> <li>▪ M&amp;E and regular reporting</li> </ul> <p>1b. ODA R&amp;I excellence in design and implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevance + coherence in design and delivery</li> <li>▪ Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity</li> <li>▪ Negative consequences mitigated and a ‘do no harm’ approach</li> <li>▪ Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes</li> <li>▪ Inclusiveness addressed within design and research processes</li> <li>▪ Capacity needs identified and assessed</li> <li>▪ Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement</li> <li>▪ 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)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data sources:</b></p> <p>KIIs with stakeholders at DPs, awards and partners</p> <p>Survey data with PIs and Co-Investigators (Co-Is)</p> <p>Programme and award documents</p> <p><b>Methods:</b></p> <p>Qualitative analysis and document reviews</p> <p>KIIs with DP programme managers</p> <p>KIIs with award managers</p> <p>KIIs with award partners in LMICs</p> <p>Survey analysis</p> <p>Programme and award documents</p>
<p>EQ 2. To what extent are structures and processes in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear ToC for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes</li> </ul>	

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"> <li>▪ Analysis/understanding of local R&amp;I ecosystems and capacity needs</li> <li>▪ Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&amp;I infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Fairness considerations integrated</li> </ul>	
EQ 3. To what extent are processes [to support challenged research] efficiently implemented: are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Efficiency and timeliness of processes</li> <li>▪ Proportionality for size of investment</li> <li>▪ Fairness for partners</li> <li>▪ VfM rubrics</li> </ul>	
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"> <li>▪ Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples</li> <li>▪ Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress</li> <li>▪ Unintended outcomes (positive and negative)</li> </ul>	
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"> <li>▪ Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maturity of the field</li> <li>○ Research capacity strengthening</li> <li>○ Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research)</li> <li>○ Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves)</li> <li>○ Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)</li> <li>○ Examples of success factors e.g. the necessary factors proposed in the GCRF ToC for navigating barriers/facilitators</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	



EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Networks, credible evidence/innovation and new capabilities mobilised to amplify change</li> <li>○ Iterative engagement by GCRF programmes and projects, responding to opportunities to amplify change</li> <li>○ Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model</li> </ul>	
<p>EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19</li> <li>▪ the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted</li> <li>▪ 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)</li> <li>▪ Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding</li> <li>▪ Other aspects that GCRF funding is instrumental for</li> </ul>	
<p>EQ 7. What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments &amp; promote learning across GCRF?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific insights and lessons from the award that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from, success factors, reasons why</li> <li>▪ Capture also specific areas for improvement in the award, areas of underperformance and reasons why</li> </ul>	

## 2.3 Selection and sampling

13 out of 37 awards were selected to be reviewed in-depth as part of the GROW sample. Awards were chosen to achieve a spread in relation to the following features:

- sponsorship by lead research council
- investment size
- challenge area<sup>12</sup>
- geographical focus.

The awards were selected by creating a numbered list and then using a random online number generator, and the results were then checked against the criteria above.

A reserve sample was also chosen, to be used if needed for substitution. One award in the original sample was replaced, as per the agreed protocol, due to non-response of the award holder. This was a like-for-like replacement to ensure alignment with the criteria. The final sample can be seen below in Table 2.:

Table 2: Final sample for GROW process evaluation<sup>13</sup>

Final sample for GROW process evaluation	Key details of award	Lead Institution/PI
Building capacity for applied research to reduce tobacco-related harm in low- and middle-income countries MRP027946/1	<p><b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022</p> <p><b>Focus country / region:</b> Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Gambia, Ghana, South Africa, and Uganda</p> <p><b>Total budget:</b> £3,359,693.04</p> <p><b>Delivery Partner:</b> MRC (70%); ESRC (30%)</p> <p><b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 13</p>	<p><b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Stirling</p> <p><b>Principal Investigator:</b> Linda Bauld + 16 Co-Investigators</p>
Training for Development: East African Growth Corridors (Development Corridors Partnership (DCP)) ES/P011500/1	<p><b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022</p> <p><b>Focus country / region:</b> Kenya, Tanzania</p> <p><b>Total budget:</b> £4,217,478</p> <p><b>Delivery Partner:</b> ESRC</p> <p><b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 26</p>	<p><b>Lead research organisation:</b> World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC)</p> <p><b>Principal Investigator:</b> Prof. Neil David Burgess + 15 Co-Investigators</p>
None in Three (Ni3) - A Centre for the Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence	<p><b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022</p> <p><b>Focus country / region:</b> Jamaica, Uganda, India, Brasil, Barbados and Grenada, UK</p> <p><b>Total budget:</b> £4,303,664</p>	<p><b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Huddersfield</p> <p><b>Principal Investigator:</b> Nadia Marie Wager + 19 Co-Investigators</p>

<sup>12</sup> As many GROW awards focused on multiple challenge areas, sampling was done using the main challenge area as provided by UKRI.

<sup>13</sup> Information on details of awards drawn from award-level write ups and [gtr.ukri.org](http://gtr.ukri.org).

AH/P014240/1	<b>Delivery Partner:</b> AHRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 5	
CEPHaS - Strengthening Capacity in Environmental Physics, Hydrology and Statistics for Conservation Agriculture Research NEP02095X1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi <b>Total budget:</b> £5,141,662 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> NERC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 12	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> NERC British Geological Survey <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Richard Murray Lark +19 Co-Investigators/Researchers
Preserving, Restoring and Managing Colombian Biodiversity Through Responsible Innovation BBP028098/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2021 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Colombia <b>Total budget:</b> £5,332,079.64 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> BBSRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 5	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of East Anglia <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Federica Di Palma +13 Co-Investigators
Building capacity for sustainable interactions with marine ecosystems for health, well-being, food and livelihoods of coastal communities NEP021107/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Indonesia; Phillipines; Malaysia; Vietnam; China <b>Total budget:</b> £5,847,901.75 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> NERC, ESRC, MRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 6	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Plymouth <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Melanie Austen +23 Co-Investigators + researchers
Strategic University Network to Revolutionise Indian Solar Energy (SUNRISE) EP/P032591/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> India <b>Total budget:</b> £6,580,123 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> EPSRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 3	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> Swansea University <b>Principal Investigator:</b> David Worsley +25 Co-Investigators
A Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases MR/P027989/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Pakistan and India <b>Total budget:</b> £6,764,938 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> MRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 10	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> Durham University <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Paul Denny +16 Co-Investigators
Transforming India's Green Revolution by Research and Empowerment for Sustainable food Supplies BB/P027970/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> India <b>Total budget:</b> £7,035,021 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> BBSRC	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Cambridge <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Howard Griffiths +16 Co-Investigators
Building Capacity for the Future City in Developing Countries (PEAK) ESP011055/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2021 <b>Focus country / region:</b> China, Colombia, India and South Africa <b>Total budget:</b> £7,249,665.54	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Oxford <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Professor Michael Keith +11 Co-Investigators

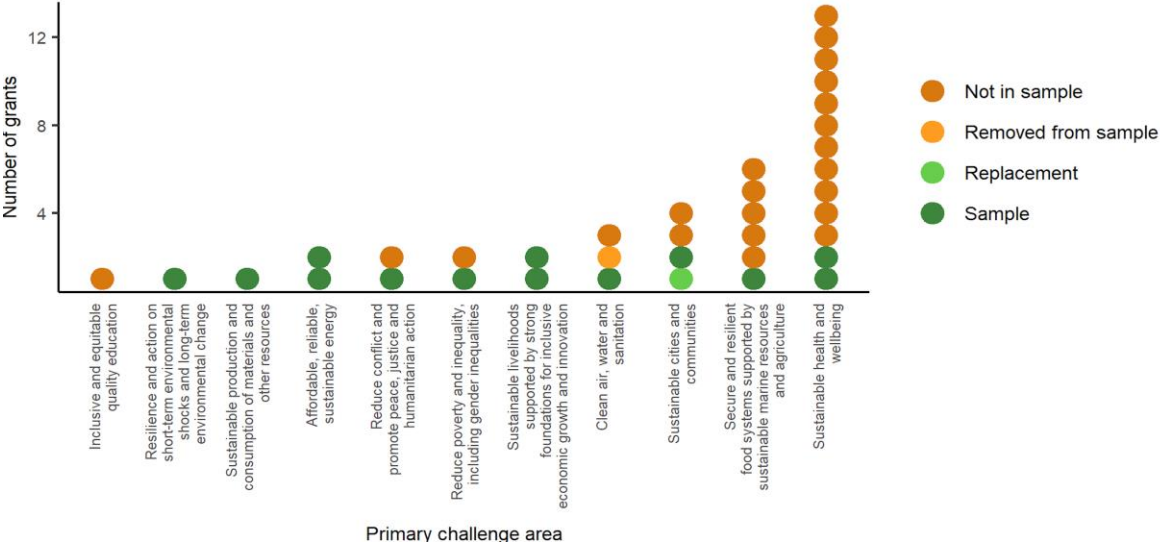
	<b>Delivery Partner:</b> ESRC, EPSRC, AHRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 4	
RECAP – Research capacity building and knowledge generation to support preparedness and response to humanitarian crises and epidemics ESP010873/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Sierra Leone, Lebanon <b>Total budget:</b> T £7,859,268.11 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> ESRC, MRC, AHRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 9	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Dr. Bayard Roberts +23 Co-Investigators
African Science for Weather Information and Forecasting Techniques (African SWIFT). NE/P021077/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Ghana, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Jordan, India <b>Total budget:</b> £8,162,095 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> ESRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 6	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Manchester <b>Principal Investigator:</b> David Hume + 24 Co-Investigators
FutureDAMS: Design and assessment of resilient and sustainable interventions in water-energy-food-environment Mega-Systems ES/P011373/1	<b>Start - end dates:</b> 2017-2022 <b>Focus country / region:</b> Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Niger <b>Total budget:</b> £7,971,410 <b>Delivery Partner:</b> ESRC <b>Primary Research Partners:</b> 15	<b>Lead research organisation:</b> University of Leeds, NCAS Department <b>Principal Investigator:</b> Alan Blyth +33 Co-Investigators

Figure 1: and Figure 2: **Error! Reference source not found.** show the sample broadly reflects the portfolio as a whole in terms of the spread of lead research councils represented, and challenge areas.

Figure 1: Lead research council for GROW sample and portfolio



Figure 2: Challenge areas in GROW portfolio and sample



## 2.4 Data collection and overview of the evidence base

Data collection has been conducted through a mixed-methods approach, with three main sources of data: programme and award level documents and data; KIIs; and survey data. Data was collected during a period when Covid-19 was disrupting people’s working patterns. Although Covid-19 impacted on award holders in terms of implementation, as detailed in Sections 1.3 and 3.4, there was no significant impact on the process evaluation, which was designed as a remote exercise from the outset. All interviews were conducted remotely via MS Teams or Zoom.

### KIIs and document review

Table 3: provides an overview of the evidence base for the GROW process evaluation.

Table 3: Overview of the evidence base for GROW

Data source	Type	Number
KIIs	Award-level stakeholders	88
	Programme staff at UKRI	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>
Documents reviewed	Award level: application documents, collaboration agreements, annual reporting, and ResearchFish data. Independent project evaluations	267
	Programme level: call guidance, GROW ToC, reporting guidance, meeting minutes, and communications materials	19
	<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>

### Document review

Documents were reviewed at both programme and award levels. At programme level, documentation included call guidance, the GROW ToC (see annex 2), reporting guidance, meeting minutes, and communications materials. At award level, documentation included application documents, collaboration agreements, annual reporting, and ResearchFish data. Additional documentation, such as independent project evaluations, was also shared by project partners. In total, 286 documents were reviewed, with 19 reviewed at programme level and 267 reviewed at award level.

### KIIs

KIIs were conducted concurrently with document review, and were done at both award and programme levels. An interview guide was developed from the evaluation matrix for all the process evaluations and was tailored for GROW to cover aspects that informants could best speak to about the award or the programme. The interview guide is included in Annex 3. The core evaluation team also prepared draft text for interview requests, as well as a letter giving an overview on the process evaluation, which was attached to each email.

At award level, project PIs were contacted for an initial interview, and were asked to provide additional contacts for interview, such as Co-Is, ECRs or non-academic stakeholders. Efforts were made to speak to Southern partners and ECRs wherever possible. There were between four to eight interviews each awards. All interviews were conducted remotely via MS Teams or Zoom. KIIs are referenced as sources, using code numbers in footnotes to show the links to the underlying evidence; key documents are also referenced. ‘A’ denotes award-level interviews

(‘A1’, ‘A2’, etc. references each award; the number following the decimal, e.g. ‘A1.14’, denotes the informant) and ‘P’ denotes programme-level interviews.

There was a high level of engagement with the evaluation. However, for two awards the PIs were unavailable for interviews, and the evaluation team spoke to programme managers instead. 69 interviews were conducted, with 19 additional participants joining for group interviews. As such, a total of 88 informants were interviewed, exceeding the original target set for 78 award-level informant interviews. In addition, three programme-level interviews were conducted, with the UKRI Programme Manager and two project officers (POs).

Informants were evenly split by gender (47 female informants and 44 male informants). Over half of the informants were based outside the UK, covering 21 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

## Survey data

As part of Stage 1b, a GCRF fund-wide survey was developed by the core evaluation team. The main aim of the survey was to quantify the process, mechanisms, early results and achievements that GCRF award holders and DPs have contributed to. The survey aimed to test a selection of core and sub-hypotheses related to these elements. The survey data ensured compatibility with the qualitative analyses from the signature investment process evaluations and alignment to the EQs for Stage 1b.

The award holder fund-wide survey consisted of 39 questions, gathering data from award holders on: General Project Information; Structures and Processes for Project Implementation; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL); Achievements; Utilisation of GCRF-Funded Research; Covid-19; and Budget Reductions.<sup>14</sup>

The award holder survey was launched on 20 October 2021 and ran until 19 November 2021. It was sent to approximately 10,472 people across the whole of GCRF, including PIs, Co-Is, researchers, fellows, and others involved in GCRF grants. In total, 3,612 responded to the survey, and there was a total of 153 responses from those affiliated with GROW projects. Of these, there was representation from 29 out of 37 GROW awards, with responses per award ranging from 13 to 1. It is important to note that 66% of GROW survey respondents are affiliated with UK institutions, so the survey data offers more limited insights into Southern partners' perspectives. Survey data has been used to triangulate findings from interviews and documentation review.

## 2.5 Data analysis

### Award-level analysis

Documentation was initially reviewed and categorised as data, context or evidence. All documents categorised as evidence were further coded in MaxQDA using a common codebook structured to reflect EQs. KII transcripts were also coded in MaxQDA using the same common codebook. The coding framework is included in Annex 3.

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 theme's EQs and criteria.
- Interview write-ups were then coded using MaxQDA, using the evaluation criteria as the structural codes (see Annex 3 for codebook).
- Coded interview data was then extracted and analysed for patterns, including similarities and differences in responses by sub-groups of stakeholders.

Data from award-level interviews and documentation review was summarised in a standardised award-level write-up, which was laid out according to the EQs and evaluation criteria. The write-up included project overview, a section for each EQ, and an overall summary of judgements for the award. The award write-up template is provided in Annex 3. Evidence utilised for the award write-up included: documentary evidence that provides

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<sup>14</sup> A DP survey was also carried out. This consisted of 21 questions, gathering data from DPs for each of their GCRF programmes on: (i) General Information; (ii) Structures and Processes; (iii) MEL. For the purpose of the GROW process evaluation, only data from the award holder survey was analysed.



context or description for the award; documents and data that form part of the evidence for the award, e.g. policies or process guidance; and interviews with award stakeholders.

In the award level write ups, for EQs 1–4, a tailored rubric assessment was also used to provide a rating for the award’s progress in relation to that EQ. The rubrics are included in Annex 3. EQs 5–7 did not include a rubric assessment. Confidence in evidence was also assessed for each EQ, using a red (low confidence), amber (medium confidence) and green (high confidence) rating, depending on the number of sources, the degree of detail for each source and the consistency among the sources.

### **Programme-level analysis**

Completed award-level write-ups were reviewed and collated into a GROW programme-level write-up. This had the same structure as the award-level write-up, with sections for each EQ and an overall summary of findings for GROW.

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 as for the award-level write-up. 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.

As with the award write-ups, the programme-level write-up also included a rubric assessment for EQs 1–4 and rating for confidence of evidence.

### **Survey data analysis**

The entire fund dataset was first prepared for analysis by removing data from respondents who did not provide consent to sharing data and removing ‘special category data’ from the dataset, specifically data on racial or ethnic origin and disability.

The analysis of survey data was conducted using the Stata statistical software, making use of its large-scale data processing capacity and extensive range of data analysis and visualisation tools. We conducted the following analysis and stratified the data by four signature funds: GROW, IPP, FLAIR and HUBS.

Descriptive univariable analyses were used to describe the sample populations and to summarise all survey measures initially and provide tables of results linked to the hypothesis and sub-hypothesis stratified by signature programmes.

Summary bivariate tables showed the relationships between indicators and grouping variables, including further disaggregations. The typical disaggregations were:

- the respondent's country of origin – classified as Low Income Country (LIC), Middle Income Country (MIC), High Income Country (HIC) or UK<sup>15</sup>
- the position of the respondent as a 'primary or secondary' researcher.

## 2.6 Strengths and limitations of our approach

Overall, the approach has worked well in relation to the objectives of the evaluation. Strengths include the following:

- Interviews included a **representative cross-section of different roles, levels of seniority, geographical location and disciplines**, as well as **gender balance**, allowing the evaluation team to benefit from a rich mix of views and perspectives on the awards.
- In general, there has been a **high level of engagement** with the evaluation, with PIs and team members eager to share their experience and 'tell their GROW story'.

There have also been several key limitations with the evaluation:

- Programme-level interviews have been difficult to secure, in part due to the change in staff for the GROW programme manager at UKRI. As such, this was delayed during data collection, and only three programme-level interviews have been completed, against a target of six.
- While engagement with informants was high, there was occasionally a **difficulty in scheduling interviews with appropriate team members**. As GROW projects began in 2016, many staff, particularly ECRs and project managers, had moved on to different positions. As such, it was occasionally difficult to understand details about the design stage of the project or the 2018 stage gate review. There were also two instances where PIs were unavailable to schedule interviews with the evaluation team (A1 and A5). In both instances, the evaluation team was able to speak to programme managers instead.
- The **compressed timeline for survey data analysis** limited the degree of triangulation that was feasible for this stage of the evaluation.

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<sup>15</sup> We grouped countries using the World Bank's income classification, which groups countries' economies into four groups: low-income countries (LICs); middle-income countries (MICs); upper-middle-income countries (UMICs); and high-income countries (HICs). We also identified respondents from the UK as a separate category. We then grouped the respondents into three final categories as HMIC, LMIC and UK-based respondents.

## 3 Findings

This section summarises our findings against each of the seven EQs, which, combined, address the Stage 1b Main Evaluation Question: ‘How well are GCRF’s signature investments working and what have they achieved?’ The questions examine the GROW systems, processes, barriers, enabling factors and emerging impact, at both programme and award levels.

### 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 key findings

- Most awards had adequate management structures and processes in place, although clearer and more extensive guidance from UKRI in this respect would have been useful.
- Partnership and interdisciplinarity were strong features of the GROW awards. Conversely, gender and social inclusion appear to have received low systematic attention.
- The lack of structured opportunities for awards to connect, explore synergies and share learning represents a lost opportunity in the management of GROW.

EQ 1 focuses on the structures and processes that we would expect to see in terms of managing and implementing challenge-led ODA R&I. Our evaluation matrix sets out a wide range of criteria, at both programme and award levels, with a view to gaining a holistic picture of how structures and processes have been working across the portfolio.

To answer the evaluation question for GROW, we start by positioning the signature investment in the overall context of the GCRF strategy and ToC (3.1.1). We then look at the GROW commissioning process, to investigate to what extent the key elements of the GROW vision and ToC were translated in the framing of the funding call and selection of awards (3.1.2). Next, we look at the systems and processes that were put in place centrally by UKRI to manage the resulting portfolio of awards, and the extent to which they are aligned with our expectations for signature investments (3.1.3).

Following this programme-level analysis, we turn our focus to the award level, to look at the process of project design (3.1.5), the extent to which ToC was used as an approach for designing projects, and how individual projects’ ToCs fit into the overall GROW ToC (3.1.6). We then look at the management structures and processes in place at award level (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and assess to what extent key ‘constitutive elements’ of the call (partnerships, interdisciplinarity, and gender and equity) were reflected in the practice across the GROW portfolio (3.1.7, 3.1.8, 3.1.9).

**Our overall assessment is that GROW is well aligned with the GCRF strategy**, and in particular it plays a key role in relation to the second strategic objective (*‘Strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership with excellent UK research and researchers’*).

### 3.1.1 Framing of initiative and ToC

**GROW is set up to address a key objective of the UK Strategy for GCRF, i.e. the strengthening of R&I capacities in the UK and developing countries.**<sup>16</sup> The focus on enhanced capabilities for challenge-led R&I runs through the GCRF ToC, and the GROW programme fits neatly into this pathway.

**The focus on capacity building takes centre stage in the GROW ToC**, through a range of activities such as training, skills development, apprenticeships and secondments. Capacity development is seen as closely interconnected with partnership building and supporting, with the aim of encouraging stakeholder engagement, knowledge exchange and dissemination. This is envisioned to lead to a greater appetite for collaborative research on development challenges, with a globally integrated and inclusive approach. A final key focus of the GROW ToC is the research process itself, to test and adopt innovative approaches, as well as to increase information and knowledge on development challenges.

**The lack of a structured approach to capacity development was identified as a key weakness of GCRF in the 2017 ICAI Rapid Review** (ICAI, 2017). The review also highlighted an unresolved tension between the principle of ‘research excellence’ and the objective of ‘capacity development’, noting that the former ‘may continue to advantage developing countries that already have credible research institutions, rather than directing investment towards poorer countries where capacity building may be most needed’.<sup>17</sup> An important question is therefore to what extent GROW, as a signature investment explicitly dedicated to capacity development, has been able to resolve this tension (see 3.2.2).

### 3.1.2 Commissioning of the portfolio to deliver across challenges

**The framing of the GROW Funding Call is closely aligned with the programme’s vision and ToC.** As noted in the Stage 1a report, funding calls are ‘one of the most powerful tools’ to influence how applications are developed and framed.<sup>18</sup> The call invited applications ‘for balanced programmes of capacity and capability strengthening, partnership building and research’.<sup>19</sup> This research was to be framed around up to three development challenges under one coherent vision.

**Compared to non-signature GCRF investments, the GROW funding call gave significantly greater weight to fair and equitable partnerships.** Applications had to be led by institutions in the UK, but having research partners from the Global South was required, rather than merely ‘encouraged’ as in several other GCRF funding calls.<sup>20</sup> Engagement with non-academic partners

<sup>16</sup> The other two objectives of the GCRF strategy are to ‘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’ (objective 1) and ‘Provide an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need’ (objective 3).

<sup>17</sup> ICAI (2017) GCRF Rapid Review: 4. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Stage 1a summary report.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1055522/gcrf-evaluation-1a-synthesis-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1055522/gcrf-evaluation-1a-synthesis-report.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> GROW Funding Call.

<sup>20</sup> The Stage 1a Fairness module reviewed 67 funding calls and found a significant variation among calls in relation to the degree of emphasis and detail on fairness and equity, whether North/South partnerships are ‘encouraged’ or ‘required’, and whether

(non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government and business) was also a key requirement, with a view to ensuring co-creation of the research questions and joint implementation of the pathways to impact. The strength of partnership and collaboration is a criterion for assessment of proposals, with a clear reference to co-production of research questions and methods.<sup>21</sup>

**Interdisciplinarity was also more strongly emphasised in the GROW Funding Call than in previous calls** (as seen in Stage 1a). The call document stated that applications ‘must outline how they will facilitate and promote collaborative and cross-disciplinary ways of working and assemble the disciplinary expertise necessary to tackle the development challenge/s in question’.<sup>22</sup> The call also stated that the team ‘must encompass the appropriate mix of disciplines and expertise required to address the development challenge/s’, and encouraged ‘participation from disciplines that have not traditionally engaged with development challenges and whose research would provide substantial benefits to developing countries’.<sup>23</sup>

**Consistent with the GROW vision and ToC, the funding call gave significant attention to capacity development.** This was seen as including ‘skills development of people across all research career stages with the primary aim of improving their ability to undertake research on the identified challenges’, as well as supporting infrastructure, such as research management. Funding for new PhD studentships was not eligible as part of the GROW call, although funds could be used to fund research and travel costs for students supported through existing routes. Equipment and consumables could be requested where appropriate, as long as individual items were below £10,000.

**Gender and social inclusion did not feature prominently in the GROW Funding Call.** While the analysis of the GROW commissioning process indicates a greater alignment of signature investments with the ‘GCRF DNA’, this does not apply to gender and social inclusion, which receive only passing reference in the GROW Funding Call. Gender inequality is only mentioned as one of the areas where GROW research may focus (‘Reduce poverty and inequality, including gender inequalities’). The call also states, in fairly generic terms, that research plans should be underpinned by a strong commitment to inclusion, equality and diversity.

### 3.1.3 Programme management

**GROW as a programme was administered by UKRI, with Research Councils funding individual awards.** Each GROW award was assigned a Project Officer (PO) from the lead research council, providing support and acting as the first port of call to answer queries. POs acted as the primary link between awards and UKRI, updating the central team on project progress and highlighting any issues of concern. POs sat as independent observers on their project’s Advisory Boards, which allowed them to remain impartial while also giving them an opportunity to ask question and advance suggestions. POs also played a role in advising on the composition of Advisory Boards, and supported award holders in the reporting process.

**Guidance and expectations set for POs was unclear at the beginning, and more clarity would have been welcomed both by award holders and by the POs themselves.** While there seems to be variance in the way that individual POs have interpreted their role, for many awards the role gradually crystallised as a ‘critical friend’, providing advice and suggestions as needed.

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non-academic institutions are mentioned as potential partners. The assessment did find, however, that fairness and equity were stronger considerations in more recent calls, pointing to an overall positive trend in GCRF.

<sup>21</sup> The call states that proposals will be assessed on the basis that ‘developing countries and stakeholders will be involved in joint framing of research questions and implementing the pathways to impact’. GROW Funding Call.

<sup>22</sup> GROW Funding Call.

<sup>23</sup> GROW Funding Call.

Feedback by award holders was generally positive, although it was also noted that there were sometimes inconsistencies in the advice given by POs from different Research Councils. It was also noted that turnover in UKRI staff affected continuity and consistency of support.

**Award-holders' were expected to report to UKRI primarily through ResearchFish,** complemented by additional reporting. The initial guidance about MEL and reporting was relatively limited, and award holders felt that there was a lack of clarity around expectations. For example, logframes were required at the start, then put aside, and now there are some indications that they will be required for the final reporting.

**A stage gate review for GROW was conducted in 2018, with interdisciplinary review panels set up for each award.** The panels' assessment was based on an Advisory Board report, a PO commentary and the award's ResearchFish submission and an additional progress report.<sup>24</sup> In most cases the outcome of the stage gate review was to continue funding without any further action. In some instances additional information was required (through submission of further documentation and interviews) before a decision could be taken. Funding for all GROW awards was ultimately continued after the stage gate review.

The feedback provided by stage gate review panels to award holders was generally quite brief (4–6 bullet points) and not very detailed. Areas for which awards were frequently commended included strong interdisciplinary working, equitable partnerships, role of the Advisory Board, and capacity development (though in a few cases it was noted that capacity development was overly focused on ECRs). Concerns that were raised in some cases included: issues around data management; composition of the Advisory Boards; health and safety; low engagement with PO/Advisory Board; and internal communication mechanisms.

Gender was not mentioned in the guidance given to panels for the stage gate review, and consequently issues related to gender have very little prominence in the feedback of the stage gate review.

**On the whole, GROW survey responses indicate the majority of respondents believed adequate processes were in place to correctly identify and elaborate challenges and there was regular, dedicated [programme] management to support R&I.** A 'criteria met' response for processes indicates that at least four project design characteristics are in place, from the options of: strategy/framework; Project ToC/Pathway to Impact/Impact Strategy; defined mission statement/vision; clearly defined targets/objectives linked to development goals; an oversight committee or similar; research and/or innovation implementation plan; communication/dissemination plan for the project outputs; and/or gender and inclusion plan. 82% of respondents met the criteria for having processes existing and in place to correctly identify and elaborate challenges.

A 'criteria met' response for management indicates that at least three types of support have been received, from the options of: technical research advice; support with research design; support with project implementation; gender and inclusion expert advice; networking opportunities/communication/dissemination of project outputs; support for pursuing additional funding; support for no-cost grant extension; and/or other. 66% of respondents declared that the award met the criteria for having regular dedicated management to support R&I. 56% of respondents declared that the criteria were met for having both processes and management in place.

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<sup>24</sup> Review criteria, for which specific questions were provided to panels, included: capacity development (in the UK and partner countries); equitable partnership; addressing relevant challenge areas; interdisciplinarity; global networks; leadership, governance and project management; and financial management.

**The GROW programme notably lacked structured opportunities for award holders to come together, share lessons and build synergies.** There was a working group for project managers set up by UKRI, which met about twice per year (initially in person, then virtually) and was considered useful. However, no corresponding forum was set up for academic staff, and there were no efforts to connect awards around themes or geographic focus. There were a few exceptions to this (see Box 4), but any networking was done on the initiative of award holders rather than as a coordinated effort from UKRI. This lack of a ‘programme approach,’ with respect to drawing lessons and building synergies across the portfolio as a whole, is identified as a weakness and a lost opportunity in the management of GROW, and is a key lesson for future investments of this scope and ambition.

#### **Box 4. RECAP’s networks with other GROW projects**

The GROW award ‘RECAP – Research capacity building and knowledge generation to support preparedness and response to humanitarian crises and epidemics’ was led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Through the project’s own outreach and networking with other GCRF projects, the PI has teamed up with other GROW projects on a number of initiatives. He collaborated with four other GROW projects and their partners in sub-Saharan Africa to form a research leadership scheme in sub-Saharan Africa. This involved workshops in London, Cape Town, Nairobi and Accra.

RECAP also partnered with another GROW project, Thanzi La Onse (York University), on a successful proposal for the GCRF Cluster Seed award. The two awards were working together on a larger proposal to GCRF, but this has since been cancelled due to the ODA funding cuts. RECAP has also collaborated with the Research for Health in Conflict (R4HC) GROW project, led by King’s College London, on a number of papers and events, including the Women’s Leaders in Conflict programme led by R4HC. One of RECAP’s Co-Is in Lebanon sits on the Advisory Board for R4HC.

Award reference: ESP/010873/1

### **3.1.4 Award-level management**

**Limited guidance from UKRI on the format that governance and management structures of GROW awards should take has led to variability in the way these have been set up across the portfolio.** As there was relatively little guidance from UKRI, each award devised a governance and management structure that would work in their specific circumstances, and in several cases adapted it during the life of the project. A leading body – variously named Executive Group, Executive Steering Committee, Executive Management Board, or similar – was generally composed of the PI, the lead Co-Is in countries and/or country directors where applicable, and the project manager or similar role, and had responsibility for providing strategic leadership and monitoring overall performance and risk. Southern partners were in the Executive Management Boards and other management structures.

**Collaboration agreements were in place for all awards.** All 13 awards in the sample had collaboration agreements with partners, and 12 of these were made available for the evaluation team to review. Eight of the awards had a central collaboration agreement signed by all partners, while four awards had individual agreements for each separate partner. The collaboration agreements all followed a standard format, containing clauses around financial

arrangements, intellectual property and dispute resolution. Five of the collaboration agreements also had separate clauses relating to data protection, and one included a section on project monitoring and evaluation requirements. One award provided separate Terms of Reference to complement its collaboration agreement, which included guidance on project values, communication, and diversity and inclusion. The process of putting collaboration agreements in place was often time-consuming and was cited as one of the key reasons for delays in the inception phase, particularly for institutions that had not worked together before. It is also unclear to what extent collaboration agreements were used in the day-to-day working of partnerships.

**All projects were required to have Advisory Boards, seen as a key channel for stakeholder engagement, but some Advisory Boards lacked clarity in their role and were underutilised.** In the initial phase there was a lack of clear guidance in this respect, and consequently the composition, role and level of engagement of Advisory Boards varied greatly across awards. Some Advisory Boards felt that they were being underutilised and/or asked to play a 'monitoring role' that was incompatible with their Terms of Reference. With time there was positive progress, with a number of examples of good practice being noted by UKRI – such as Advisory Board members being invited to project conferences or partner meetings, or being engaged as peer reviewers of internal funding applications from ECRs.<sup>25</sup>

**There was not enough clarity around the need for full-time management staff in projects,** and awards varied in terms of the full-time staff dedicated to the project. Some informants noted that this need was possibly underestimated at the beginning and that clearer guidance from UKRI in terms of expectations for project management would have been beneficial.<sup>26</sup>

**GROW awards vary widely in terms of their MEL systems.** There was some feedback on lack of clarity about MEL requirement – for example, logframes were required at the start, then put aside, and now there are some indications that they will be required for the final reporting. Several awards holders found that the relationship between the ToC and the logframe was confusing. The awards that have established strong MEL systems and processes have done so of their own volition, going beyond the guidance received by UKRI.

### 3.1.5 Award level design: Involvement of partners and stakeholders in project design

**Short timescales for proposal writing resulted in fewer new partners than established partners being involved in the projects at this stage.** As mentioned above, co-creation of research questions was a requirement in the GROW call. The extent to which this has happened in practice varies greatly across the portfolio. The timeline of the application process appeared well suited to build on existing collaborations. In these cases the application time was generally perceived to be sufficient, and the process was reported as straightforward. Southern research partners generally felt that they had played an active role in co-creating the proposal, and some of them participated in the selection interview (although visa requirements were a constraint in this regard). Conversely, the application timescale was considered too short by those institutions trying to set up new partnerships. Time constraints meant that new partners could not be engaged meaningfully at this stage, resulting in the overall application process being led by the UK institution. This confirms the findings of the Research Fairness Module in Stage 1a of the GCRF evaluation: '*Compressed timelines in the*

<sup>25</sup> Source: general feedback from 2020 Annual Reports.

<sup>26</sup> p2.



*proposal writing and design stages significantly curtail the possibility to establish new partnerships and involve Southern partners in research design’.*<sup>27</sup>

**Projects involved non-academic stakeholders to different degrees in the project design phase.** The online survey shows a fair degree of consultation with external stakeholders in project design, in particular international and national NGOs (67.4% and 67.2% of respondents respectively), local community representatives (59.8% of respondents), multilateral organisations (44.3% of respondents), national and subnational governments (49.6% and 45.8% of respondents respectively), and the private sector (36.4% of respondents).

### 3.1.6 Award level design: Use of ToC in project design

**A ToC was not a requirement at the proposal stage, but had to be submitted by selected awards prior to funds’ disbursement,<sup>28</sup> with diverse feedback as to whether this additional requirement was useful.** Several interviewees felt that creating a ToC after the project was designed was an unnecessary exercise of ‘retrofitting’. Other projects found it more useful. Moreover, there was variety in how this initial document was used during implementation. For some awards, ToC was a ‘done and dusted’ document that was submitted to fulfil a requirement and not used again, with team members who joined at a later stage often being unaware of the documents. Other awards embraced ToC as an approach and used it as a living document to guide project implementation and MEL. For example, the Tobacco Control Capacity Programme (TCCP) award (MR/P027946/2) and the PEAK Urban award (ES/P011055/1) both hired external consultants to help them rethink their ToCs and MEL systems. The award Transforming India’s Green Revolution by Research and Empowerment for Sustainable Food Supplies (TIGR2ESS-BB/P027970/1) also updated their ToC documentation to take stock of the impact of Covid-19 at the end of 2020. Interestingly, almost 20% of survey respondents declared that the project did not have a ToC, while in fact a ToC was an essential requirement. This reflects the finding that those not involved in the design stage may have been unaware of this requirement and that, potentially, the ToC was not actively used throughout the course of some awards. External evaluations were also not standardised across GROW, with 66% of GROW survey respondents either noting that their project had not been subject to an external evaluation (32%) or that they didn’t know or were not qualified to say (34%).<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1.7 Research partnerships

Research partnerships between UK and Southern institutions were an essential requirement of the GROW call, as a key dimension to fulfil the programme’s vision of growing research capabilities for challenge-led research.

**There is significant variation across GROW awards in terms of the spread and complexity of partnership arrangements. Awards with multiple partnerships faced greater project set up administration challenges.** This is primarily a function of the number of countries on which the research focuses. Five GROW awards focus on only one country each – of these, two focus on India, two on Colombia and one on Bangladesh. At the other end of the spectrum, one award (*Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality*, or KNOW, led by University College London – ES/P011225/1) had the highest number of focus countries (10). Awards focusing on multiple countries generally faced greater challenges in project set-up and implementation, owing to

<sup>27</sup> This was a lesson later incorporated in the design of the Interdisciplinary Hubs, which included a ‘Global Engagement Budget’ to be used in the period between the outline proposal and the full proposal. See Foundation Stage Evaluation report.

<sup>28</sup> At the proposal stage, applicants had to submit a Case for Support, Pathway to Impact, Justification of Resources, ODA statement, CVs of team members and a letter of support from partner institutions.

<sup>29</sup> N=154

the need to reconcile different bureaucracies and administrative systems as well as different work cultures. However, at least in the most accomplished cases, these led to the emergence of South–South networks and collaborations, which were seen by many informants as a key value-add of the GROW programme.

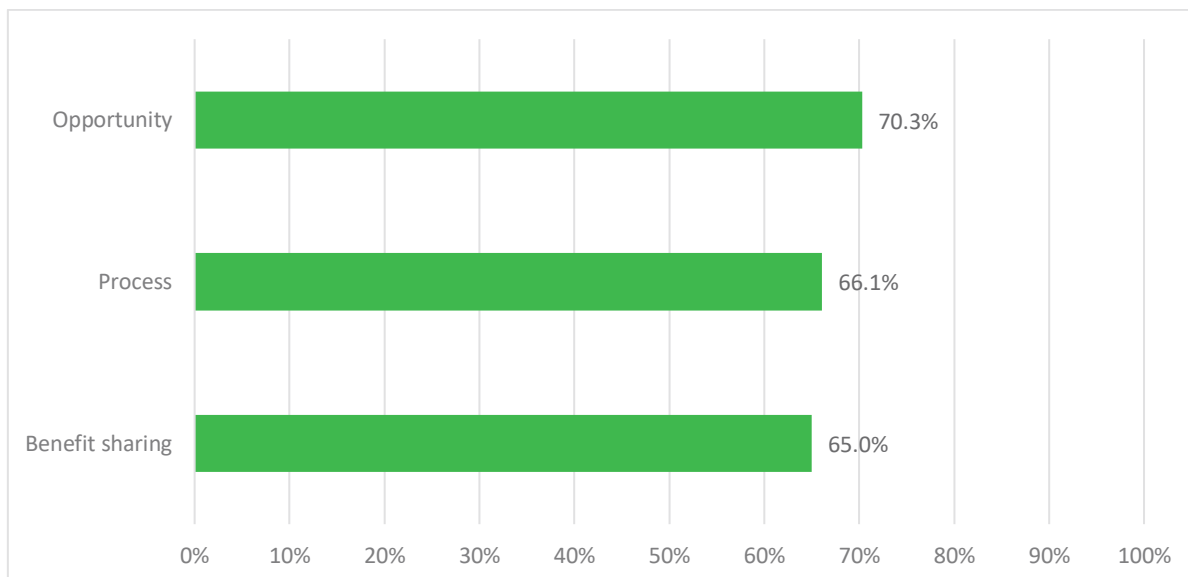
**Most GROW awards have successfully strived to ensure fairness and equity<sup>30</sup> in their research partnerships.** Drawing on the analysis conducted as part of Stage 1a (Fairness module), we can conclude that GROW awards stand out for having given more thought to issues related to fairness and equity compared to non-signature GCRF investments (see Stage 1a Fairness module). A number of factors (specific requirement in the call; size and length of the grant; encouragement and support from UKRI) led to GROW awards generally performing well across the three *fairness dimensions*: opportunity, process and benefits (see Table 4). To gather survey data on this issue, we set out criteria that an award would have to meet to demonstrate fairness of opportunity, process and benefits, also laid out in table 4 below. Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed that these criteria were present in their awards. Figure 3 below shows that GROW awards met at least 65% of the criteria for each dimension:

**Table 4: Framework for assessing the fairness of research partnerships (GCRF Stage 1 Fairness Report)**

	<b>Fairness of opportunity</b>	<b>Fairness of process</b>	<b>Fairness of benefits</b>
Definition	Who has a say in designing, planning and implementing the research project? How are the various partners' priorities, incentives and practical constraints factored into this?	Are there clear and transparent procedures for accountability and for everyone to have a voice?	Is there agreement on how the expected benefits of the partnership will be distributed?
Survey criteria	<p>My project is relevant to the communities of the target country(s)</p> <p>Contributions of those involved are clearly defined</p> <p>Financial resources allocated to partners to deliver the project are/were proportionate</p> <p>Appropriate support was provided for partners to manage the project</p>	<p>Any potential negative effects of the project were identified and mitigated</p> <p>Where possible, the project invested in local capacity building in the target country(s)</p> <p>Local ethical approval was sought or consulted</p> <p>All costs to deliver research outputs were/are covered in financial agreements</p>	<p>The project has helped improve research system capacities in the target country(s)</p> <p>Any intellectual property rights arising from the project are shared equally</p> <p>The project has specific plans to optimise the local practical use of new knowledge</p> <p>The project includes/included a plan to address environmental, social, and cultural concerns</p> <p>The project adheres to international best practice in international research and innovation</p>

<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this evaluation, we define 'equity' in partnerships as referring to the relations between partners, while we see 'fairness' as a broader concept encompassing other dimensions such as who has the opportunity to become a research partner in the first place, and the aggregate impact of partnerships on the context where they take place (see Fairness module report, p. 1).

**Figure 3: Percentage of GROW awards which met criteria for fairness of opportunity, process and benefit**



**Partners' involvement in project design is a key determinant of *fairness of opportunity*.** While partners were generally involved in project design for all the sampled GROW awards, these tended to be partners with which the UK RO already had an established relationship. Most GROW partnerships emerged out of previous collaborations and personal connections. Over half of the awards in our sample (8 out of 14) emerged from previous contacts and collaborations, while three were completely new partnerships and the remaining three were a mix of previous and new partnerships. The degree to which Southern partners were involved in project design at the application stage appears to closely correlate with the existence of collaborations that predated the funding call.

*'The time frame for the application was very short. We were lucky to have not just 'colleagues' but 'friends' in partner institutions – otherwise we could not have done it' (Professor Paul Denny, PI, A Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases – MR/P027989/1)*

**In relation to *fairness of process*, several examples of good practice and ideas for inclusiveness were given during the interviews**, such as: setting up meetings at different times to accommodate different time zones (thus 'rotating' the discomfort that comes from holding meetings very early in the morning or late at night); taking into account cultural and religious celebrations and national holidays when scheduling meetings; and being mindful of the fact that English is not the first language for many non-UK partners. The importance of flat management structures and a culture that encourages critical questioning was stressed.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> A1.1; A3.6; A8.2.

**Good internal communication played an essential role in fairness of process.** Most awards have established active channels of communication within the team. In addition to formal meetings, a number of examples of good practice emerged through the interviews:

- **WhatsApp groups** were used by many teams to stay in touch informally.
- Some teams used **monthly e-bulletins**, sent to the whole team and accessible online, with regular updates about the project, reminders about events and deadlines and external opportunities of potential interest for the team (conferences, trainings and funding calls), as well as more personal updates (such as weddings and new babies).
- A number of projects use **cloud-based content management and storage systems** (and/or log-in zones in project websites, open to all team members) for their data to ensure that all partners can securely access the data and project materials they require.
- In several cases, formal meetings were complemented by **informal ‘check-ins’** with PIs and/or programme managers.

For some projects, **social media** was vital not only in outward-facing communication but also as a way for different country teams to keep track of each other’s activity and achievements. For example, the **Ni3 award** (AH/P014240/1) has a very active social media presence (on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and in a YouTube channel). Each country team has students involved in media gathering, contributing to social media posting, and multimedia content creation.

**Many interviewees spoke of partnerships being ‘friendships’ – and in several cases, they were likened to ‘families’.**<sup>32</sup> In most cases the positive relations were considered a function of personalities (having the ‘right people’ on the team) rather than formal arrangements. Although in some cases the role of the PI was considered particularly important.<sup>33</sup>

**In-person engagement in the early (pre-Covid) phase of the project proved crucial to establish mutual trust and support, which then allowed teams to continue collaborative work during the pandemic.** For most projects, there was a considerable investment in relationship building in the early phase of the project, with partners travelling to meet each other and (in the cases of multi-country partnerships) events organised bringing together partners from different countries. As a consequence, projects were generally able to adapt well to the ‘online shift’ following Covid-19 and related travel restrictions. It was often remarked that if Covid had been there earlier in the life of the awards, the situation would have been very different.<sup>34</sup>

Yet **Covid-19 did also pose great challenges impacting on fairness of process and benefits.** It was recognised that the collaborations were negatively impacted from not being able to be together in person, and that has probably affected the possibility of getting funding for future collaborations (to be further explored below). Many informants spoke about the limits of online communication, which cuts out facial expressions, body language and the space for chatting and joking. The context of ‘working from home’ varied greatly for different team members. There were great differences in Internet connectivity, particularly for Southern researchers, who often had to leave their workplace and move to rural areas to be closer to their families. With school closures, many team members faced the stress of home schooling

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<sup>32</sup> A9.1; A10.1; A8.2.

<sup>33</sup> A1.2; A1.7; A9.3; A10.7; A11.5; A12.2.

<sup>34</sup> A1.1; A1.2; A8.2; A8.3; A9.1; A9.3; A10.6; A10.3; A13.1; A14.1.

and childcare. Many also faced personal illness, loss and trauma. There were several cases of researchers (particularly ECRs) who were caught out by the pandemic while spending time outside their home country because of research, and therefore were ‘stranded’ in another country, far from their families.

**Awards differed in the support provided to staff during the pandemic, but there are several examples of good practice.** For example, **TIGR2ESS** (BB/P027970/1) conducted a programme-wide survey in June 2020 to assess the impacts of the pandemic and working from home on team members. The management team worked with team members to ensure their well-being by encouraging flexible working hours and scheduling meetings at times convenient for all. Additionally, for those who felt isolated or overburdened due to the pandemic, increased support and engagement was also provided by the management team. Other awards, e.g. **Ni3** (AH/P014240/1), held social events online, such as an online quiz, virtual coffee hours, or other social occasions in order to keep the team connected.

**Southern partners generally expressed satisfaction with the *fairness of benefits deriving from the partnerships*** – in particular capacity development, discussed more in detail in EQ 2. South–South networking was considered as a great value-add and a unique feature of the GROW programme, leading in some cases to further funding (see EQ 4). An example is discussed in Box 5.

#### Box 5. Connecting researchers on neglected tropical diseases

The GROW award ‘A Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases’, led by Durham University, is an international academic consortium whose mission is to help identify new treatments for two parasitic illnesses: leishmaniasis and Chagas disease. The award connects researchers from countries where these diseases are endemic – in Latin America (Brazil, Argentina and Brazil) and South Asia (India and Pakistan). The award also made a significant effort to reach out to researchers in other endemic countries, in particular by opening its workshops for ECRs to applicants from other countries. Having the opportunity to ‘pick up the phone’ and ask questions to colleagues working on the same disease in another part of the world was considered a key benefit of this award by Southern partners. Talking to *The Guardian*, PI Professor Paul Denny stressed how this global collaboration has not just facilitated innovation but has also significantly contributed to worldwide trust and cooperation, with impact going well beyond the lifetime of this project.<sup>35</sup>

Award reference: MR/P027989/1

**Most GROW awards promoted joint authorship of publications.** One of the conclusions of the Fairness module in Stage 1a was that the authorship of publications has not been, to date, a significant benefit for Southern partners, with Southern researchers<sup>36</sup> being under-represented in publications generated by GCRF awards.<sup>37</sup> While a quantitative analysis of publications was not conducted for this process evaluation, our overview shows Southern authorship and co-authorship of academic publication in GROW awards to be the rule rather than the exception.

<sup>35</sup> Greenway (2021).

<sup>36</sup> Throughout the report, we use the expressions ‘Northern authors/researchers’ and ‘Southern authors/researchers’ to refer to individuals affiliated with universities in the Global North and the Global South respectively, at the time of the project and/or the publication. In case of multiple affiliations, the primary affiliation is considered. We recognise that this categorisation may not necessarily coincide with the researchers’ nationality or identity.

<sup>37</sup> This discrepancy of Northern and Southern publications reflects what was found in other research for development (R4D) programmes – e.g. Joint Fund evaluation: <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/research/joint-fund-evaluation/>

**In general, GROW awards have given thought to fairness in intellectual property rights and put mechanisms and processes in place to avoid the risk of ‘data drain’.** Several examples of good practice were noted by UKRI, including the hiring of a dedicated data specialist, the appointment of a ‘data lead’ within existing staff, or the set-up of ‘data groups’. 88% of survey respondents stated that they felt any intellectual property rights arising from the project are shared equally by the project’s partners, with 35.2% stating that they agreed with that statement and 52.5% stating that they strongly agreed. Data management plans are in place for most projects, although UKRI has noted that it is not always clear if they have been developed with overseas partners’ inputs. A number of projects referenced the FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) data principles in their data management plans.<sup>38</sup> In one instance, however, Southern partners in our sample expressed concern at what they saw as lack of clarity on intellectual property and data ownership after the end of the project. There was also some concern expressed in one case that if the publications are not completed by the end of the project, the Southern partners will need to take on the publication fees.<sup>39</sup>

**Within this overall positive picture of fairness in partnerships, a number of challenges were noted.** There were some mismatched expectations regarding the time commitment required by partners, leading to partnership termination in at least one case. Political developments in partner countries also impacted the collaboration in a number of cases, as discussed under EQ 5. In one instance, Southern partners raised issues related to the distribution of budget, reflecting on what they perceived as unequal researchers’ remuneration.

**Language barriers and cultural issues impacted the effectiveness of the partnership in some cases.** This was noted in particular with reference to difference approaches to hierarchy, which affected engagement of ECRs at times. In one instance (the **Blue Communities** award – NE/P021107/1), UK researchers participated in a cultural competency workshop, to help them reflect about their own positionality and critically examine their assumptions. It was suggested that similar cultural sensitivity workshops may be usefully considered more broadly for future programmes.

**Projects in which partners knew each other and had worked together before the project seem to have fared better in tackling these challenges, confirming the finding of GROW being better suited to nurturing existing collaborations rather than building new partnerships from scratch.** However, there are several cases of new partnerships that have also fared very well and developed into strong collaborations with the markings of fairness and sustainability.

### 3.1.8 Interdisciplinarity

**The majority of GROW projects have succeeded in having an interdisciplinary focus although the projects vary greatly in terms of the way in which interdisciplinary collaborations were fostered.** For some projects, interdisciplinarity was at the core of their DNA from the design stage. In other cases, the interdisciplinary lens became more prominent during the life of the project, as a combined result of a ‘push’ from the funders and a more organic response to the nature of challenge-led research, which gradually exposed the limits of single-discipline approaches. A minority of GROW awards remained mostly within the limits of closely connected disciplines, or had only limited success in connecting disciplinary silos of different work packages.

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<sup>38</sup> UKRI Overall feedback from 2020 Annual Reports.

<sup>39</sup> A1.5; A10.3; A14.4.

**UKRI played an important role in ensuring interdisciplinarity was prioritised in the GROW projects – particularly with regard to bridging the divide between natural sciences and social sciences.** This encouragement came both from the call itself and from the advice and feedback given to the awards at different times; POs played an important role in this regard. Many informants spoke candidly about the prevailing disciplinary bias in academia, particularly between natural and social sciences, and how the GROW programme has been transformational in helping to overcome these barriers. As one informant put it: ‘in the early days, we got strong hints from the funders that we needed to up our game in social science’.<sup>40</sup> This encouragement was generally welcomed by researchers, many of whom described their experience of interdisciplinarity within the project as a ‘learning journey’, at once challenging, rewarding and eye-opening. Several informants noted that prior to the GROW programme, their experience had been one of ‘narrow’ interdisciplinarity – collaboration with adjacent disciplines, which benefited from common language and epistemological frame of reference. In some cases, award holders declared that they took a ‘step back’ after the project was funded, realised that something was missing, and brought in researchers from other disciplines. Similarly in other cases, the work package structure was initially conceived along disciplinary silos, but cross-package linkages were developed during the course of the project.<sup>41</sup>

**The transformative value of interdisciplinary research was seen by several award holders in its potential to catalyse a change in the culture of UK academia and promote challenge-led research** – moving the starting point to complex issues that straddle multiple disciplines. The role played by GCRF in helping UK academics break disciplinary silos is discussed in more detail below under EQ 2. Box 6 and Box 7 provide examples of interdisciplinarity in GROW awards.

#### **Box 6. Using the past to inform policy: collaboration between plant scientists and archaeologists in TIGR2ESSS**

The GROW award TIGR2ESS, led by the University of Cambridge in collaboration with several institutions in India, offers a fascinating example of interdisciplinary collaboration by bringing together plant scientists and archaeologists to devise solutions to water scarcity in the India Northern state of Punjab.

With groundwater levels fast declining, improving the efficiency of water use in Punjab is a fundamental issue. TIGR2ESS includes a flagship project, led by archaeologists in collaboration with plant scientists, investigating changes in crops and water use in the

<sup>40</sup> A8.2.

<sup>41</sup> A8.1; A8.2; A8.3; A10.2; A10.3, A10.4; A10.6; A10.7; A13.1. A13.2 13.4, A13.5, A14.3, A14.6.

region covering modern-day Punjab over the last 4000 years.<sup>42</sup> These conclusions fed into the project's policy recommendations on how to increase crop diversification and alleviate stress on groundwater in Punjab.<sup>43</sup>

In 2021 the project received the prestigious Cambridge University Vice Chancellor's Collaboration Award. Of the project, the judges said: 'The impact of this project is truly epic in scale and importance. The project has had a huge influence on people and communities in the developing world. This was demonstrated through the exemplary and very large scale of engagement that has been undertaken, working in close collaboration with partners.'<sup>44</sup>

Award reference: BB/P027970/1

*'I am a plant scientist and had never in my life met an archaeologist. When the project launched, I knew we had many disciplines, but all parts seemed difficult to wrap my head around, so I thought I would just focus on my bit. This completely changed as we often met and closely interacted with sociologists, economists & geographers! TIGR2ESS brought home the true meaning of interdisciplinarity and social context to me. Next time I put together a grant application, I know that it will be more than just plant science'. (Dr Gitanjali Yadav, Co-I, TIGR2ESS)*

### **Box 7. Interdisciplinarity and community engagement in the SUNRISE award**

The GROW award SUNRISE, led by Swansea University, was initially designed as a primarily engineering-led project, but later expanded in two related directions: a greater role for social science research and a greater focus on the engagement of local communities in India. The Tata Institute of Social Sciences played a leading role on both counts. SUNRISE's strategy of public involvement and engagement centres around the use of participatory arts-based approaches.<sup>45</sup>

SUNRISE was selected as a case study for a study by an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on Addressing Societal Challenges Using Transdisciplinary Research. In the report, SUNRISE was highlighted for involving a broad range of academic and non-academic groups, including physicists and chemists as well as social scientists and user communities. The OECD report notes that 'Whilst the programme is Engineering-led, the core team involved experts from Social Sciences with knowledge and experience of working with Indian communities and subsequently expanded to include Humanities specialists exploring the relationship between energy systems and gendered household practices'.<sup>46</sup>

Award reference: EP/P032591/1

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<sup>42</sup> Petrie and Bates (2017).

<sup>43</sup> Stewart-Wood (2021).

<sup>44</sup> Smith (2021).

<sup>45</sup> Bevan (2019); Winter and Berholt (n.d.).

<sup>46</sup> OECD (2020).



### 3.1.9 Gender responsiveness and social inclusion

**Gender responsiveness, namely integrating measures for promoting gender equality, appears generally low in most awards, with the exception of those where gender is a primary focus of the research.** While GROW awards seem to be ‘ahead of the GCRF curve’ for fair partnership and interdisciplinarity, this does not apply to gender. Here, awards generally reflect the conclusions of Stage 1a, which found ‘a strong tendency for focusing on team parity was observed at the award level, at the expense of more progressive thinking about gender-related barriers and power issues’.<sup>47</sup> Box 8 and Box 9 provide examples of projects that have looked at gender in different ways.

**In general, awards made an effort to ensure gender balance in the team and in governance bodies, as well as in terms of panels for workshops and symposia.** The main obstacles to having gender parity within the team (and relatedly within management structures) came from the specifics of disciplines (with some fields being male-dominated) as well as country contexts. Senior female researchers have spoken of their role in providing positive role models for female ECRs. In one case, the project recruited a team of diversity champions to provide guidance on issues of gender and social inclusion. Several awards provided mentorship opportunities for female ECRs. For example, the **TCCP** (MR/P027946/2) engaged with *She Leads Change*, a London-based organisation that offers a comprehensive leadership programme for women, and two female research fellows undertook the training.

**In some cases, differences emerged between UK and Southern partners in relation to gender** – with UK partners feeling that they could not ‘push’ gender, out of respect for cultural sensitivity. Conversely, one Southern partner reported the feeling that gender was pushed in the project ‘by force’, and this was perceived to be due more to the UK lead institution’s need to report to funders than to an actual relevance to the project.

**Overall, there was little reflection on how the development challenges tackled through the awards had different gender manifestations and implications,** and therefore little reflection on how a gender perspective should be reflected in research questions, methods and processes. In a few cases, informants stated that gender was not relevant for their particular research topic, or that it was encompassed under a more general focus on inclusion. Several informants admitted that the project had not really thought about gender. In one case, it was stated that the relevance of gender became increasingly apparent during the course of the project, and so a gender specialist was brought in. While the impact on this particular award was limited, informants stated that this ‘learning journey’ had helped them to become more aware and that this will be reflected in future applications and work in general.<sup>48</sup>

**There was a sense that more guidance from UKRI around gender and inclusion would have been useful.** 82% of survey respondents noted that the funder did not supply them with gender and inclusion expert advice. From 2019, UKRI required a Gender and Equality statement for all GCRF applications, and published standardised guidance to assist prospective award holders.<sup>49</sup> As the GROW call was published in 2016, this was prior to any standardised guidance from UKRI, and gender and equality statements were not mandatory. Several informants noted that guidance and reflection on these issues in the proposal stage would have been useful. The majority of survey respondents (53%) noted that their award did not have a gender and inclusion plan in place.

<sup>47</sup> Izzi *et al.* (2021).

<sup>48</sup> A1.1; A1.5; A3.1; A3.2; A3.8; A8.3; A9.1; A9.3; A9.4; A9.5; A10.1; A10.2; A10.4; A10.6; A10.7; A10.8; A11.1; A11.2; A11.6; A13.2; A13.6.

<sup>49</sup> UKRI (2019).

### Box 8. Using video games to tackle gender-based violence (GBV)

The Ni3 GROW award, led by the University of Huddersfield, aimed to change attitudes towards GBV among young people, in Uganda, India, Jamaica and the UK (the latter funded separately by the University of Huddersfield). Its innovative approach involved developing and evaluating prosocial computer games as culturally appropriate, educational tools. The project finds its rationale in research showing that prosocial computer games offer the opportunity for unparalleled immersion and can enhance children's moral reasoning, foster empathy and reduce aggression.

Each country team focused on dimensions of GBV that they considered more relevant for their context: early marriage in Uganda, gender bias and its correlation to GBV in India, child sexual abuse in Jamaica, and intimate partner violence in the UK. This freedom to set country-specific priorities – within the common theme of GBV and the shared method of prosocial games – was greatly appreciated by partners.

All games are culturally specific, with a lot of attention given to getting the details right for the context (e.g. clothes, school buildings, language). Young Persons Advisory Groups have been established in each project countries, to enable consultation on game development.

Award reference: AH/P014240/1

### Box 9. Using mobile teaching kitchens to support women's empowerment in rural India

One of the components of the project encourages the growth of crops which can be introduced into people's diets to improve their health. TIGR2ESS researchers, working with Indian partner NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition and Health, have developed an innovative method for nutrition education using mobile teaching kitchens. The team behind this initiative has developed nutritious recipes, using healthy and often underused ingredients such as the grain millet. The project has empowered marginalised women in Kolkata, India to sell healthy food and deliver nutrition education to customers in a microenterprise model.

The team has also included outreach in the UK, in particular by putting together a cookbook, inspired by women taking part in mobile kitchens, and organising a cook-along session as part of the 2021 Cambridge Festival.<sup>50</sup>

Award reference: BB/P027970/1

**Broader issues of social inclusion are even less systematically addressed than gender.** In most cases, award holders see their research as de facto relevant for poor and marginalised populations, by virtue of the development challenge being addressed. While several awards do target specific marginalised populations, there is overall little systematic reflection on how development issues affect different individuals and groups in different ways.

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<sup>50</sup> TIGR2ESS (n.d.).

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

#### Box 10. Key findings of EQ 2

- By design, GROW focused on capacity development to a much higher degree than the non-signature GCRF investments.
- Early Career Researcher (ECR) schemes were a key value-add of GROW, providing opportunities for training, collaboration and networking.
- Some awards have increased institutional capacity in various ways, such as provision of lab equipment or establishment of ethics committees.
- There has been no systematic attention on the overall impact of GROW on research ecosystems in the Global South.
- There have been some significant outreach and capacity development efforts outside academia.
- GROW impacted UK academia, helping to change modes of working, promoting interdisciplinarity and challenge-led research.

EQ 2 looks at capacity development in GCRF signature investments, considering in particular the degree to which capacity development has been informed by a clear ToC, an analysis of capacity needs, and considerations of fairness.

As capacity development is the central tenet of GROW, we give particular attention to EQ 2 in this process evaluation, and identify three sub-EQs corresponding to three levels of capacity development:

- **Individual level:** To what extent are structures and systems in place to strengthen the capacities of individual researchers – in the UK and in the Global South? (3.2.1)
- **Organisational level:** To what extent are structures and systems in place to strengthen the capacities of research institutions – in the UK and in the Global South? (3.2.2)
- **Systemic level:** To what extent are structures and systems in place to strengthen research ecosystems – in the UK and in the Global South? (3.2.3).

We discuss a theme that came out prominently in our analysis, i.e. the role played by GROW in building capacities – at both individual and organisational levels – to engage ethically with local communities in the research process (3.2.4). Finally, we look at how capacity development efforts have benefited non-academic stakeholders and local communities (3.2.5).

**Our overall assessment is that GROW shows adequate structures and processes to support capacity development**, albeit primarily at the individual level. The Fairness assessment under Stage 1a found a lack of a systematic approach to capacity building in GCRF, which was also a key criticism advanced by the ICAI review: ‘Our analysis confirms that capacity strengthening is still approached in a rather ad hoc fashion (through discrete activities such as training workshops), and capacity is generally understood as going from the North to the South – although there are exceptions on both these counts’. Compared to this general assessment, our GROW analysis paints a very different picture, with capacity development being central to the call and reflected in the awards’ pathways to impact and ToCs.

**Call requirements were generally felt to have played a role in placing capacity development strongly on the agenda of GROW awards, not only as a set of activities but as a key measure of the success of awards.** Some awards have carried out a formal needs assessment to determine the capacity gap in partner institutions to inform the response to the GROW call.

### 3.2.1 Capacity development at individual level

**The primary beneficiaries of capacity development were ECRs, with several awards having training, mentorship and research mobility schemes.** Capacity development of ECRs was central to the GROW vision. This focus on ‘passing the baton to the next generation’ was seen by many as the real value added of the programme. ECR programmes were set up in different shapes across the portfolio, providing opportunities for training, collaboration, networking, and support for further funding. Innovative ways of capacity development of ECRs included small grants and pump-priming funding. In several cases, the capacity development relied strongly on international exchanges (see Box 11 for the example of the Blue Communities award’s ECR programme), which were severely affected by Covid.

#### Box 11. Blue Communities’ ECR programme

The GROW award ‘Building capacity for sustainable interactions with marine ecosystems for health, well-being, food and livelihoods of coastal communities’, known as Blue Communities and led by the University of Plymouth, instituted a robust ECR programme. It was spearheaded by a Co-I who had led a similar programme on another grant, and provided mentorship, targeted trainings, and workshops for researchers. Blue Communities’ definition of ECRs encompassed postdocs, PhDs, master’s students and undergraduates, reaching them extremely early in their career and allowing for mentorship between ECRs as well as with senior academics. This inclusion of undergraduates and master’s students was not found in any other GROW projects in the sample.

In addition to creating networks between Northern and Southern ECRs, it also facilitated South–South learning and collaboration. In many cases this has led to promotion, publication, and success in obtaining further funding. Blue Communities also succeeded in supporting ECRs from the Global South, and helped to create agency and opportunities for those in traditionally hierarchical cultures such as Indonesia and the Philippines.

Award reference: NEP/0211071

**It was remarked that ‘early career researcher’ means different things in different contexts, and that the figure of ‘postdoc’ (which is so central in the UK and other Northern academic contexts) does not really have an equivalent in many Southern contexts. Lack of funding for PhDs was generally felt to be a great missed opportunity for the programme,** particularly by Southern partners – a point already raised in the Fairness assessment.<sup>51</sup> This was particularly felt by many Southern partners in light of the duration of the GROW award (four years), which would have made it a perfect fit for PhDs.<sup>52</sup> Relatedly, it was also noted that more support for mid-career researchers would have been useful in some contexts.

**ECR schemes relied strongly on international exchanges, and that was severely affected by Covid.** Projects that have worked with lab-based ECRs felt significant disruption as their work

<sup>51</sup> A1.3; A1.7; A10.2; A13.1; A13.2.

<sup>52</sup> Some projects did include PhD students by other means (through the host institution contribution, or by hiring them directly in project roles).

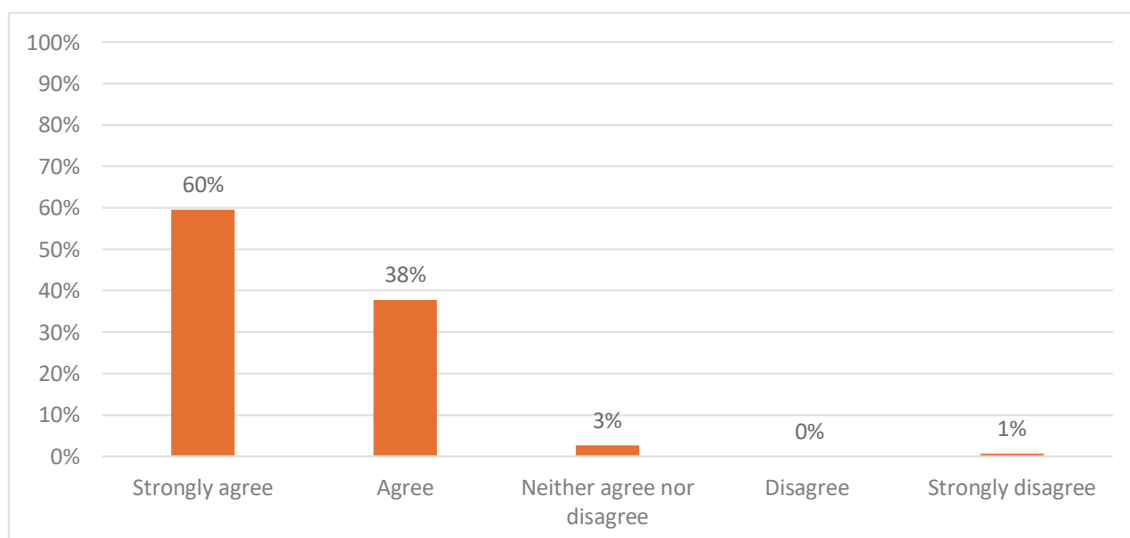
could not be carried out remotely. In addition, projects that worked with seasonal cycles – such as TIGR2ESS, which relied on annual crop cycles – had fewer opportunities for data collection and analysis. These challenges resulted in project delays, but also created a risk for the ECRs’ overall career trajectories.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2.2 Capacity development at organisational level

**While most capacity development happened at individual level, there are also examples of capacity development benefiting Southern institutions.** Provision of laboratory equipment was considered by several Southern partners as a key element of capacity development and sustainability. Other examples of institutional capacity development included: support for the establishment of ethics systems;<sup>54</sup> support to establish a postdoc programme;<sup>55</sup> support to establish closer links with industry (e.g. joint PhD programmes);<sup>56</sup> and support for grant writing.

The survey data shows that 97% of GROW survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project has increased capabilities (skills/infrastructure) in the project’s target country. 92% of survey respondents reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the project has helped improve research system capacities in the target country. However, it is important to note that most survey respondents were not from the target country of the project, and there is limited voice within survey data from team members in target countries. Of those from LMIC countries (18% of GROW survey respondents), 98% stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the project has helped improve research system capacities in the target country (as seen in figure 4 below).

**Figure 4: How strongly do you agree that your project has contributed to improved capacities in the target country(s) (LMIC respondent)?<sup>57</sup>**



**There is evidence that the GROW programme changed modes of working and increased the capacity of UK academics and their institutions to conduct challenge-led, interdisciplinary research for development impact.** The key element was moving away from academic

<sup>53</sup> Greenway (2021).

<sup>54</sup> A7.

<sup>55</sup> A5.

<sup>56</sup> A8.

<sup>57</sup> N=151

publications as the primary measure of success and including indicators around capacity development, partnerships and outreach – all areas that are often recognised as important in principle but that can then be easily sidelined by the prevalent imperative of ‘publish or perish’. Almost 80% of survey respondents stated that they felt there were new or strengthened capabilities (skills and infrastructure) in the UK – 40.9% stated they agreed with the statement, and 38.7% stated that they strongly agreed.

### 3.2.3 Capacity development at systemic level

**There is a lack of systematic reflection on the impact of GROW on the overall research ecosystem in the Global South** beyond the institutions that are directly involved with the GROW awards. The Research Fairness module, as part of Stage 1a of the GCRF evaluation, noted that the concentration of a significant amount of funding, capacity development, networking opportunities and influence in a limited number of Southern institutions raises issues of **contextual fairness** – defined here as the legacy that research processes have, in a cumulative way, on the context where they take place. A focus on contextual fairness moves the attention to the aggregate impact of R4D investments on research ecosystems and power dynamics in the Global South. This recognises that, even if individual projects are fair in their partnerships and engagement with stakeholders, they can still, taken together, have unfair results – for example, by exacerbating inequalities among countries and institutions in the Global South. The search for ‘tried and true’ Southern partners may lead to disproportionate capacity development support and funding going to a small proportion of organisations and scholars. Relatedly, research partnerships can lead to deviation of Southern-generated research from locally relevant priorities. More broadly, the significant increase in UK academics engaged in development research, and the related need to achieve and demonstrate research uptake and development impact, raises potential risks in terms of ‘engagement saturation’ of national and local stakeholders.<sup>58</sup>

**In relation to contextual fairness, our assessment of GROW is aligned with the general findings of Stage 1a.** The aim of strengthening research ecosystems (beyond individual partner institutions) is not reflected in the GROW ToC. While the GROW Funding Call encourages building ‘new’ partnerships as well as strengthening existing ones, a number of factors (primarily the limited time available at the application and set-up stage) have made GROW more conducive to nurturing existing partnerships than to establishing new ones. With the programme coming to a close, there is great potential for reflection on how GROW as a whole influenced competition for opportunities among Southern institutions and the shaping of research priorities in the Global South.

### 3.2.4 Ethical engagement with local communities

**An important dimension of capacity development for ‘doing research differently’ (both for UK and Southern partners) had to do with engaging local communities.** This is strongly linked to interdisciplinarity: seeing the problem from the perspective of the local community helped to overcome disciplinary silos. One researcher talked about having worked ‘for’ local communities for all their career (i.e. assuming that their work, because of its theme, would eventually benefit local communities) but how they were working for the first time ‘with’ communities (i.e. actually going out and talking to community members about their needs and priorities). Another researcher noted that their award has ‘changed the whole ethos’ of how

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<sup>58</sup> Global Challenges Research Fund Evaluation – Research Fairness, Final Report (2021).

they work.<sup>59</sup> Box 12 describes the example of the Ni3 project, which worked with survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and child abuse in different countries.

**GROW project teams had to grapple with a number of ethical issues when engaging with local communities** including the need to manage communities' expectations around the direct benefits of research, as well as issues of informed consensus when dealing with strong asymmetries of power and/or traumatised groups. Ethical issues also arose when awards resumed work after lockdowns. Team members had to weigh the need to finish a project against the potential risks with community interaction while the pandemic still posed a threat. One project working with local communities used funds to acquire personal protective equipment (PPE) for researchers in order to ensure the health and safety of both researchers and the community. Overall, however, 90% of survey respondents stated that they felt local ethical approval was sought or consulted during the project, with 17.1% stating they agreed with the statement and 73.7% stating they strongly agreed.

### Box 12. Building capacities on ethical research with traumatised populations

Given its focus on GBV victims, the Ni3 award has given particular thought to the issue of ethical engagement with traumatised populations. In a recent workshop for new and aspiring researchers, Dr Esther Nanfuka Kalule (Makerere University, Uganda), who shared the project's experience and learning around doing research with child marriage survivors, abused children and young people, and former abducted women and girls.

The starting point is the recognition that questions can re-traumatise respondents. Strategies to mitigate this risk included the following:

- Ensure the presence in the team of staff members with counselling skills, and train the whole team to recognise triggers of distress and situations of potential risk to participants.
- Establish interview strategies that give participants time to recover from questions, letting respondents dictate the pace and take breaks when necessary.
- Provide guidance on diversionary tactics for changing the conversation to less sensitive topic should a potential perpetrator (e.g. spouse) arrive during the interview.
- Have referral procedures in place, connecting respondents in need of help with appropriate service providers.
- Prioritise participants' and researchers' safety when choosing the place and time of interviews.

It is also important for the team to be mindful of the risk of secondary trauma for the researchers, thus allowing for regular debriefing, as well as flexibility for time off for those who need to recover.<sup>60</sup>

Award reference: AH/P014240/1

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<sup>59</sup> A8.1; A8.2; A8.3; A10.2; A10.4; A10.7.

<sup>60</sup> None in Three (n.d.).

### 3.2.5 Capacity development beyond academia

**Most GROW awards proactively expanded capacity development beyond researchers, with a strong emphasis on outreach to non-academic audiences and local communities.**<sup>61</sup> Several awards linked up with festival and other events aimed at the general public in the UK, e.g. science festivals, British Science Week, activities in schools, and various podcasts. Members of the research team were actively encouraged to engage in outreach, and in some cases received specialised media training. Box 13 provides a compelling example of capacity development with former combatants in Colombia.

**In some cases, moving events and training online meant a wider reach.** For example, once the pandemic struck, the TIGR2ESS team moved its data science training courses online. One of them, held in December 2020, was called ‘WE-Vidya’, which stands for ‘Women enabled for Virtual Induction as Data Youth and AI experts’ (the word ‘Vidya’ means ‘education’ in Hindi). The organisers were surprised to find that this attracted a much broader spectrum of participants, including women in very remote rural areas who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to attend such a course.

#### Box 13. Creating opportunities for conservation and ecotourism with former combatants in Colombia

The award ‘Preserving, Restoring and Managing Colombian Biodiversity Through Responsible Innovation’, known as ‘GROW Colombia’ and led by the University of East Anglia, worked in Colombia in the immediate aftermath of the peace accords and engaged significantly with former combatants. The award trained former FARC-EP guerrillas as citizen scientists to carry out species surveys and explore opportunities for conservation and ecotourism. This biodiversity work is mainly carried out in areas that were previously conflict zones and had not been accessible. These regions, called Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCRs), are also increasingly becoming ecotourism hotspots, providing ample opportunity for new jobs.

Significant efforts have been made to reincorporate ex-combatants into civilian life, as they are now looking for stable and suitable jobs. GROW Colombia has helped to teach ex-combatants basic conservation skills, such as species inventory, bird sighting and cave exploration. It also provided business networking opportunities, connecting participants with Colombian research institutions. This led to the establishment of a national biodiversity committee of ETCR representatives, as well as a committee of government and non-government institutions to support biodiversity and ecotourism initiatives.

This work was led by a Colombian team member who lived part of his life under the conflict, and it has helped to create strengthened trust with the community. Former combatants often have difficulty obtaining work, so targeted interventions such as this have been found to be very successful.<sup>62</sup>

Award reference: BB/P028098/1

<sup>61</sup> A8; A10.

<sup>62</sup> Gongora and Di Palma (2019).



### 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 14. Key findings of EQ 3

- For most awards there were delays in award set-up and subsequent project start dates, generally due to administrative and financial challenges. Financial management continued to pose challenges past the inception period.
- Reporting requirements and guidance from UKRI were not always felt to be clear or consistent.
- Awards did not have specific guidance on VfM, and generally adopted a narrow interpretation of the concept (focused on procurement).

EQ 3 addresses the efficiency, timeliness and proportionality of the processes that were put in place to support challenge-led research (as discussed in Section 3.1), their fairness to partners, and the VfM that these processes provided. In other words, while EQ 1 discusses the key *principles* of the processes that were put in place, EQ 3 discusses how these processes worked out *in practice*.

We start by discussing findings around the efficiency, timeliness and proportionality of the guidance provided by UKRI, and the way in which the awards interpreted and expanded on this guidance to deal with their management challenges (3.3.1). We then discuss the way in which VfM was interpreted in GROW awards (3.3.2).

**Our overall assessment is that the majority of GROW awards were efficiently implemented and made considerable efforts to put in place fair and equitable processes.** Flexibility of funding was widely appreciated; however, some of the structures in place (e.g. payment in arrears) were found not to be well suited to the conditions for most Southern partners, and thus not inherently conducive to fair partnerships.

#### 3.3.1 Efficiency, timeliness and proportionality of processes

**There is great variation in terms of project management feedback by award holders:** some awards found it quite straightforward, while others struggled and found that resources for project management were insufficient. The main factors affecting this were: (1) whether partners had collaborated before; (2) the institutional strength of partners; (3) support from the lead institution (e.g. being embedded in an existing centre); (4) the amount of human resources dedicated to project management.

**In most cases the set-up period took longer than anticipated, leading to delays at the start of the projects.** Frequently reported challenges during the inception phase had to do with different bureaucratic systems, leading to delays in the signing of collaboration agreements and delays in hiring of staff, procurement of equipment, and money-transfer to Southern partners. As many GROW projects had partners in India, they were particularly affected by the provisions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act Clearance, which regulates which Indian institutions can receive foreign funds and under what conditions. Putting in place the relevant ethics and data management plans was also reported as a source of delays.

While most informants felt that there was nothing specific to GROW about these delays (the view was often expressed that ‘these things just take time’), it does seem that such predictable challenges had been underestimated by both award holders and UKRI, and that the envisaged timelines for the start of research work proved to be unrealistic. We can also observe a difference between awards based on previous connections and collaborations – which could navigate these delays relatively smoothly – and awards where partners had not worked together before, which found the process more stressful and in some cases led to mutual frustration. Other important factors were the amount of dedicated management research in the awards and the previous institutional experiences in this kind of project.

**Financial management continued to pose challenges beyond the inception period.** In particular, the practice of payment in arrears (requiring the institutions to advance funds and then be refunded upon submission of financial records) was reported as a challenge by all GROW awards in our sample. In most cases, Southern partners did not have the cashflow to be able to advance payments, and ad hoc solutions were found with host institutions. A view frequently expressed in interviews was the need for a common approach from UKRI to the issue of payment in arrears, rather than this being left to lead institutions.

**Many partners needed additional support to build financial capacity .** A common issue had to do with financial records (delayed, incomplete or incorrect invoices, or claims from overseas partners for refund of some expenses without invoice, e.g. the practice of Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA)). A number of projects included activities to build capacity in this area, for example exchanges, training and mentoring on financial management. It was reported that research support staff from different partners meeting face to face helped to establish good relationships, and this meant that future queries or issues were dealt with more effectively.<sup>63</sup> Due diligence has been another source of some delays and frustrations for projects. UKRI advocates a ‘risk-based’ approach to due diligence, although research organisations decide their own level of risk appetite.<sup>64</sup> **Post-Brexit currency fluctuation has also negatively impacted Southern partners.** Lead institutions stepped in to mitigate, but the suggestion was raised of a central ‘contingency fund’ for such occurrences.

**Requirements and expectations from UKRI have not always been clear and consistent.** As GROW was one of the first GCRF calls to be launched, there was a general sense among grantees that requirements were still at some level a ‘work in progress’, where expectations were not always clearly communicated and guidance was not always consistent. Examples had to do with the use of ToC, MEL requirements, and expectations around Advisory Boards (all discussed above in EQ 1).

**Reporting and management arrangements were generally considered proportionate and not too onerous,** although there was variation across award holders. This seemed to depend mostly on the previous experience of PIs and other key team members; those who had experience working on DFID or European Union grants tended to find the MEL and reporting requirement quite ‘light’. In some cases this was a source of frustration, leaving uncertainty in terms of which data to gather and which criteria the award would ultimately be measured against. It was also noted that the comments received from UKRI after reporting were quite limited and generic, and that more extensive and detailed feedback would have been useful. In general, 82% of survey respondents stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that appropriate support was provided for partners to manage the project.

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<sup>63</sup> UKRI overall feedback 2020 reports.

<sup>64</sup> UKRI overall feedback 2020 reports.

### 3.3.2 VfM

**Awards did not have specific guidance on VfM, and generally followed the procurement guidelines of lead institutions.** A review of financial management plans shows that several awards referenced the DFID’s 4E framework (‘Economy’, ‘Efficiency’, ‘Effectiveness’ and ‘Equity’).<sup>65</sup> However, concrete steps that awards declare they have taken are mostly around the first two Es (‘Economy’ and ‘Efficiency’), in compliance with procurement guidelines of host universities. Frequent examples include:

- Tendering process for the procurements of good and services (e.g. complying with the requirement of three quotes).
- Purchasing lab equipment directly from manufacturers.
- Careful planning and harmonisation of timelines between work packages to ensure resources (people and materials) are used as efficiently as possible.
- Airline flight policy: use of economy ticket and low-cost airlines when safe; ensuring that adequate plans are made in advance to reduce the requirement for ‘last minute’ travel bookings; block book flights whenever possible, using the most competitive fares.
- Hotel policy: staying in reasonably priced accommodation when safe to do so.
- Use of videoconference facilities and online content management systems to limit the need of in-person meetings and travel.
- Use of conference facilities by host institutions (free of charge) for in-person meetings, and using universities’ catering systems and universities’ accommodations at subsidised rates.

**The stage gate review had one specific question on VfM as part of financial reporting** (‘How well is the project ensuring value for money? Is there anything they should be doing better?’). In a number of cases, stage review panels commented that the awards demonstrated good VfM; however, no details are provided in the feedback as to how this conclusion was reached. In one case there was a suggestion to expand the concept of VfM beyond ‘saving money’, but no further suggestion or guidance as to how this was to be achieved. In another case it was noted that the remit of VfM was seen as mainly falling within the Finance and Management Team, and that it should be integrated within the team at large – but, again, with no further detail guidance on how to go about doing this.

**Several informants noted that the ‘real value’ of GROW was hard to articulate in VfM terms.** They referred mostly to the role played by the programme in launching the careers of a new generation of researchers, who will be able to ‘do research differently’ – transcending disciplinary silos and geographical barriers, and crossing the walls of academia to co-produce research with key stakeholders and local communities. This mindset shift was described as ‘intangible’ and ‘impossible to count in financial terms’.

*‘The real legacy of GCRF has been to alter the way UK academics think and frame their research. The value of outputs is not only seen in immediate deliverables – we have trained so many young researchers, launching careers and developing collaborative partnerships. You can’t count that in*

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<sup>65</sup> DFID (2011).

*financial terms, but their academic potential will endure'. (Professor Howard Griffiths, Principal Investigator, TIGR2ESS (BB/P027970/1))*

**Success in securing follow-up funding was quoted by some award holders as an indication of VfM.** 30% of survey respondents stated that additional funding had been secured on the back of the GROW award. This is discussed further under EQ 6.

### 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?

#### Box 15. Key findings of EQ 4

- **The GROW awards are making significant progress towards their intended impacts. They have supported policy uptake,** influenced practice and private investments, and provided direct benefits to local communities.
- While Covid-19 impacted progress towards impact in multiple ways, projects were able to adapt and continue to progress in their impact pathways.
- In some cases, Covid-19 provided new areas of analysis and policy influence in impact.
- Most teams felt that the no-cost extension was not sufficient, and there was disappointment that the projects were ending just when impact was starting to show.

Under EQ 4, we investigate to what extent the GROW awards have progressed against their envisaged impact (3.4.1) and what the impact of Covid-19 has been on these trajectories and how projects have adapted (0).

**The overall assessment of EQ 4 is that most awards are performing well and have made significant progress towards their intended impact** and have been able to successfully respond and adapt to the unexpected and unprecedented challenges of Covid-19, thanks to a large extent to the flexibility provided by the funders.

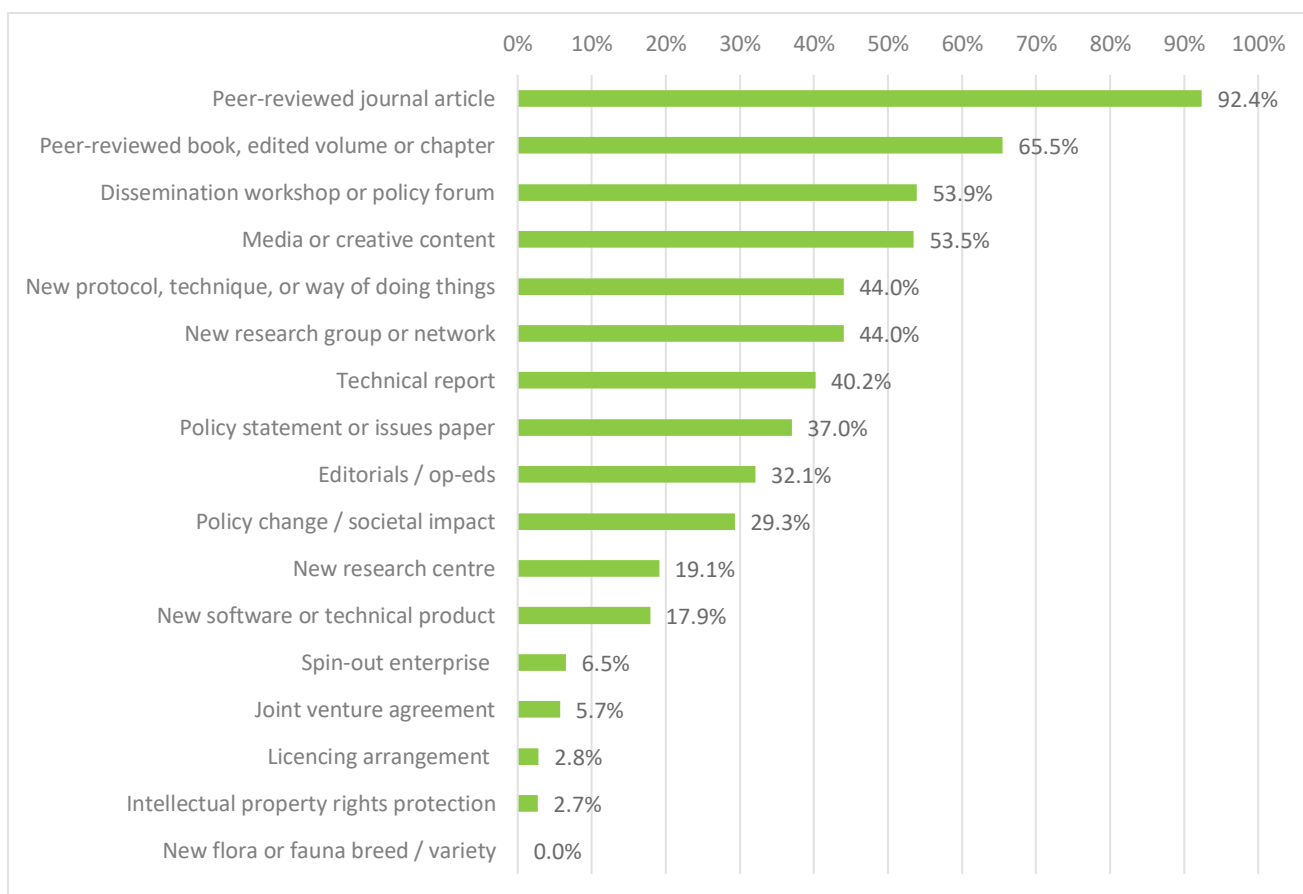
#### 3.4.1 Overview of pathways to impact

**The GROW awards are making significant progress towards their intended impacts. They have supported policy uptake,** influenced practice and private investments, and provided direct benefits to local communities. According to GROW survey respondents, the most common form of uptake was by academics and researchers, with 85% of respondents stating that academics and researchers used information from GROW projects. 47% of respondents stated that national policymakers used information from their projects, and 43% of respondents stated that local communities did so. Less commonly reported areas of uptake were: the UK private sector, with only 3% of survey respondents stating use of GROW information in this area; the private sector in LMICs, with 12% of survey respondents stating use of project information here; and UK non-governmental institutions or civil society, with 13% of survey respondents stating use of project information in this regard. **Capacity development, discussed in detail above under EQ 2, is also an important part of the envisaged impact for GROW.**

**As seen below in Figure 5:7, survey respondents noted that their GROW award produced a wide variety of project outputs.** The most common output was publication of a peer-reviewed

journal article, with 92% of survey respondents stating that their project had produced this. Other commonly reported project outputs included: having a dissemination workshop or policy forum with decision makers (54% of survey respondents); created media or creative content such as interviews, blogs or podcasts (54% of survey respondents); creation of a new research group or network (44% of survey respondents); and developing a new protocol or way of doing this (44% of survey respondents).

**Figure 5: Which of the following outputs has your project produced? (Percentage of GROW respondents)<sup>66</sup>**



### 3.4.2 Effects of Covid-19 on pathways to impact

**Covid-19 and related restrictions significantly affected the progress towards impact for all awards in our sample.** In particular, travel restrictions impacted on the international exchanges, on which many ECR capacity development programmes were based. The closure of universities had a significant impact on all lab-based projects. Projects that were working with local communities had to interrupt fieldwork; several of them later adapted data collection methods to the new Covid reality, for example by using mobile phone technology. Several informants reported that **one immediate consequence of Covid restrictions was to have more time for writing and analysis** – and indeed, GROW awards have remained on track (or above target) in the production of academic publications, as well as policy- and practice-oriented

<sup>66</sup> N=154

outputs. **Projects whose pathways to impact included close engagement with policymakers reported being particularly affected by Covid**, as this kind of interaction is more difficult to move online. However, in many cases projects had already established policy engagement in pre-pandemic times, and could continue to build on these engagements to some extent.<sup>67</sup>

In some cases, GROW team members and partner institutions took on additional responsibilities (outside the project) to support their government's pandemic responses. A particularly interesting case is the **TCCP** (discussed in Box 16), where several team members – in view of their expertise in public health, epidemiology and respiratory health – took on various responsibilities in Covid response with their governments. This was also the case with the **Network of Neglected Tropical Diseases** award (MR/P027989/1), where team members – in addition to supporting the Covid response in various ways – focused on public outreach and raising public awareness in relation to the pandemic. Researchers from the project noted that, along with its many devastating impacts, the pandemic also provided an opportunity for a greater emphasis on zoonoses, and more broadly for a greater role of science in informing policy responses. Box 17 discusses the case of the PEAK Urban award (ES/P011055/1) influencing Covid response policies in Colombia.

*'This pandemic has strengthened the idea that science can help. It is a very important time to build a 'constituency of science'. So, in this sense, I see an opportunity for a more holistic approach to health – provided that scientists can present the case strongly' (Professor Iqbal Choudhary, Pakistan Hub Lead, Network of Neglected Tropical Diseases (MR/P027989/1))*

#### **Box 16. GROW awards adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic: the case of the TCCP**

The TCCP, led by the University of Edinburgh, works in several countries in Africa and Asia to improve capacity to produce high-quality evidence on how to reduce morbidity and mortality caused by tobacco use. The programme has built close relations with key stakeholders at country level. For example, it has engaged closely with the Tobacco Control Committee in The Gambia and has been brought into discussions around the country's Tobacco Control Act. A paper published by the project around impact of exposure to second-hand smoke in public places was reported to have contributed to the Ministry of Health rekindling its efforts towards sensitisation. In Ghana, the same project has published research showing that 20% of cigarette products in the country are illicit, providing a 'push' for the signing of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products.

All TCCP partners were placed under lockdown restrictions by their governments in spring 2020. These restrictions have differed by country, but typically involved bans on all travel, and the closure of workplaces, universities and schools. Given their expertise in public health, epidemiology and respiratory health, several TCCP team members took on additional responsibilities to support their government's pandemic response. The award PI, Professor Linda Bauld, was appointed as Interim Chief Social Policy Adviser within the Scottish Government to support a comprehensive programme of work on Covid response,

<sup>67</sup> A1.1; A1.3; A3.1; A3.2; A8.1; A8.2; A8.3; A9.1; A9.3; A9.4; A10.1; A10.2; A10.6; A10.8; A11.1; A11.2; A11.3; A11.5; A12.1; A12.7; A14.4. A14.5.

as well as serving as an advisor to the Scottish Parliament's Covid response.<sup>68</sup> Two of the Co-Investigators in the UK are respiratory physicians, and were at the front line of caring for Covid patients. Other team members in The Gambia, Ghana, India, Bangladesh and Ethiopia have been tasked with providing clinical care, leading testing centres and carrying out Covid surveillance activities.

Despite these diversions, the project continued to progress against its objectives, and it expanded its focus to examine the relation between tobacco consumption and Covid. Directly building on the GROW award, in mid-2020 the project partners implemented a two-and-a-half-month research project designed to meet an urgent need for evidence on public health responses and tobacco control in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This produced a number of briefing reports, with policy recommendations, looking at the connection between Covid and tobacco use in Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The project was funded through an internal call for proposals from the University of Edinburgh, utilising GCRF funding from the Scottish Funding Council.<sup>69</sup>

Award reference: MR/P027946/1

### Box 17. Covid adaptation and adoption of urban planning models in Medellin, Colombia

The GROW award 'Building capacity for the future city in developing countries', known as PEAK Urban and led by the University of Oxford, included partners from Universidad EAFIT in Colombia. GROW provided the opportunity for significant institutional capacity building, including establishment of the university's first postdoc programme. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, a Co-I, Professor Juan Carlos Duque, and his team were given the opportunity to provide urban resilience recommendations to the local government. They developed an 'insularity index' to understand which municipalities in the city of Antioquia could be opened at low risk. This was adopted, and proved successful owing to quick and easy deployment.<sup>70</sup>

Responding to the Covid-19 crisis allowed the team to hone their communication skills with stakeholders such as policymakers, and it prepared them for future opportunities to create impact. Duque's team subsequently identified industries directly through a spatial examination of their supply chains, leading them to develop an algorithm to map commercial activity in highly informal cities, including anticipated natural resource use. This was particularly relevant to Colombia, which has high commercial informality. The model was subsequently adopted by the largest public utility in Colombia, and is now used by the City of Medellin for urban planning projects.

Award reference: ES/P011055/1

**The no-cost extension in general was not considered sufficient.**<sup>71</sup> In spite of the generally positive adaptation to Covid conditions, progress towards impact was certainly slowed by the pandemic, and most teams feel that their awards are coming to an end just when impact was starting to emerge. A frequent point made during interviews is that award holders had wished

<sup>68</sup> SPECTRUM Consortium (2021).

<sup>69</sup> Usher Institute (n.d.).

<sup>67</sup> PEAK Urban (n.d.).

<sup>71</sup> P1; A8.3; A9.1; A9.3; A11.1; A12.1; A12.7.

for a longer no-cost extension, while the majority of awards only received a three-month extension to March 2022. A common effect of the short no-cost extension (combined with the uncertainty around funding cuts, discussed below) was the loss of several staff members (particularly research managers and ECRs) who moved on, looking to new positions. Also, the short no-cost extension particularly affected multi-country projects, who were left with little or no time for cross-country synthesis.<sup>72</sup>

### 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 18. Key findings of EQ 5

- GROW awards faced a number of contextual challenges, in addition to the global challenge of Covid, linked to contextual factors e.g. political instability and security concerns, as well as an unsupportive organisational environment in some cases.
- The timing was right for GROW, as most awards had already established close working relationships with partners and were well positioned in terms of data collection when the pandemic started.
- Funder flexibility was a key enabler for overcoming barriers and achieving impact.
- The commitment of award research teams and leadership strengthened the ability to achieve impact in the face of significant challenges.

We address EQ 5 by highlighting the main barriers that have been encountered by GROW awards, some of which have already been explored in other sections (3.5.1). We then examine the main factors that have allowed GROW awards to overcome these challenges in different contexts (3.5.2).

**Our overall assessment is that GROW awards have generally been successful in overcoming barriers (both contextual and project-related),** thanks to funder flexibility, strong leadership, and the high level of commitment of research teams.

#### 3.5.1 Barriers

**Covid-19 was cited by all award holders as the main barrier.** As discussed under EQ 4, Covid-19 significantly hampered data collection, capacity development and impact activities, causing significant delays.

**In addition to Covid-19, several GROW awards faced contextual challenges in their respective countries of work.** Some of these challenges had to do with political developments – for example:

- the 2021 military coup in Myanmar for the **FutureDAMS** award (ES/P011373/1)
- the political uprising, restrictions of freedom of movement, university closures, financial instability, and 2020 port explosion in Lebanon for the **RECAP** award (ES/P010873/1)

<sup>72</sup>UKRI explained that a longer no-cost extension was not possible past the end of the financial year, as it was given only when projects had extenuating circumstances, such as parental leave.

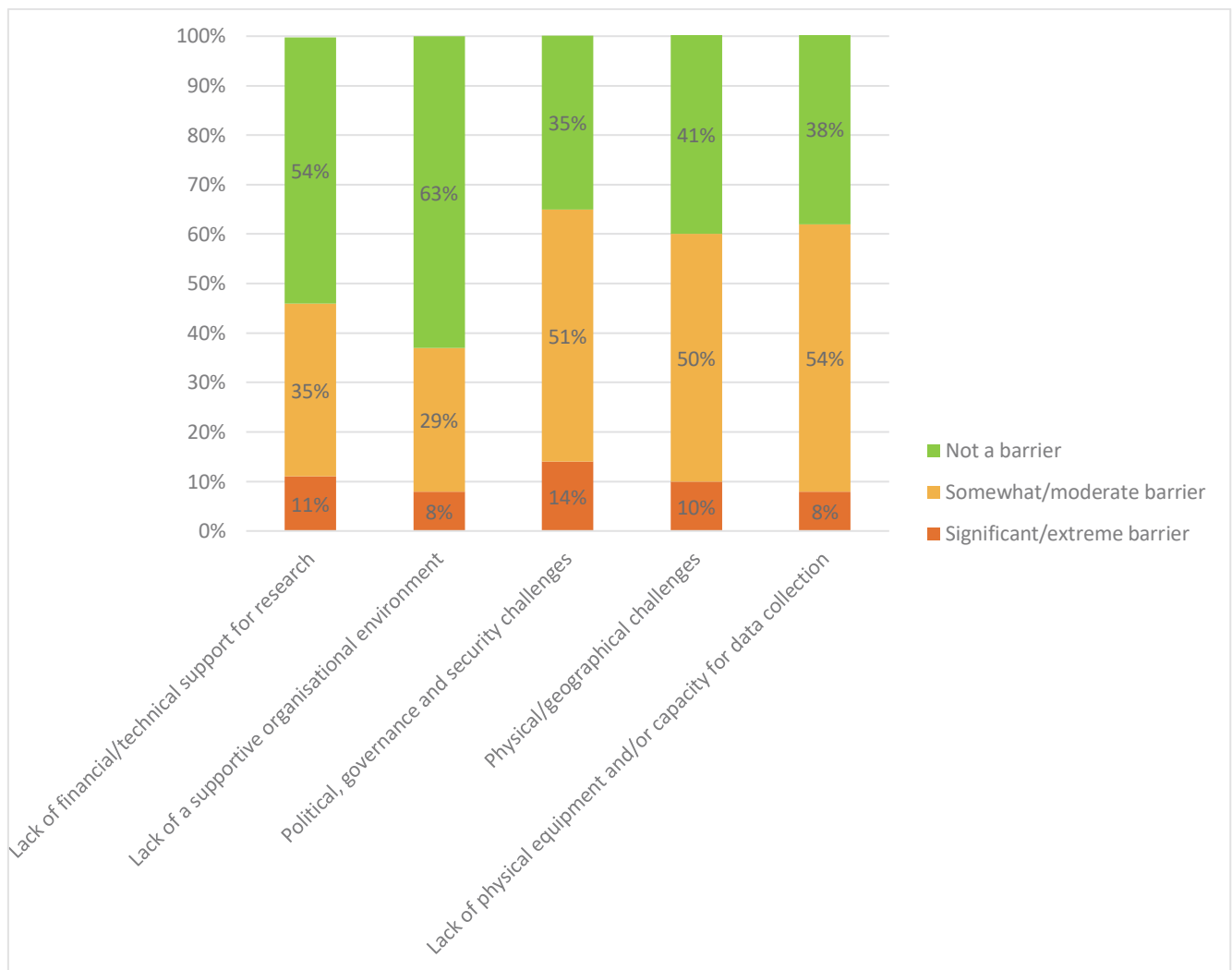


- the continuing insecurity and localised violence in Colombia for the **Colombian Biodiversity** award (BBP0280981).

GROW survey respondents stated that this was the most significant barrier they faced, with 14% of survey respondents reporting it as a significant or extreme barrier. Other contextual challenges had to do with environmental factors, such as drought and extreme weather events, with 10% of survey respondents stating that these were either significant or extreme barriers.

Further barriers can be seen in Figure 6 below. These include: lack of financial and technical capacity (10% of survey respondents reporting it as a significant or extreme barrier); lack of a supportive organisational environment (8% of survey respondents reporting it as a significant or extreme barrier); and lack of physical equipment and/or local professional capacity for data collection (8% of survey respondents reporting it as a significant or extreme barrier).

Figure 6: To what extent did these factors represent a barrier to your project’s progress?<sup>73</sup>



<sup>73</sup> N=145

### 3.5.2 Enabling factors

**A first enabling factor that allowed GROW to respond to the challenge of Covid-19 was fortuitous rather than planned, and had to do with timing. The fact that when the pandemic struck, GROW awards had already been under way for over two years certainly made a significant difference in their ability to cope.** At that point, partnerships had already been established, and most awards had dedicated significant time and energy in the early stages of the process to get to know their partners – so that when the ‘online switch’ happened with Covid, there was already a habit of cooperation and a basis of trust and support among partners. Similarly, data collection was well under way by that point, so, with fieldwork interrupted and universities and labs closed, researchers could dedicate a few months to analysis and publications, thus advancing on that front and limiting the damage to the overall progress of the award.

**Funder flexibility was a key enabling factor for overcoming barriers and achieving impact.** In general, respondents felt that UKRI had been responsive to the needs of the awards, allowing for adaptive management in response to Covid-19 and other contextual challenges. It was noted that GCRF funders were very responsive to requests for budgetary allocation changes, as long as they were clearly motivated and had a clear rationale geared towards ensuring that the objectives of the project were met.<sup>74</sup> This flexibility was crucial in allowing projects not only to continue to work during the pandemic, but also to adapt their role and offer their expertise to support pandemic responses at the country level, as discussed under Section 3.4 above. For example, the **RECAP** award (ES/P010873/1) was able to reallocate underspent funds towards a specific work package to support Covid-19 responses in countries such as Somalia and Sudan. In several cases, flexibility also allowed the addition of new partners during the lifetime of the project. However, lack of funder flexibility around the length of the no-cost extension (see 3.2.4) was considered to have impacted the ability of awards to fully build on their impact activities.

**The commitment of the research team, strength of partnership and leadership were crucial enablers for impact in the face of significant challenges.** Several PIs expressed their admiration for the team’s enduring commitment to the project despite extremely difficult circumstances of stress, trauma, illness and loss. Conversely, team members often praised the vision and leadership of PIs and the support received in those challenging times. An interesting feature of many GROW awards appears to be the close collaboration between academic team members and research managers – with the latter often playing a significant role in facilitating not only formal collaborations but also informal networking within the team.

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

- **how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19**
- **the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?**

#### Box 19. Key findings of EQ 6

<sup>74</sup> A14.4.

- GROW was felt to be unique and could not be easily substituted.
- The funding cuts affected awards to different degrees, with compensation provided to partners in some cases.
- There were several instances of GROW collaborations leading to further funding.

EQ 6 addresses the question of what made GROW ‘special’ and different from other funding opportunities, and how this played out in response to Covid-19 and related ODA funding cuts. We address this question first by highlighting the key elements that made GROW unique according to informants (3.6.1), and then by discussing the adaptation to the funding cuts (3.6.2).

**Our overall assessment is that GROW had several characteristics of ‘uniqueness’ in the current funding scenario, which align it well with GCRF vision and objectives.** However, the funding cuts – and the way in which they were communicated – significantly affected some of the core features of GROW. Our confidence in the strength of evidence for this EQ was high, reflecting a good degree of triangulation and consistency among respondents.

### 3.6.1 Elements of uniqueness of the GROW programme

**There is a strong consensus among award holders that GROW is a unique programme in the current UK funding scene.** When asked to define GCRF funding, award holders expressed their enthusiastic appreciation with terms such as ‘really great’, ‘unique and incredibly worthwhile’, ‘brilliant’, ‘fantastically successful’, ‘an extraordinary opportunity’ and ‘amazing programme’.<sup>75</sup> Some PIs admitted having been initially sceptical of GCRF as a concept (and, more generally, the principle of using the ODA budget to fund university research in the UK), but to have eventually come round to see the value of it.

**GROW funding, and its accompanying timeline, seemed to be ‘the right size’**, hitting the elusive Goldilocks spot of being ‘large enough’ to allow for ambitious research scope, as well as for time dedicated to building partnerships and stakeholder engagement, and yet still ‘small enough’ to be manageable and to allow different parts of the team to know each other personally and to develop long-lasting connections and friendships. The size of funding was also seen by most respondents to be closely correlated to the flexibility allowed by GCRF, which, as discussed above, was a key enabling factor for impact and overcoming barriers. Having a longer project fostered trust between partners and was a unique experience.

The size of the awards also meant that, in most cases, **GROW projects connected partners in different Southern countries and regions**, often facing the same development challenges – while most smaller research grants only connect UK institutions ‘bilaterally’ with partners in the South. This South–South networking around concrete development challenges was considered by many respondents as one of the most valuable and unique features of the GROW awards, and as a key dimension of sustainability.

**Southern partners from both Latin America and South Asia also remarked that GCRF funding arrived at a time in which public funding in their countries was rapidly declining.** The fact that – as part of the focus on capacity development – GCRF funds could be used for acquiring laboratory equipment was considered particularly important for sustainability, as well as unique for research funding. It was noted that in many parts of the world the space for ‘open’ research is shrinking, and a lot of research is funded by NGOs, foundations and similar actors that have specific policy and advocacy agendas. In contrast, GCRF retained the open-ended

<sup>75</sup> A11; A1.2; A8.2; A8.3; A10.1; A11.1.

nature of academic research and allowed for posing ambitious research questions. Relatedly, as GROW was framed around broad development challenges, it allowed for funding of themes that were not necessarily prioritised by funds with more narrow thematic scope. One example is the **TCCP** (MR/P027946/2), which addresses a gap in evidence on tobacco consumption in LMIC settings: the majority of tobacco control research happens in high-income countries, while the international development agenda has historically prioritised work on communicable diseases. The focus of GROW allows for the identification of such gaps in policy-relevant research.

**In some cases it has been possible for awards to secure follow-up funding.** Some award holders have reported that GROW funding has been instrumental to unlock further funding sources and even to transition from traditional academic funders to development funders. Because GROW awards are such large ODA investments that require management expertise beyond traditional academic grants, they can give other donors the confidence that the lead university and its partners are able to manage large ODA funding, understanding its specific requirements (in terms of due diligence, MEL and reporting). Being able to ‘tell the GROW story’ was considered instrumental in scaling up funding. Yet while there are several cases of teams that have secured further funding or are in the process of doing so, the time for this has been limited (given the delays due to Covid-19, the relatively short no-cost extension, and all the uncertainty around the funding cuts), and it was generally felt that lack of in-person contact made it more difficult to secure collaborative funding.

Last but not least, **the uniqueness of the GROW programme was identified in its role of ‘pushing’ UK academic culture outside its comfort zone** and providing the space and motivation to undertake interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, engage with local communities, stakeholder and end-users of research, and try out innovative approaches to co-production and capacity development. By focusing on different indicators of success – related to capacity development, outreach and impact – the GROW programme has ‘given permission’ to academics to move away from publications as the only or main measure of research success. While GROW awards have, on average, produced significant numbers of academic outputs in well-respected journals, the view was often expressed that ‘this is not about how many papers you publish’ and that these awards have different and more diverse measures of success. As discussed above in EQ 2, it was frequently reported that this ‘new way of working’ has not been limited to the GROW awards but had spillover effects on the way in which UK academia works, e.g. closer collaboration among university departments.

**The enthusiasm for GCRF as a programme was mirrored by a unanimous disappointment at the termination of the programme** – not only the funding cuts per se, but more generally what informants referred to, in similar terms, as the government ‘pulling the plug’ on GCRF as a programme and a concept of funding.

### 3.6.2 Adaptation to ODA funding cuts

**GROW awards have been affected by funding cuts to different degrees.** In some cases, these have been partially compensated by savings accrued as a consequence of Covid-related cancellation of travel and fieldwork. In at least one case (**Ni3** – AH/P014240/1), the lead university stepped in to compensate for the cuts by reducing its own overhead, thus ‘protecting’ the partners’ budget. In another case (**CEPHaS** – NE/P02095X/1), the cuts were compensated by additional resources from the International Climate Fund. Award-holders generally found that communication from UKRI around the funding cuts and related matters (e.g. no-cost extension) has been confusing and unhelpful, amplifying the uncertainty and

stress and leading to a 'people drain', as key staff moved on to other positions to avoid the risk of being left out of a job. Several informants spoke of what they saw as the reputational damage (for individual awards and for the UK government as a whole) vis-à-vis Southern partners and other stakeholders (governments and industry counterparts) coming from the sudden cutting of funding in the midst of uncertainty and unclear communication.

## 4 Conclusions

GROW has largely delivered on its vision to build capacities for interdisciplinary, challenge-led research, through the development and strengthening of research partnerships, as well as through engagement with local stakeholders. GROW appears to have broken barriers in different ways – between countries (through international partnerships), between disciplines (through a promotion of interdisciplinary, or even transdisciplinary, research), between generations of researchers (through the capacity development and empowerment of ECRs) and between academia and the outside world (through stakeholders’ engagement and work with local communities).

GROW is a large and ambitious GCRF investment, focused on building capacities for interdisciplinary, challenge-led research, through the development and strengthening of research partnerships, as well as through broader stakeholders’ engagement. Our analysis shows that GROW has largely delivered on this promise, in spite of the considerable challenges posed by a global pandemic.

The overall aim of this process evaluation was to address the overarching EQ *How well are GCRF’s investments working and what have they achieved?* Our analysis for GROW points to the fact that the investments are largely working as intended and show promising signs of impact. As one award holder put it: ‘GROW does exactly what it says on the tin’.<sup>49</sup>

As discussed throughout the report, our analysis confirms the insight, which emerged from Stage 1a, that GROW as a signature investment is more closely aligned to GCRF’s underpinning vision and values, compared to non-signature GCRF investments. The GROW commissioning process has led to a portfolio of awards with high relevance to global development challenges as well as local contexts. Strong international research partnerships were at the core of GROW projects, and real efforts towards equity and fairness were made in most cases. The distinctive characteristic of the call was the emphasis on capacity development, and this commitment to empowering the next generation of researchers came out very strongly in the analysis. While the pandemic certainly impacted on capacity development (particularly by preventing international exchanges of ECRs, which were central to several awards), projects still managed to achieve significant results.

Award-holders praised in particular the flexibility of the funding, which allowed for adaptive management in response to emerging impact opportunities as well as in response to Covid-19 and other contextual challenges. It was noted, however, that as a new programme GROW still had a ‘work in progress’ feel, and that greater guidance from UKRI on a number of issues would have been useful at times.

GROW was seen by many as having benefits beyond individual projects, having facilitated a new way of doing research in UK academia (with a focus on collaborative, interdisciplinary, challenge-led research). From the perspective of many Southern partners, GROW not only provided much-needed funding for key areas of research but also, importantly, provided funding that was not linked to any specific agenda but only to the pursuit of scientific

investigation. There was a strong sense of disappointment for the abrupt end of the programme.

Based on this analysis, we address EQ 7 below, identifying key lessons that can inform future investments and promote learning.

#### 4.1 Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF (EQ 7)

##### Box 20. Key findings of EQ 7

- Size, scale and flexibility of funding matter.
- Fairness in partnerships is not only about ‘who participates’ but also ‘who is left out’.
- The experience of GROW award holders has shown the importance of setting clear expectations and providing guidance in a number of key areas (around grant administration, MEL, financial management, risk management and VfM).
- Doing research with local communities and vulnerable population raises important ethical issues, which are new for many UK researchers.
- Gender and equity perspectives do not necessarily ‘come up’ in research processes unless such a lens is explicitly incorporated.
- ‘Early Career Researcher’ means different things in different contexts.

##### Lesson 1: Size, scale, length and flexibility of funding matter.

One of the key elements of GROW’s success has been its size, scale, and flexibility of funding. Its size was large enough to allow for flexibility and adaptive management but still small enough for personal connections to be established. GROW has demonstrated that having funding to match its ambitions was crucial to achieving programme objectives. The length of funding while sufficient to create meaningful and sustainable partnerships and networks to emerge (which, it is hoped, will last beyond the length of the award) did not accommodate a sufficiently long enough inception phase to encourage new partnerships to be built.

In addition, award holders reported delays in set up owing to delays in setting up collaboration agreements, transferring money and hiring staff. This longer time frame is to be expected in the case of complex international partnerships, and adequate time should be allocated to it from the outset.

Similarly, most informants felt frustrated at the fact that the projects had to stop just when ‘things were getting interesting’, research findings were emerging, and avenues of potential impact were opening up. While this is partly a consequence of Covid-19 and related delays (only partially compensated by no-cost extensions), it also indicates more general lessons about allocating time at the tail end of the project for synthesis, dissemination, impact activities and legacy building.

##### Recommendations:

- *Future R4D investments should build on the strengths of GROW and consider the importance of having substantial funding proportionate to the scope and ambition of the*

*programme. An adequate funding period is important to allow for the development of equitable partnerships, and to engage with stakeholders and foster research networks.*

- *Particular consideration should be given to the two ‘ends’ of the research timeline: the inception period (with adequate time for project set-up and partnership building) and the final stage (with time dedicated to synthesis, dissemination, impact activities and legacy).*

### **Lesson 2: Fairness in partnerships is not only about ‘who participates’ but also ‘who is left out’.**

Overall, GROW proved to be better suited to nurturing established partnerships over creating new ones, raising potential issues of contextual fairness. As discussed under EQ 1, the relatively short time available for the application processes made the GROW call particularly well suited for those institutions that had ‘good to go’ partners in the Global South, while disadvantaging (and potentially discouraging) the formation of new partnerships. Thus, while the assessment of fairness of partnerships at award level is generally positive, there are potential issues of ‘contextual fairness’, by which GCRF funding may contribute to reinforcing inequality within the Global South research ecosystem, widening the gap between a limited number of well-established, well-connected institutions on the one hand and the majority of Southern research institutions on the other. More time at the application stage as well as in the project set-up phase would have allowed new partners to co-design the project (fairness of opportunities) and establish the foundation for fair process and distribution of benefits.

#### **Recommendation:**

- In order to encourage new partnerships, more time should be allocated at the application stage to allow new partners as well as established partners in the Global South to co-design the project. Funding for partnership building should be considered. A longer phase of project set-up should also be encouraged, in order to establish the foundation for fair process and distribution of benefits, particularly for Southern institutions without previous experience of international collaborations.

### **Lesson 3: The experience of GROW award holders has shown the importance of setting clear expectations and providing guidance in a number of key areas.**

As GROW was one of the first GCRF calls to be launched, there was a general sense among grantees that requirements were still at some level a ‘work in progress’, expectations were not always clearly communicated, and guidance was not always consistent. While award holders generally appreciated the flexibility of the funders and the role played by POs, many of them would have welcomed greater support and guidance on a number of areas, including the following:

- **Administrative needs of the grants.** In some cases, grant-holders admitted having initially underestimated the amount of time and human resources – in the UK as well as in partner countries – necessary for the management of a project of this complexity and ambition. Having some guidance in this sense from the start would have been useful.
- **MEL.** Most award holders, particularly those with experience of other funders such as DFID/FCDO and the European Union – found that the MEL and reporting requirements for the GROW awards were quite ‘light’, with significant discretion left to the individual awards. As a consequence, we observed a wide variation in the MEL systems and processes across the GROW portfolio, with some awards meeting the minimum



requirements for reporting, and others going above and beyond such requirements to put in place sound and robust MEL systems. Respondents also found a disconnect between the requirement for producing a ToC and logframe at the start of the project and the lack of reference to those in subsequent reporting.

- **Finance management and financial risk.** Issues related to payment in arrears were raised by all award holders. Most Southern partners did not have the cashflow leeway to advance cost and be refunded on production of financial records, so the UK lead institutions had to come up with creative ways to compensate. Currency fluctuations (following Brexit and related devaluation of the pound sterling) led to a loss of purchasing power for Southern partners' budgets, which again was left to individual awards to compensate. There was a suggestion from an award holder for a contingency fund (to be kept centrally at UKRI) to respond to unexpected currency fluctuations. It was also noted that guidance on eligible costs for safeguarding the well-being of researchers and participants (for example, support to researchers and participants working with trauma), particularly in the context of the pandemic, would have been useful.
- **VfM.** Award holders generally referred to their lead institutions' procurement guidelines to ensure and document VfM. Consequently, VfM approaches appear generally geared towards 'economy' and 'efficiency', and it remains unclear how awards were expected to achieve and document 'effectiveness' and 'equity'. The latter appear particularly crucial in relation to contextual fairness: if partnerships are to include Southern institutions that are less well established and have little or no previous experience of international collaborations, this has implications not only in terms of time but also in terms of financial and human resources. This needs to be captured by the VfM guidance so as to avoid penalising those awards who proactively try to include partners beyond the 'tried and true'. Similarly, GROW raises broader questions on how results related to capacity development, networking and cultural shifts in academia (which were often referred to by informants as 'intangible') can be captured in VfM frameworks.

#### Recommendation:

- *Funders should provide clear and consistent guidance in the areas outlined above.*

#### Lesson 4: GROW demonstrated the importance of crossing the divide between natural and social sciences for challenge-led research.

The GROW programme 'pushed' interdisciplinarity more than would have been the case otherwise – particularly with regard to bridging the divide between natural sciences and social sciences. This encouragement came both from the call itself and from the advice and feedback given to the awards at different times, with POs playing an important role in this regard. Several informants noted that before the GROW programme, their experience had been one of 'narrow' interdisciplinarity – collaboration with adjacent disciplines, which benefited from common language and epistemological frame of reference. In some cases, award holders declared that they took a 'step back' after the project was funded, realised that something was missing, and brought in researchers from other disciplines. The transformative value of interdisciplinary research was considered by several award holders as lying in its potential to catalyse a change in the culture of UK academia and promote challenge-led research.

#### Recommendation:

- *Future investments for challenge-led research should continue to promote 'wide' interdisciplinarity, breaking silos between natural and social sciences.*

**Lesson 5: Gender and equity perspectives do not necessarily ‘come up’ in research processes unless such a lens is explicitly incorporated.**

Many GROW awards have not fully integrated a gender and equity lens in their questions, methods and approaches. Interestingly, while GROW awards appear ahead of the GCRF curve in terms of fairness of partnerships and engagement of stakeholders, by and large their approach to gender and social inclusion appears aligned with the general findings of the Stage 1a GESIP assessment: with a few notable exceptions, gender is mostly thought about in terms of male/female parity in teams, governance structures and events. Many respondents could not elaborate on how the specific development challenge that they were tackling affected different genders differently. Other equity issues are even less systematically incorporated.

**Recommendations:**

- *UKRI could facilitate a collective reflection and learning exercise, looking (with hindsight) at how gender dimensions emerged in the tackling of development challenges, which were not necessarily anticipated at the outset.*
- *Funders should provide greater emphasis and guidance on gender and social inclusion during the project design stage.*

**Lesson 6: Career progression in research in UK and LMIC contexts takes different routes and the term ‘early career researcher’ should be understood against the backdrop of the research capacity needs of LMIC institutions as well as UK institutions.**

The emphasis on ECRs appears to be the distinctive feature of GROW and an area of unquestionable success for the programme. Several senior researchers remarked that the real value of the programme was to empower the next generation of researchers, who would be the ones actually dealing with these development challenges in their lifetime. One consideration is that the idea of who an ‘early career researcher’ is was possibly overly influenced by the idea of the ‘postdoc’, a position which is prominent in UK academia but that does not necessarily have a correspondence in many other academic environments. Many non-UK partners saw the exclusion of direct funding for a PhD as a missed opportunity, as well as (at times) an unmet need to build capacity of slightly more senior, mid-career researchers – although this varied considerably between awards. A reflection on ‘who is an ECR’ would be an interesting exercise for UKRI.

**Recommendation:**

- *Future R4D investments should consider a broader and context-specific definition of ‘early career researcher’, to go beyond postdocs and potentially provide funding for PhDs, master’s students, or even slightly more senior mid-career researchers.*

**Lesson 7: A structured approach at the programme level is needed to share learning and encourage collaboration across the portfolio.**

One area in which the potential uniqueness of GROW has remained untapped is the connection between awards. Opportunities for networking between awards have remained very limited. Most PIs reported little or no interaction with other GROW awards, or, in cases where there was collaboration, this was sought out by award holders themselves rather than

being centrally organised. This appears to be a lost opportunity, in particular given the thematic and geographic overlay among many of the GROW awards.

**Recommendation:**

- *Systematic guidance and convening by the funder are recommended to enable strong cross-award collaboration and knowledge sharing. Opportunities for (in-person and virtual) gathering, with inclusion and funding for non-UK partners, should be encouraged.*

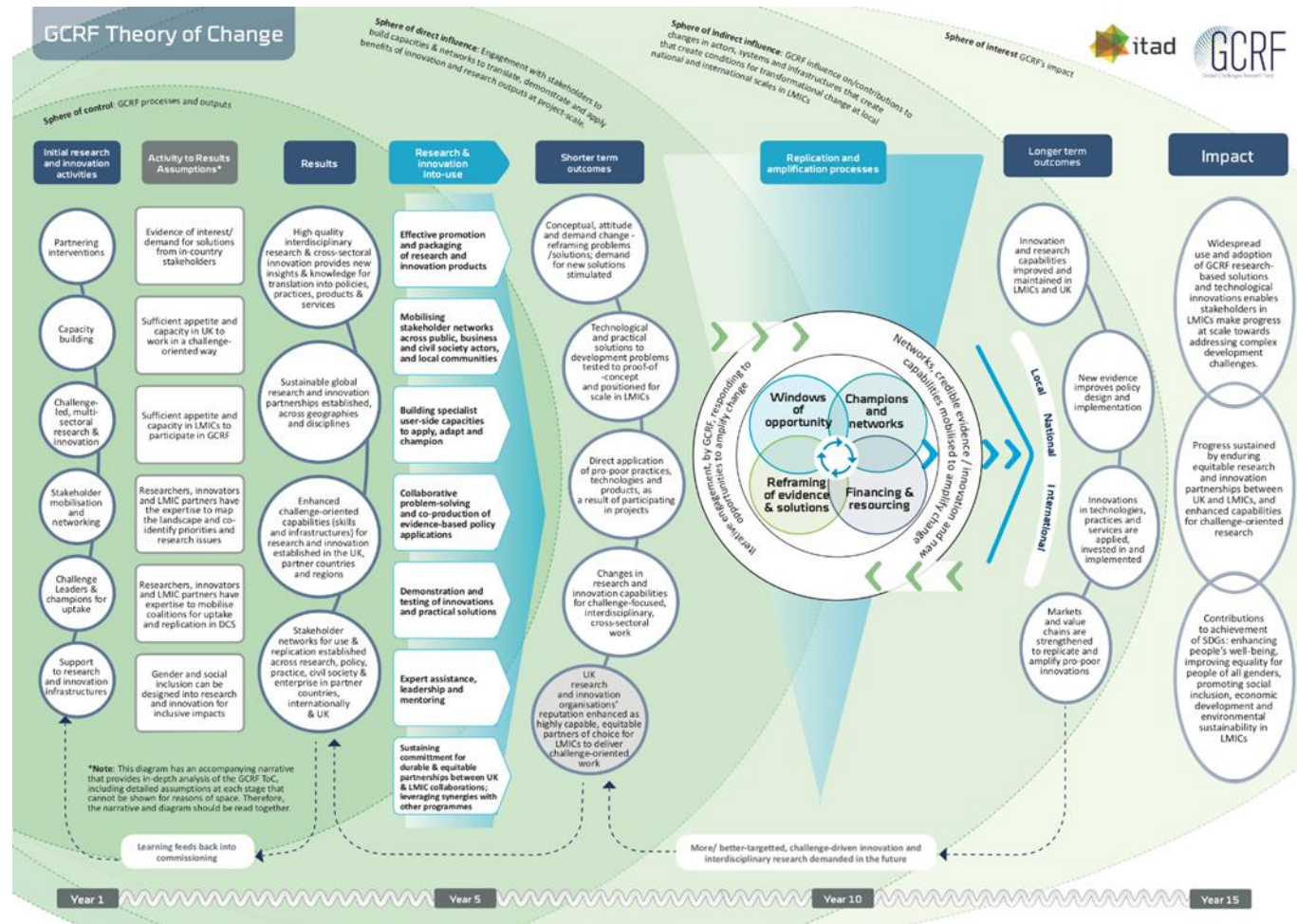
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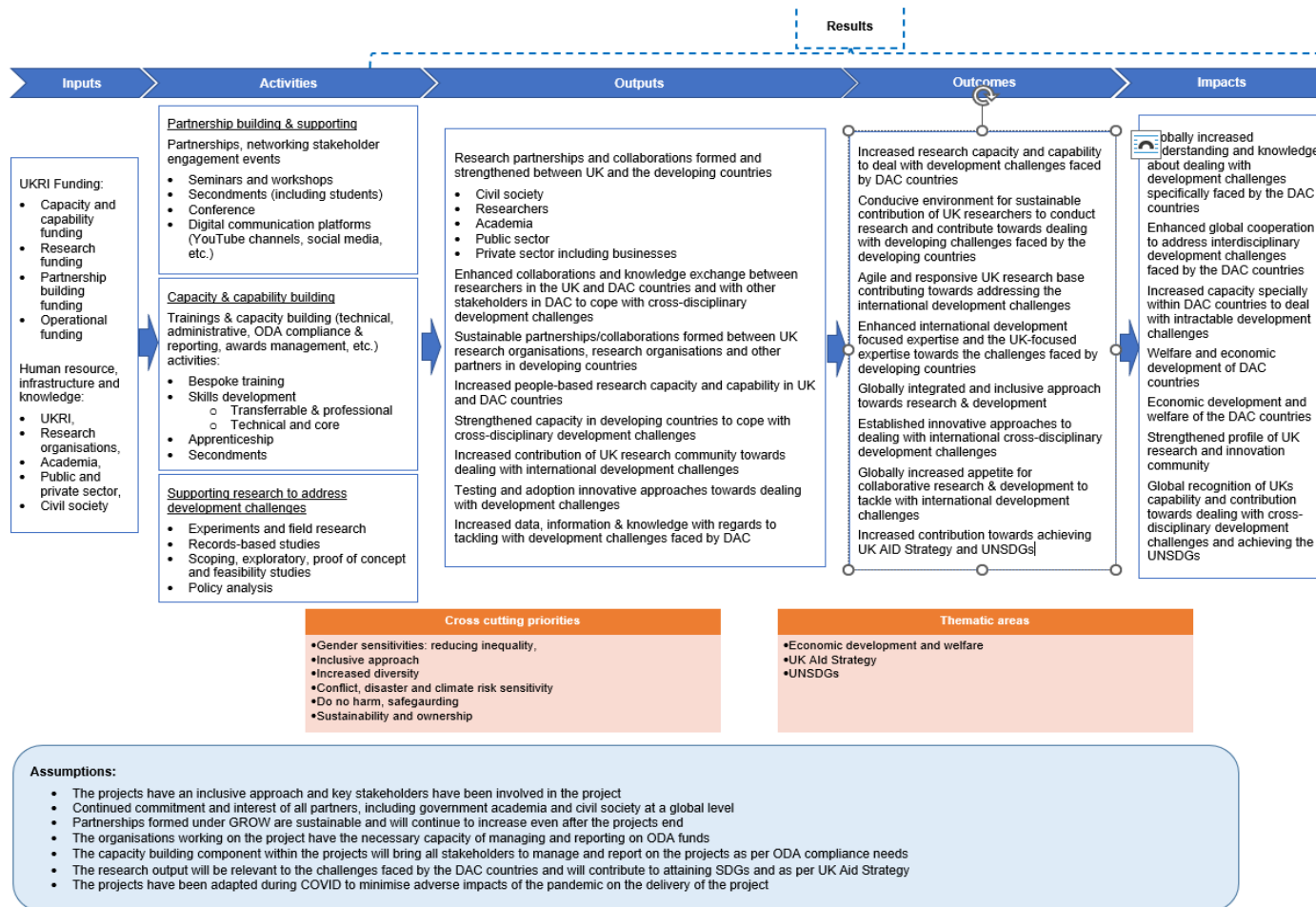
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# Annexes

# Annex 1: GCRF Theory of Change



# Annex 2: GCRF GROW 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

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

### 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]

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

2	Design and Implementation processes (ODA research excellence)	<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"> <li>a. Gender responsiveness</li> <li>b. Poverty and social inclusion</li> <li>c. Equitable partnerships and wider fairness</li> <li>d. Relevance to local needs</li> <li>e. Coherence with the wider portfolio (in the programme, in GCRF, elsewhere)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance + coherence in design and delivery</li> <li>• Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity</li> <li>• Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes, e.g. gender in context analysis</li> <li>• Gender balance/composition of the evaluation team</li> <li>• Inclusion of 'gender experts' as part of the evaluation team and in the design of the calls for proposal?</li> <li>• Target for women applicants?</li> <li>• Evaluation criteria – gender equality scoring</li> <li>• Gender balance in the research team?</li> <li>• Gender expertise in the team?</li> <li>• Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes</li> <li>• Capacity needs identified and assessed</li> <li>• GESI considered in stakeholder engagement and dissemination design</li> </ul>
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RESPONSES HERE:

3	Management of the programme and awards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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"> <li>a. How do you coordinate and interact with other parts of GCRF?</li> <li>b. How do you make your portfolio work together, both within the programme itself and within GCRF?</li> <li>c. What opportunities are there for networking between award holders?</li> <li>d. How do you support interdisciplinary research?</li> </ol> </li> <li>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"> <li>a. Gender responsiveness</li> <li>b. Poverty and social inclusion</li> <li>c. Equitable partnerships and wider fairness</li> <li>d. Relevance to local needs</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. How do you manage and adapt to changing circumstances?             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What did you do to manage COVID-19?</li> <li>b. What did you do to manage the funding cuts?</li> <li>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?</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. How, if at all, do you consider the potential negative consequences of the award/programme?             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are the potential risks and how do you mitigate them?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort-building, aggregate-level R&amp;I into use)</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19</li> <li>▪ Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working</li> <li>▪ Promoting coherence between awards</li> <li>▪ Negative consequences mitigated and a 'do no harm' approach</li> <li>▪ Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy</li> <li>▪ Guidelines/capacity building on the integration of gender analysis into research/innovation cycle</li> <li>▪ Engagement with gender experts</li> <li>▪ M&amp;E and regular reporting</li> <li>▪ 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</li> </ul>
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		<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"> <li>▪ Do they have a gender equality strategy, how are they tracking that, systems and monitoring across awards?</li> </ul>
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RESPONSES HERE:

4	Capacity development	<p>1. How is capacity strengthening delivered in the programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you assess capacity needs? For LMIC partners and for UK partners.</li> <li>○ How do you ensure capacity strengthening is supported?</li> <li>○ How do you assess it?</li> <li>○ At which levels does capacity strengthening occur (in both directions)?</li> <li>○ How are fairness considerations included in your capacity strengthening?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clear Theory of Change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes</li> <li>● Including capacity development for UK partners as well as LMIC partners</li> <li>● Analysis/understanding of local R&amp;I ecosystems and capacity needs</li> <li>● Gender and inclusion analysis of capacity needs, both LMIC and UK</li> <li>● Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&amp;I infrastructure</li> <li>● Fairness considerations integrated</li> <li>● Tracking of GESIP and Fairness aspects</li> </ul>
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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"> <li>What are your engagement and dissemination strategies?</li> <li>How do you build and maintain relationships with potential users of research?</li> <li>How much happens at the programme level and how much is left to award holders?</li> <li>Is Gender and inclusion factored into the development of engagement strategies?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement</li> <li>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)</li> </ol>
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RESPONSES HERE:

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

RESPONSES HERE:

<b>TOPIC:</b>			
<b>3. Early progress towards desired outcomes/impacts</b>			
	<b>SUB-TOPIC</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS</b>
1	Key outcomes and achievements	<p>What have been the key achievements and outcomes of the programme?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How well do these align with your ToC and vision for the programme?</li> <li>b. Have there been any unintended or unexpected outcomes (positive or negative)?</li> </ol> <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"> <li>i. Risks in the research environment (organisation, support for research)</li> <li>ii. Risks in the political environment (underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of issues)</li> <li>iii. Risks in the data environment (data availability and agreements)</li> </ol> <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"> <li>• Maturity of the field</li> <li>• Research capacity strengthening</li> <li>• Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research)</li> <li>• Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves)</li> <li>• Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)</li> </ul>



		i. Organisational capacity (support from IPP, own institution) ii. Wider networks	Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model  Enablers or challenges in applying GESIP guidance to your innovation or research?
RESPONSES HERE:			

<b>TOPIC:</b>			
<b>4. Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding</b>			
	<b>Sub-topic</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS</b>
1		Given the Covid-19 impacts AND funding cuts, to what extent do you think GCRF funding can be substituted? 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"> <li>• Extent to which GCRF funding can be substituted</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding/response to Covid-19</li> </ul>

RESPONSES HERE:

**Topic**

**5. Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF**

	<b>SUB-TOPIC</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS</b>
1	Lessons for award holders  Lessons for funders	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
<b>1. Structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes</b>	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)
<b>2. Efficiency, proportionality and VfM of processes to support challenge-led research</b>	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
<b>3. Early progress towards desired outcomes/impacts</b>	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
<b>4. Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding</b>	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)
<b>5. Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments &amp; promote learning across GCRF</b>	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><b>Beginning:</b> 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&amp;I.</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> 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&amp;I.</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> 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&amp;I.</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> 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&amp;I and put the award at the cutting edge of managing challenge R&amp;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><b>Beginning:</b> 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&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> 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&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the capacity strengthening criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support R&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> 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&amp;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><b>Beginning:</b> 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><b>Developing:</b> 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><b>Good:</b> 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><b>Exemplary:</b> 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><b>Beginning:</b> 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><b>Developing:</b> 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><b>Good:</b> 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><b>Exemplary:</b> 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>

## Annex 3d: Award write-up

### Award analysis write-up template: General

Please save a copy of this template in the relevant award folder on Teams. Once it is completed, please indicate in the award spreadsheet, and send the link to your Technical Lead for review.

#### Completing the template

The template is laid out according to EQ and evaluation criteria in the Evaluation Matrix.

There is a rubric for assessing the strength of evidence for each segment of the evaluation matrix.

#### Combining evidence

The evidence that you will be considering when writing up the analysis of the award is:

- Documentary evidence that provides context or description for the award.
- Documents and data that form part of the evidence for the award, e.g. policies or process guidance.
- Interviews with award stakeholders.

You should combine the evidence from all these sources in your analysis of the award, and note the strength of evidence.

Extract relevant quotes and details from the documents and interviews against the EQs and criteria.

This can be in bullet point form but should be comprehensible to someone who is unfamiliar with the award. You should include both positive evidence (which suggests alignment with the evaluation criteria) and negative evidence (which suggests problems or limitations with the evaluation criteria).

Once you have extracted all the relevance evidence, highlight whether this evidence indicates 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary' practice, based on the rubric descriptions, and justify why you have selected this in the 'rationale' box underneath.

#### Making judgements about your confidence in the evidence

Once you've made a judgement on where the award fits against each EQ/evaluation criteria, please consider how confident you are in the strength of evidence underpinning your judgement. This is based on how strongly the evidence emerges from the individual sources, as well as the degree of triangulation possible between the sources.

**Red** = low confidence in the evidence (only one source – interview or document – or very low-detail/low-quality evidence from multiple sources)

**Amber** = medium confidence in the evidence (two sources with a sufficient degree of detail)

**Green** = high confidence in the evidence (3+ sources with a good degree of detail, including clear alignment or misalignment with the contextual analysis)

Author:

## AWARD INFORMATION

Award name

Unique BEIS ID (from award spreadsheet)



<b>PI name</b>
<b>Lead institution</b>
<b>Primary research partners</b>
<b>Start–end dates</b>
<b>Focus country/region</b>
<b>Total budget</b>
<b>Delivery Partner</b>
<b>Funding call</b>
<b>Type of award</b> ( <i>e.g. research grant, training grant, fellowship, networking grant</i> )
<b>Summary of award</b> <i>Brief (1 paragraph) summary of award and key objectives, including countries of focus and intended impacts</i>

## CASE INFORMATION

<b>List of documents reviewed for this case</b>
<b>Unique IDs of interviewees (from central interview log – column A)</b>
<b>Any data or methodological limitations?</b> ( <i>e.g. only one interview conducted; suspicion of bias in interviews; key document gaps</i> )

**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?**

<b>ODA R&amp;I management</b> (at programme and award levels): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence</li> <li>▪ ToC and shared vision</li> <li>▪ Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge</li> <li>▪ Capacity needs assessed and identified</li> <li>▪ Risk factors identified and mitigated</li> <li>▪ Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort building; aggregate-level R&amp;I into use)</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19</li> <li>▪ Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working</li> <li>▪ Promoting coherence between awards</li> <li>▪ Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy</li> <li>▪ M&amp;E and regular reporting</li> </ul>		<b>ODA R&amp;I excellence in design and implementation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevance + coherence in design and delivery</li> <li>▪ Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity</li> <li>▪ Negative consequences mitigated and a 'do no harm' approach</li> <li>▪ Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes</li> <li>▪ Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes</li> <li>▪ Capacity needs identified and assessed</li> <li>▪ Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement</li> <li>▪ 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)</li> </ul>	
Source (interview number/document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)		
	<i>Include both positive and negative evidence</i>		
<b>Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award</b>			

<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the award 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.	<b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the management criteria; but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to effectively support challenge-led R&I.	<b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the management criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support challenge-led R&I.	<b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the award 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.
<b>Rationale for this judgement</b> <i>(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):</i>				
<b>Confidence in evidence: (red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</b>				
<b>Reasons why the award structures and processes are in place to the extent observed</b> (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)				

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

- Clear Theory of Change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes
- Analysis/understanding of local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs
- Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&I infrastructure
- Fairness considerations integrated

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

**Evidence of alignment / misalignment with our contextual analysis?**

<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> 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	<b>Developing:</b> 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	<b>Good:</b> 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	<b>Exemplary:</b> 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 puts the award at the leading edge of capacity strengthening practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.
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	strengthening, in LMICs and the UK			
<b>Rationale for this judgement</b> <i>(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):</i>				
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i>				
<b>Reasons why the structures and processes are in place to the extent observed</b> (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)				

**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?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Efficiency and timeliness of processes</li> <li>▪ Proportionality for size of investment</li> <li>▪ Fairness for partners</li> <li>▪ Read across to VfM rubrics</li> </ul>	
<b>Source</b> (interview number / document name)	<b>Evidence</b> (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> 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.	<b>Developing:</b> 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.	<b>Good:</b> 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.	<b>Exemplary:</b> 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.
<b>Rationale for this judgement</b> <i>(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):</i>				
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i>				

**Reasons *why* the structures and processes are in place to the extent observed** (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)

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

- Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples of how these have been met
- Expected progress
- Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress
- Adaptation to unintended outcomes (positive and negative)

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> 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)	<b>Developing:</b> 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 ensure that it is well supported and adaptive (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	<b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is progressing well along its ToC, is meeting milestones as anticipated, 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)	<b>Exemplary:</b> There are indications that the award is surpassing expectations of progress along its ToC - is meeting milestones, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well supported - and puts the award at the leading edge of performance.
<b>Rationale for this judgement</b> <i>(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):</i>				
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i>				
<b>Reasons why progress is being made to the extent observed</b>				

**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)**

- Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes:
- 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

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE NO RUBRICS FOR THIS EQ.**

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)
<p><b>Overall assessment of the features that have made a difference and identification of success factors</b></p>	
<p><b>Reasons <i>why</i> progress is being made to the extent observed</b></p>	

Confidence in evidence: (red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)

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

- how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19
- the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?

- 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
- PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE NO RUBRICS FOR THIS EQ.**

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

Overall assessment of how instrumental GCRF funding is for achieving the outcomes
Reasons <i>why this is so</i>
Confidence in evidence: <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i>

**EQ 7: What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Capture specific insights and lessons from the award that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from etc. success factors, reasons why</li> <li>▪ Capture also specific areas for improvement in the award, areas of underperformance and reasons why</li> </ul>	
<b>Source</b> (interview number / document name)	<b>Evidence</b> (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

<b>Summary:</b>	

## Overall summary

<b>Overall summary of the judgements for the award:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Highlight areas of strength and good/exemplary performance; how overcome challenges, success factors</li><li>▪ Areas for improvement , factors that have inhibited better performance</li></ul>
<b>(300-500 words max)</b>



Itad is a global organisation. Our strategy, monitoring, evaluation and learning services work to make international development more effective. We generate evidence on important issues – from malnutrition to migration – to support our partners to make informed decisions and improve lives.

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