

Global Challenges Research Fund: International Partnerships Programme Process Evaluation

Executive Summary

This summary presents findings from the 2021 process evaluation of the Global Challenges Research Fund's International Partnerships Programme.

The Global Challenges Research Fund is a £1.5 billion fund overseen by the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. GCRF supports pioneering research and innovation that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. The GCRF evaluation examines the fund's Theory of Change, from activities to impacts, over a five-year period running from 2020 to 2025. This process evaluation focused on the International Partnerships Programme (IPP), delivered by the UK Space Agency (UKSA) as part of GCRF.

The evaluation found IPP to be a unique and effective programme that has successfully tested space-based approaches for development, delivering a novel portfolio of development-focused space research and innovation (R&I), taking development considerations into account and showing the ability to adapt and learn over the lifetime of the programme to support greater impact.

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

Overview of the IPP initiative: IPP is a five-year, £152 million programme run by UKSA and funded by GCRF. IPP aims to use the UK space sector's strengths to deliver sustainable economic or societal benefits to developing economies. IPP projects tackle global development challenges across a range of sectors, including forestry, agriculture, maritime and disaster resilience. Through a combination of developing technical solutions and supporting capacity development in-country, IPP aims to support the use and long-term sustainability of the solutions developed.

Over three calls, 33 projects have been funded in Africa, Asia, Small Island Developing States, Central America and South America.

Evaluation findings

IPP made considerable investments into comprehensive structures and processes, from commissioning through to supporting the uptake of the research and innovations,

which have been largely effective in supporting challenge-led R&I with development impact; monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes are a key strength. (EQ 1)

IPP had several structures and processes in place to support challenge-led R&I with development impact. IPP has developed detailed ToCs at award and programme levels, which map activities to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. IPP has clear and detailed processes to commission research, aligned to the challenges faced by developing economies. Management of IPP has been adaptive and well received, although greater 'hands-on' involvement would be welcomed by award holders. IPP has extensive M&E processes at both project and programme levels, supporting projects to measure impact and ensuring learning as the programme evolves. Finally, through varying engagement mechanisms IPP supports the implementation and uptake of research.

Capacity strengthening was a key element in most IPP awards to support the long-term use of the solutions developed and was explicitly assessed in the programme; in practice, capacity strengthening was challenging to deliver and varied across awards. (EQ 2)

Almost all awards had capacity building as a stated objective, and this varied in the form and extent to which it was achieved. Capacity building could be challenging for awards, and award holders were not always prepared for the level of in-country capacity building that was required. Capacity building was assessed at both programme and award levels, although the degree to which this was undertaken varied across awards. As well as developing capacity in low-to middle-income countries (LMICs), some award holders felt the award had a positive impact on UK capacity.

IPP processes to support challenge-led research were generally considered proportionate to the size of the fund, although M&E activities were considered high. (EQ 3)

Processes were generally considered efficient, and flexibility was valued by award

holders. IPP has established processes to support projects in delivering value for money (VfM), and projects were demonstrated to be cost-effective when compared to non-space alternatives. In terms of fairness, IPP projects involved consortia of UK and in-country partners, although greater involvement of in-country stakeholders was suggested as beneficial for future awards. IPP aims to promote project sustainability to ensure that the benefits of the project continue after the lifetime of the fund; however, projects continued to find this challenging.

On the whole, IPP awards have made progress towards their outcomes, although not all have been successful, as is the nature of innovations; nevertheless, foundations have been laid for future outcomes to emerge through new networks and capacities. (EQ 4)

IPP successfully demonstrated the utility of space-based approaches to development, although there have been varying levels of success in progress towards desired outcomes and impacts, and not all awards have been successful. IPP has enabled valued and sustainable partnerships and demonstrated a positive economic return to the UK, and IPP funding has helped award holders to leverage funding from other sources. The impact of Covid-19 varied across IPP, with a number of projects being delayed in progress towards desired outcomes.

Good understanding of country contexts, and adaptive management within awards, have helped to overcome barriers, including political and geographical challenges, and enabled progress towards outcomes. (EQ 5)

IPP projects have encountered several barriers to achieving their desired outcomes and impacts, including political challenges, geographical challenges and local capacity challenges. Despite these barriers, several enabling factors supported the delivery of IPP, including a good understanding of the in-country context, and proactive communication and management across project consortia.

IPP has been a unique programme in realising the impact of space in the

development sector, providing a large scale of investment and a strong focus on M&E. (EQ 6)

Call 3 projects within IPP were the most heavily impacted by the 2021 funding cuts, and this caused a significant negative impact on the project teams as well as reputational damage to the UK more widely.

Conclusions, lessons and recommendations

Overall, IPP is an effective programme that has delivered a novel portfolio of development-focused space R&I, taking development considerations into account and showing the ability to adapt and learn over the lifetime of the programme. IPP has been **a unique programme in realising the impact of space in the development sector.** As a test case for the use of space technologies in development the programme has been a success, demonstrating that there are practical applications and value for development in space-based approaches. Beyond laying the groundwork for potential future space-based development programmes, **IPP has also achieved a range of outcomes** – despite some Covid-19-related delays – including establishing **valued and sustainable partnerships** and demonstrating a **positive economic return to the UK** from the investment made. The programme was **carefully designed with development and delivery considerations in mind, and M&E processes were a particular strength** of IPP. The programme has demonstrated that an extensive M&E approach ensures that impacts can be measured and lessons can be learned. A good example of learning from ongoing M&E processes that IPP has in place is identifying the **importance of a good understanding of the in-country context.** IPP has demonstrated that this is critical to the success of projects and to the **ultimate sustainability of the technical solution,** which was identified as a key challenge. Both the achievements of the programme and some of the challenges and barriers encountered offer valuable lessons for future space-

focused and wider development-oriented R&I programmes, as follows:

Recommendation 1: Ensure substantial and continued engagement with end users to support technical solutions that meet user needs:

Where future programmes are attempting to deliver technical solutions to support user needs, engagement with local stakeholders and end users is required throughout project design and implementation. This ensures that technical solutions remain appropriate to user needs as well as ensuring that there is ‘buy-in’ from local stakeholders.

Recommendation 2: Promote mechanisms to support M&E to ensure that impacts can be measured, and lessons can be learned:

The extensive M&E undertaken by IPP has ensured that outputs and impacts from the awards can be documented, as well as lessons learned as the programme has evolved. This has ensured that IPP had adapted as it has progressed, as well as being able to provide broader lessons for the development and space sector. To ensure that M&E frameworks are taken up successfully, they should be developed at programme establishment.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that time scales and targets remain realistic to get the maximum impact and utilise project outputs effectively:

Where future programmes are addressing complex challenges or working within novel environments, timescales must be appropriate to ensuring that outputs can be achieved during the lifetime of the project. This ensures that impacts can be fully realised and that technical solutions and tools can be handed over to end users in a useful manner.



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