



FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

A Collection of UKCDR Case Studies

About UKCDR

The UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR) brings together government and research funders working in international development. We exist to amplify the value and impact of research for international development by promoting coherence, collaboration and joint action among UK research funders. Our core contributing members include the Department of Health and Social Care; the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology; the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; UK Research and Innovation; and Wellcome. For further information on UKCDR, please visit ukcdr.org.uk.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (UK)	INGOS	International Non-Governmental Organisations
BEIS	Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (UK)	ISPF	International Science Partnership Fund
CEMADEN	National Centre for Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters (Brazil)	JGHT	Joint Global Health Trials
CEI	Community Engagement and Involvement	LMICs	Low and Middle-Income Countries
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
DBT	Department of Biotechnology (India)	Met Office	Meteorological Office (UK)
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)	MRC	Medical Research Council (UK)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)	NIHR	National Institute for Health and Care Research (UK)
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care (UK)	NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
DSIT	Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (formerly BEIS) (UK)	ODA	Official Development Assistance
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council	PAGASA	Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK)	PI	Principal Investigator
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund	REF	Research Excellence Framework
GHR	Global Health Research	RPC	Research Programme Consortia
GHRUG	Global Health Research Unit Group	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
GRP	Global Research Programme	ToC	Theory of Change
HEI	Higher Education Institution	UKCDR	UK Collaborative on Development Research
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus	UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
HMG	His Majesty's Government (UK)	WCSSP	Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership
		WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

➤ Lessons Learned from ODA Research Funds – seven case studies of funding mechanisms

This booklet provides evidence on how to set up effective funds for Official Development Assistance (ODA) research by collating lessons learned from existing funding mechanisms from a variety of UK-based funders of research for development. These case studies build on the UK Collaborative on Development Research (UKCDR's) synthesis report of GCRF and Newton Fund evaluations (2022), by considering in more depth specific funding approaches within UK ODA funders' portfolios and exploring the connection between, on one hand, how research is designed and managed and, on the other, the impact it achieves. These case studies were compiled from a document review that was complemented by key informant interviews with funders and award holders to understand their perspectives on the strengths of the funding approach.

These seven case studies were selected through consultation with UKCDR members on the most impactful examples of funding mechanisms in the UK ODA space. UKCDR also wanted to learn from examples of different funding approaches and represent different disciplinary areas to support shared learning across the research ecosystem to guide future practice.

Each case study contains:

- A summary highlighting the **distinctive funding feature** of each mechanism.
- Key **enablers of impact** from UKCDR analysis informed by our previous work analysing REF2021 impact case studies.
- A diagram depicting **funding flows** and how different actors **coordinated** within each mechanism.
- Perspectives from **funders and award holders located either in the UK or in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs)** on: funding design (strategy and governance, approach to funding, partnering with LMICs) and delivery (development impact and sustainability).
- Examples of the **types of impact** funded research achieved (conceptual; instrumental; learning and development; and networks and connectivity). This impact framework derives from UKCDR's 2023 report, [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#).

➤ Context

This booklet builds on UKCDR's 2022 report, [Lessons learned from ODA research funds: A synthesis report of GCRF and Newton Fund evaluations](#).

These seven case studies are intended as a useful resource for understanding the intricacies of funding effective development research, highlighting key aspects within each mechanism that support development impact.

Table 1 Funding mechanisms at a glance

	Research Programme Consortia	Global Research Partnership	Joint Global Health Trials	GCRF Interdisciplinary Hubs Programme	Global Health Research Groups and Units	Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership	Darwin Initiative
Funder(s)	FCDO	FCDO, UKRI, India's DBT	FCDO, UKRI-MRC, DHSC and Wellcome	UKRI	DHSC	DSIT	Defra
Estimated funding	£6-£8m per Consortia	£13.4m from UK funders	£200m	£150m	£351m	£26m	£50,000 - £5m per scheme
Dates	2000s - present	2013 - 2023	2009 - 2020	2019 - 2024	2016 - present	2014 - present	1993 - present
Grant duration	5+ years	3 years	3 - 5 years	5 years	5 years for Units 4 years for Groups	Depending on each programme	1 - 5 years depending on funding scheme
Stakeholders involved	HEIs	HEIs	HEIs	HEIs	HEIs	HEIs	HEIs
	NGOs	UK research councils	NGOs	NGOs	Research institutions	Research institutions	NGOs
	Research institutions	Research institutions	Local governments	UN agencies		UK Met Office + LMIC-based	
		Indian Gov Partner – Department of Biotechnology	Research institutions	Research institutions			
Disciplinary focus	Healthcare	Maternal and child health	Healthcare	SDGs per hub	Healthcare	Weather and climate resilience	Biodiversity and conservation
		Aquaculture					Sustainable development
What is funded	Research and programmatic activities in LMICs	Research projects with LMICs	Late-phase clinical trials in LMICs	12 Interdisciplinary hubs	Research projects in LMICs	Bilateral research partnerships	Research projects
Distinctive feature	Long-term consortia funding	Trilateral partnership between the UK, India and LMICs	Pooled funding supporting large-scale definitive clinical trials	Hub autonomy to design research programme and allocate funding	Long-term funding for mid-size and large research centres	Partnerships with LMIC-based governments, including matched funding	Staged grants to support scalability

➤ Enablers of research impact



9 Flexibility to respond to emerging needs

Achieving development outcomes is not a linear process. Research needs to be funded in a way that allows flexibility to respond to changing contexts and adaptations to make the most of emerging opportunities. Flexibility enables research teams to make the most of unplanned avenues for impact. [See GCRF Interdisciplinary Hubs programme.](#)



8 Support for proposal development

Investing in the proposal development stage through seed funding, pre-call workshops, or two-stage funding calls supports equitable involvement in research design and provides time and space for co-design processes leading to higher quality research plans and outputs. [See Global Research Partnerships programme.](#)



1 Long-term thinking

Sustained long-term funding for research provides the space for research teams to iterate, improve, and make the most of emerging opportunities. Other long-term approaches include funding that targets different research stages or follow-on grants that can support new avenues for inquiry or impact. [See Research Programme Consortia.](#)



2 Focus on LMIC priorities

Research aligned with the needs of those using evidence to inform decision making in LMICs is more likely to facilitate international development. Mechanisms are needed to ensure funded research is aligned with and relevant to the needs of the country or context in which it is being conducted. [See NIHR Global Health Research Groups and Units.](#)



3 Equitable partnerships between UK and LMICs

Time and resources are required to build respectful and mutually beneficial research partnerships in which LMIC leadership is supported and decision making is distributed. Equitable partnerships support more contextually relevant research, which can have a greater impact on policy and practice. [See Joint Global Health Trials.](#)



4 Focus on avenues for impact

Development research needs to be funded with international development impact as the primary objective. A clear vision for what research hopes to achieve supports the selection of impact-focused proposals and incentivises research teams to prioritise activities and outputs most relevant to development challenges. [See Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership.](#)



7 Transdisciplinary research:

Funding collaboration across and beyond different research disciplines, e.g. between natural scientists, social scientists, arts and humanities researchers, and/or research users, has helped address real-world development issues. [See GCRF Interdisciplinary Hubs programme.](#)



6 Embedded capacity strengthening

Holistic support to capacity strengthening and learning within funded research develops people and institutions, fosters collaborations across disciplines and sectors, builds supporting infrastructure, and creates a strong enabling environment for research and research actors to thrive. All of this contributes to the impact that funded research can have. [See NIHR Global Health Research Groups and Units.](#)



5 Co-production with research users

Working in close collaboration from the outset with those who will directly benefit from the research (e.g., policymakers, practitioners, civil society) leads to more contextually relevant work, ensures diverse forms of knowledge inform the research process, and embeds avenues for impact as the evidence produced is of relevance to those who need it. [See Darwin Initiative.](#)

From this deep dive into seven funding mechanisms for ODA research, UKCDR has distilled nine enablers of impact

➤ Research Programme Consortia (RPCs)

Funder	FCDO (formerly by DFID)
Dates	Three generations of RPCs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2000s ● 2011-2016/7 ● 2020-2026¹
Funding amount	£6 to £8 million over five to seven years for each RPC
Duration of grants	Five years per RPC, plus possible extensions
What is funded	Research and programmatic activities
Implementation partners	Partners are a mix of UK-based and LMIC-based institutions and could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research institutions ● NGOs ● Independent consultants
Coordinating partners	Research institutions (usually a Higher Education Institution (HEI)) – lead institutions did not have geographic requirements, but most lead institutions were UK-based.
Beneficiary countries	LMICs
Disciplinary focus	Health: e.g., Health Systems, Infectious Diseases, Maternal Newborn Health, Sexual Reproductive Health, Women and Girls, etc.
Unique funding feature	Long-term consortia funding

Enablers of impact



Long-term thinking 5+ years of funding



Focus on LMIC priorities with health-related themes



Co-production with research users including non-governmental organisations and representatives from local communities



Flexibility to respond to emerging needs supporting LMICs going through crises and changes during COVID-19



Focus on avenues for impact by prioritising impact on policy and practice and supporting evidence synthesis



Support for proposal development with seed funding for partnership building

RPCs are funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and have been designed to support a consortium of partners to conduct research addressing some of the greatest challenges in global health. Funding through RPCs prioritises impact on policy and professional practice in health-related research. RPCs include a diverse range of partners in LMICs, has contributed to evidence-based policymaking, and improved the delivery of health services, especially to vulnerable groups.

RPCs began in the 2000s, with two further generations of funding starting in 2011 and 2020, respectively. RPCs were led by HEIs, primarily based in the UK. Each RPC has a portfolio of projects, allowing lead institutions to independently allocate and distribute funds among their research partners, either UK-based or LMIC-based. Consortia were open to non-academic actors, including non-governmental organisations and representatives from local communities.

¹ RPC work may be extended beyond 2026.

Research Programme Consortia (RPCs)

While each RPC operated independently, there were avenues for information exchange and collaboration between them. The latest cohort of RPCs (2020-2026) will also be subject to an independent evaluation.

“One of our researchers from **ReBUILD** became the Minister of Tertiary Education in Sierra Leone, so we hope to see some impact through their role”.

Award holder

“[The RPC] produced cross-cutting papers, it brought together people who were interested in that area from the different consortia, they sort of supported each other... I think this is a strong feature”.

Award holder

“We could be like other funders and just... fund individual projects, but the advantage of the RPCs is pulling everything together, pulling the knowledge together, building bodies of knowledge around a particular theme and having a mechanism to transmit that into policy and impact”.

Funder

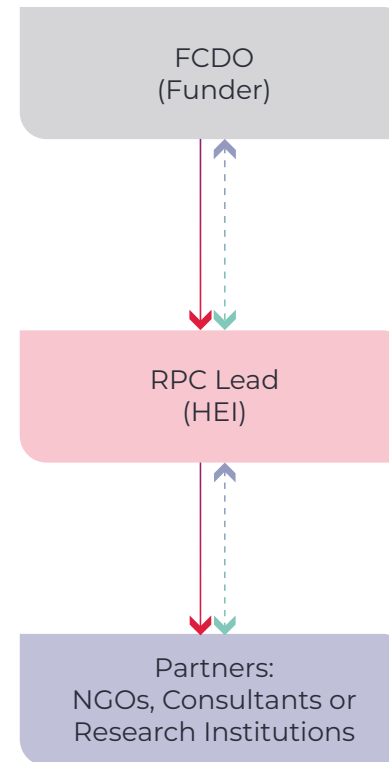


Figure 1 The FCDO is the main funder, funding goes to the RPC lead institution, which in turn administers the funding for each consortium, providing funds to partners working on specific research projects.

Research Programme Consortia (RPCs)

Table 2 RPCs: Funder and award holders' perspectives

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
Applicants were required to address health-related themes and challenges in LMICs at the bidding stage.		
	Funder	Award Holder
Strategy and Governance	Research Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) roles were established in each RPC to direct research, manage partnerships, and facilitate uptake.	Challenges with carrying out work in LMICs experiencing crises, as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic, were balanced by the flexibility of funding and communication with FCDO. New procurement guidelines were introduced to support this.
RPCs were required to demonstrate evidence and uptake in policymaking when applying for funding and through constant reporting.		
Approach to Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding needed to place emphasis on the quality and impact of research by demonstrating how projects met local development needs. ● Seed funding was available to support partnership building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding structure enabled multi-level impacts targeting local, country, and regional levels through clear funding requirements on meeting local needs. ● Flexibility of funding enabled the inclusion of various types of partner organisations into the RPC, extending beyond academia.
Some working relationships were pre-existing, but it was possible for new members to join an established RPC.		
Partnering with LMICs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There was no geographic restriction when selecting lead institutions and partners for each RPC, provided there was available space for LMIC-based research organisations. ● Engagement with diverse partners in LMICs, including NGOs and other non-academic actors, enhanced research uptake and facilitated the dissemination of outputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Although no geographic restriction was in place for lead institutions, most RPC leads were based in the UK. This is related to the administrative demands of running an RPC which is harder for smaller institutions. ● RPC-funded projects required strong relationships with local communities in LMICs which required time to develop.
Funding Delivery		
RPCs were expected to demonstrate the capacity to deliver real-world impact.		
	Funder	Award Holder
Development Impact	Policy uptake and non-academic dissemination strategies were prioritised, e.g., workshops and meetings, in addition to academic publications.	Direct collaboration with LMIC-based institutions improved analysis, research uptake, and understanding of the country context, informing future work.
Sustainability	The time awarded for each grant and the possibility to extend the contracts allowed for greater sustainability.	Long-term flexible funding enabled sustainable relationships with diverse partners. This translated into additional funding opportunities or new projects with the same partners.

Research Programme Consortia (RPCs)

Impact

The impact achieved by research funded through the RPCs addressed areas including the delivery of health services and impact on vulnerable groups, contributing to evidence-based policymaking in LMICs.²

Table 3 RPCs: Impact achieved

Conceptual Impact	<p>Reframing issues</p> <p>RPCs broadened the understanding of research impact beyond academia by recognising practical applications and policy influence. By integrating multidisciplinary and equitable partnerships, including non-academic collaborators, the RPCs effectively reframed what impact meant in applied research contexts.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Through their work on performance-based financing in fragile states and humanitarian contexts, the RPCs developed insights that adapted existing models to suit complex environments. This collaborative and practical approach engaged major international organisations like the World Bank, illustrating how RPCs realigned research focus from traditional outputs to transformative policy changes and concept evolution.</p>
Instrumental Impact	<p>Policy significance</p> <p>The RPCs successfully influenced health-related policies and practices through strategic engagement with policymakers and the cultivation of strong networks across various sectors, including academic institutions, think tanks, NGOs, and governmental organisations. This approach leveraged the skills and mindsets necessary to effectively bridge evidence and policy.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> RPCs' engagement with key stakeholders, such as Ministries of Public Health in LMICs, enabled support for the expansion of community-driven health initiatives like the community-based scorecard scheme, demonstrating how the inclusion of diverse expertise facilitated impactful policy integration.</p>
Learning and Development Impact	<p>Capacity building</p> <p>Some RPCs prioritised capacity building at both individual and institutional levels as part of their programmes, ensuring sustainability and long-term impact. This included creating training, mentoring, and development working groups.</p> <p>Cross-cutting collaboration</p> <p>Participants from different RPCs had the opportunity to engage with each other and exchange ideas, leading to impact across RPCs.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Cross-RPC collaboration on gender and ethics brought together experts working in this area, building the capacity for stronger gender analysis work within the three RPCs involved.</p>
Networking and Connectivity Impact	<p>New and strengthened partnerships</p> <p>Long-term funding and the diversity of partners allowed for collaborations with local and international organisations. These collaborations extended beyond individual projects and facilitated the continuation of the RPCs' work.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Partnerships developed during one generation of RPCs were successful in applying for funding for newer generations of the RPC model.</p>

² This is the impact framework used in UKCDR's 2023 report: [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)

➤ Global Research Partnership (GRP)

Funder	FCDO, UKRI, and India's DBT
Dates	2013 to 2023
Funding amount	£13.4m for UK- and LMIC-based researchers. India's DBT funded Indian-based researchers
Duration of grants	3 years in average
What is funded	Research projects
Implementation partners	UK: FCDO and UKRI (BBSRC, ESRC, and MRC) India: DBT LMIC: Universities, foundations, and research institutions
Coordinating partners	UK: FCDO & UKRI India: DBT
Beneficiary countries	ODA recipient countries
Disciplinary focus	Global development challenges through two main themes: Maternal and Child Health and Aquaculture
Unique funding feature	Trilateral partnership between the UK, India, and LMICs

The Global Research Partnership (GRP) was a collaborative research initiative funded by the FCDO, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), and India's Department of Biotechnology (DBT). The programme funded trilateral research partnerships between Indian, UK-based, and LMIC-based researchers in the areas of Aquaculture and Maternal and Child Health, that generated globally relevant evidence, informed related policies in LMICs, and supported capacity building and career development.

Enablers of impact



Focus on LMIC priorities in the areas of Maternal and Child Health and Aquaculture



Equitable partnerships between UK and LMICs requirement for LMIC-based co-PIs and matched funding supporting co-ownership



Embedded capacity strengthening through support for careers of LMIC-based PhD candidates and early career researchers



Support for proposal development through "Sandpit" method and seed funding for partnership building



Co-production with research users through collaborating with non-academic partners e.g. NGOs, health care professionals

The GRP lasted for 10 years, including a no-cost extension due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were three rounds of calls for proposals leading to an average research project duration of three years. The Medical Research Council (MRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) helped manage the joint calls for proposals with India's DBT. LMIC-based institutions, including universities, foundations, and research institutes, could participate as co-principal investigators (co-PIs) on projects.

Global Research Partnership (GRP)

“We were very clear that we would need a Co-PI from each of the third country (LMICs) partnerships and we were not going to use them as downstream data collectors, they would be involved in the co-production of the research so it felt like a genuine case of equitable partnership”.

Funder

“That little bit of pump-priming to be able to meet partners face-to-face to develop the relationships...that was really critical”.

Award holder

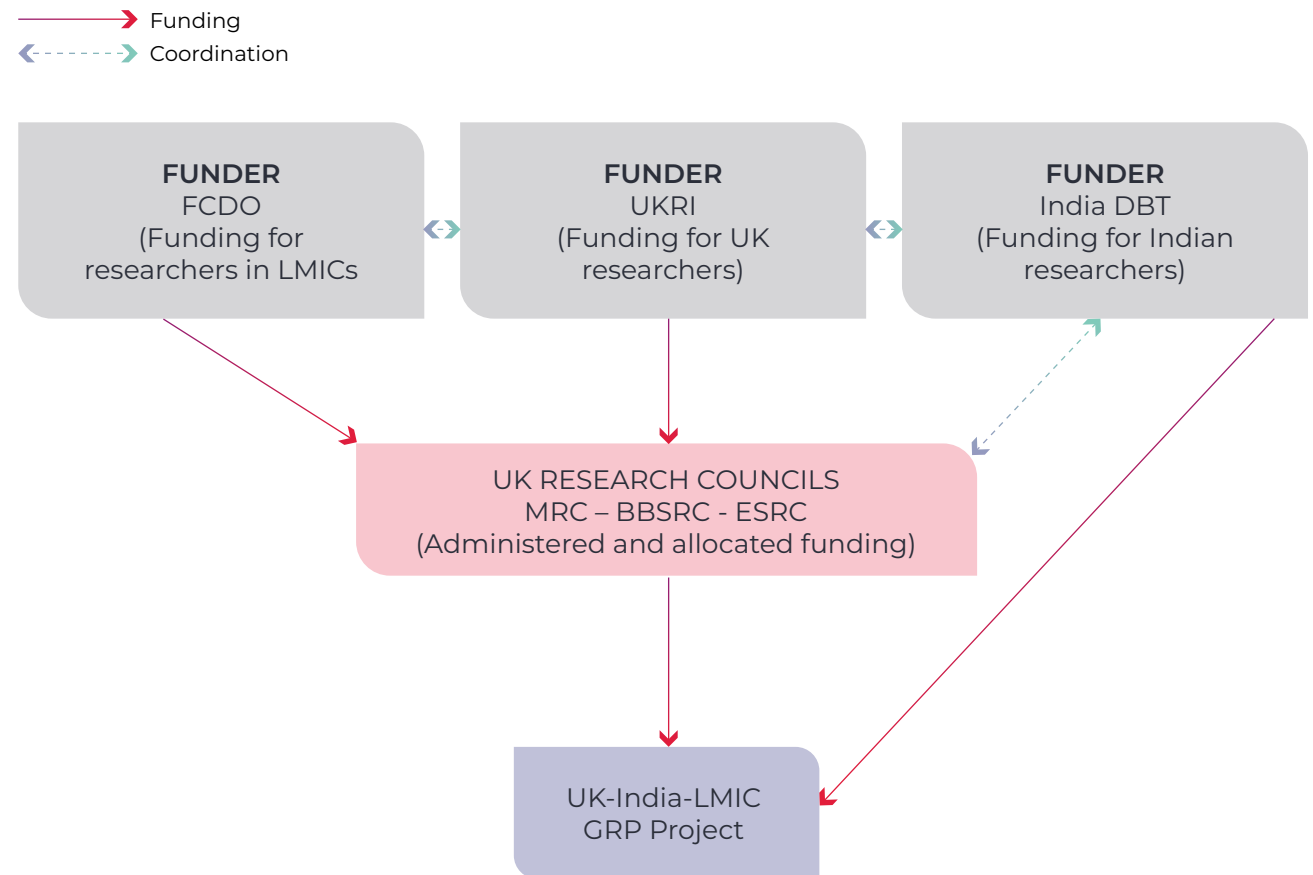


Figure 2 FCDO funding was administered by UKRI and its research councils and funded UK- and LMIC-based researchers. The Indian government funded Indian researchers taking part in RPC projects.

Table 4 GRP: Funder and award holders' perspectives

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
Funding applications were required to include one UK-based institution, one Indian institution, and one LMIC-based institution.		
	Funder	Award Holder
Strategy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The GRP's trilateral structure enabled international cooperation across the UK, India, and LMICs. ● A strategic approach to grant allocation, including peer review, panel assessment, and PI rebuttal stage, ensured funded projects were high quality and relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Comprehensive governance frameworks were established within each project. However, there were sometimes communication difficulties due to the complexities of multi-party interactions. ● From an academic perspective, appropriate governance structures allowed researchers to concentrate on research with minimal interference from governance-related issues.
Funding decisions were made through joint external peer review and joint panel assessments led by co-chairs from India and the UK.		
Approach to Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Matched funding allowed for equitable collaborations with all funders, fostering financial autonomy. ● Seed funding for proposal development and partnership building allowed for more diverse institutions to be included. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seed funding during the proposal phase enabled crucial interpersonal engagement, resulting in better research proposals. ● Funders streamlined post-award engagement and reporting structures, which provided considerable procedural flexibility.
Each project required PIs from India and the UK, and Co-PIs from LMICs.		
Partnering with LMICs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● LMIC research challenges were prioritised within calls for proposals, elevating their role in agenda setting. ● Requiring Co-PIs from LMICs prevented the relegation of their role to data collectors. ● The GRP strengthened UK and India research partnerships with LMIC-based researchers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some healthcare projects provided funding for pre-existing partnerships, mostly between two of the three parties involved in the GRP (commonly UK-India or UK-LMIC partnerships). ● GRP allowed pre-existing partners to expand their network into other countries. ● The "sandpit" approach³ used in the aquaculture call supported new partnerships with LMICs and fostered collaborative proposal development.

³ The sandpit method refers to interactive workshops bringing together different backgrounds and disciplines. Researchers from the UK, India, and LMICs used it prior to submitting their bid for the aquaculture funding call to build relationships and develop their initial project proposals.

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives

Funding Delivery

Calls required projects to address a challenge in an LMIC related to the theme of the funding call. Two funding calls focused on maternal and child health and another on aquaculture.

	Funder	Award Holder
Development Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The GRP model supported pathways to development impact by involving LMIC-based researchers and institutions as equal partners. ● Funding joint development projects in LMICs supported UK and India leadership in advancing the SDGs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnering with institutions located in LMICs was beneficial as they possessed the expertise needed to localise project objectives and navigate different logistical aspects for delivery. ● Collective expertise from at least three countries (UK, India, and an LMIC) benefited project outcomes in the areas of healthcare, aquaculture, and sustainable development.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some partnerships built during GRP projects were able to secure external sources of funding, ensuring continuity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The GRP model scaled up localised projects into national contexts and allowed funding for research outputs to build upon previous deliverables within each project.

Impact

The impact achieved by research funded through the GRP addressed areas including food security, maternal and child health, and sustainable development, contributing to evidence-based policymaking in LMICs.⁴

Table 5 GRP: Impact achieved

<p>Conceptual Impact</p>	<p>A new model for working with LMICs The GRP shifted perspectives regarding international development research funding, allowing tripartite collaboration and strengthening the case for South-South and triangular cooperation.</p> <p>Advancing understanding of development issues GRP funded projects built evidence and advanced understanding in aquaculture and maternal and child health due to strong participation of LMICs in the project initiation stage.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The CRADLE project enhanced how maternal health issues are understood and addressed globally, both through validation trials and policy recommendations demonstrating the potential for research to inform investment decisions.</p>
<p>Instrumental Impact</p>	<p>Implementing findings and informing policy GRP projects led to the implementation of research findings in practical settings and informed new policies in LMICs.</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> The collaborative approach of the GRP included experts from different sectors. The aquaculture approach used by farmers in Bangladesh and Malawi helped increase productivity. These findings helped shape the National Fish Health Management Strategy of Bangladesh.</p>
<p>Learning and Development Impact</p>	<p>Capacity strengthening The active involvement of LMIC-based institutions in GRP projects ensured knowledge exchange and collaborative problem solving. This supported capacity building and developing the careers of PhD candidates and early-career researchers. Some projects allowed funding for specific projects led by researchers in LMICs.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Childhood Maltreatment project in Nepal benefited PhD and postdoctoral researchers in the country, who were supported by UK PIs to publish peer reviewed articles.</p>
<p>Networking and Connectivity Impact</p>	<p>Early career networking Funded projects helped build partnerships and networks early in researchers' careers, providing long-term benefits and reciprocal exchanges between UK-, India-, and LMIC-based researchers.</p> <p>Collaborative approach with research users The GRP's trilateral model fostered a collaborative approach and integrated non-academic partners, such as healthcare professionals, NGOs, and communication specialists. These partnerships were crucial for scaling up results and securing broader community impact.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The CRADLE project's early funding facilitated meetings among international partners, which were vital in building trusting relationships and understanding one another's constraints, allowing for stronger collaboration.</p>

⁴ This is the impact framework used in UKCDR's 2023 report: [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)

➤ Joint Global Health Trials (JGHT)

Funder	FCDO, Wellcome Trust, UKRI-MRC, and DHSC
Dates	2009 to 2020 with 10 funding calls
Funding amount	£200 million
Duration of grants	3 to 5 years, some were granted extensions beyond 5 years
What is funded	Clinical trials
Implementation partners	Academic institutions from the UK and LMICs, LMIC-based governments, commercial entities, NGOs
Coordinating partners	UKRI-MRC, FCDO, Wellcome, DHSC
Beneficiary countries	Trials took place in LMICs
Disciplinary focus	Healthcare
Unique funding feature	Pooled funding supporting large-scale clinical trials

The Joint Global Health Trials scheme (JGHT) was a joint funder initiative between the FCDO, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), UKRI through the Medical Research Council (MRC), and Wellcome. The initiative funded clinical trials from 2009-2020 via two funding streams:

1. **Development awards** to support preliminary work to enable full trial readiness.
2. **Full trial awards** for late-stage, definitive clinical trials to evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of health interventions.

The JGHT issued funding that enabled the implementation of clinical trials⁵. This generated new knowledge about health interventions and improved health outcomes in LMICs. The results of funded trials have been published in prominent journals, influenced WHO policies, changed practice, and saved lives, underscoring the quality and impact of the research conducted.

⁵ Some funded projects are expected to continue work until 2027.

Enablers of impact



Long-term thinking 5+ years of funding



Equitable partnerships between UK and LMICs requirement for LMIC-based Co-Investigators and support for direct applications from LMIC-based researchers



Support for proposal development with availability of smaller grants to support preliminary work before full trials



Flexibility to respond to emerging needs adaptation to respond to challenges e.g. COVID-19



Embedded capacity strengthening for clinical trials in LMICs

“For me and for the team and for the local population here, we’ve all benefited hugely from this grant, and I think it’d be really great if they could bring it back as it opens many doors for people working with it.”

Award holder

“One of the key features [of the scheme] is that it allowed LMIC applicants to apply directly. That was, I think, a really important shift in helping to support LMIC leadership and equity of funding in the global health space.”

Funder

Joint Global Health Trials (JGHT)

“A key feature {of JGHT} is that it’s a funding partnership allowing us to pool money and have millions of pounds annually available to enable us to fund larger trials than any funder could have done on their own.”

Funder

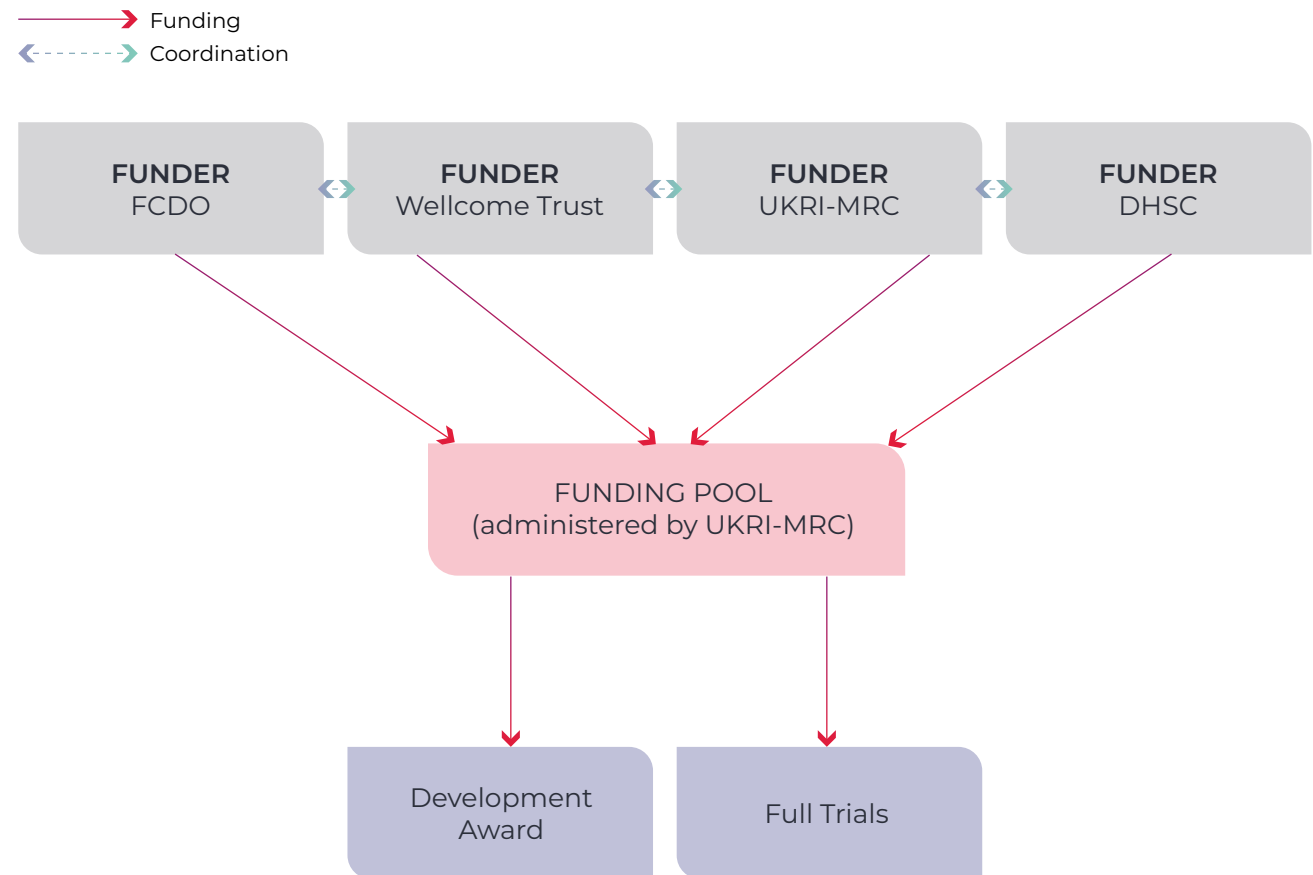


Figure 3 Pooled funding coming from all the different funders is administered by the MRC, which in turn manages the funding for development awards and full trials.

Table 6 JGHT: Funder and award holders' perspectives

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
<p>JGHT aimed to fund clinical trials with a focus on generating new knowledge and addressing significant health challenges in LMICs. The scheme was targeted at trials led by academic groups, rather than commercial companies.</p>		
	Funder Perspective	Award Holder Perspective
Strategy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pooling budgets from the four funders into a single fund enabled the support of larger trials and sharing of administrative and financial risks. ● Governance mechanisms ensured funded projects abided by stringent technical and ethical standards, including trial transparency and public registry requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Award holders appreciated the strategic focus on alignment of funded projects with local and regional health priorities. ● Award holders welcomed that the funders trusted them and had confidence that they would execute their projects responsibly and effectively.
<p>The development awards were introduced in response to observations made during calls 3 and 4, where some applications demonstrated high quality but needed further preparatory work.</p>		
Approach to Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The creation of the development awards led to higher quality full trial proposals and reflected the ability of the JGHT to adapt and respond to feedback. ● Full trial and development awards were reviewed concurrently to maintain balance in funding allocation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Despite disruptions due to COVID-19 and funding uncertainty, award holders appreciated JGHT protecting funds for trials and providing additional support where necessary. ● Flexibility in the use of funds was appreciated as it allowed for adaptability and responsiveness to project needs.
<p>Applications had to include Co-Investigators from the country or countries where the trial would occur and had to demonstrate how they had engaged with local stakeholders. LMIC-based applicants could apply directly.</p>		
Partnering with LMICs	<p>Equity in partnerships between UK- and LMIC-based researchers was a criterion in the application process. UK-led applications were mandated to work in strong partnerships with researchers in the LMICs where trials took place.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conducting the research in an LMIC context contributed to strengthening the capacity of LMIC-based researchers. ● Local research teams were given autonomy by the JGHT working model. This reinforced the benefits of South-South collaborations and knowledge exchange.

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives

Funding Delivery

Applications were assessed based on their potential for policy influence and contribution to improving health outcomes in LMICs.

	Funder Perspective	Award Holder Perspective
Development Impact	The knowledge generated and the findings from clinical trials funded under the JGHT have informed health-related policies worldwide, including those of the WHO.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● JGHT-funded projects have facilitated networking, policy influence, and community involvement in research. ● Development grants gave early-career researchers and new PIs a platform to gain experience to advance their careers.
JGHT provided long-term funding (5+ years) with the two award types supporting trials at different stages of readiness.		
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The joint funding model mitigated the risk involved in managing large clinical trials. ● Funders are discussing future funding mechanisms that capture the successes and learnings from JGHT. 	The JGHT development award facilitated pilot studies and offered opportunities for researchers to develop ideas before applying for full trial funding.

Impact

The impact achieved by research funded through the RPCs addressed areas including the delivery of health services and impact on vulnerable groups, contributing to evidence-based policymaking in LMICs.⁶

Table 7 JGHT: Impact achieved

<p>Conceptual Impact</p>	<p>Improving how health trials are conducted in LMICs The JGHT catalysed a shift in how global health trials were conducted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focusing on equity and leadership from LMICs. ● Focusing on public engagement activities, which created awareness about public health misconceptions. <p>Some development awards led to new resources for conducting clinical trials, such as treatment manuals, improved tools for gaining consent, data collection, and patient enrolment.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Community engagement events helped debunk myths about spinal fluid sampling, which is critical for diagnosing meningitis, illustrating the translation of research into public health education.</p>
<p>Instrumental Impact</p>	<p>Influencing policy and practice on neglected health issues JGHT funded research influenced WHO and national policies and practice. This was achieved by funding research on neglected health issues for which little evidence was previously available, alongside sustained engagement with policymakers throughout the research process.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Research on safer treatment for cryptococcal disease in people living with HIV led to new WHO guidance and changes to treatment guidelines in several African countries. In Uganda, over 1000 people have been treated with the new regimen in the 18 months since its introduction. This is estimated to have saved 250-450 lives to date.</p>
<p>Learning and Development Impact</p>	<p>LMIC leadership of global health trials JGHT-funded research has enhanced research capacity in LMICs through a 'learning by doing' model, with LMIC-based researchers not only participating in but often leading the trials. This has built capacity within weaker trial sites.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The flexibility of JGHT funding allowed award holders, particularly those in LMICs, to manage the grant efficiently, directly supporting local capacity development and career progression for the next generation of researchers.</p>
<p>Networking and Connectivity Impact</p>	<p>Strengthening networks for clinical trials The JGHT scheme fostered collaborations and networks, shown by new partnerships emerging from the trials and increased participation in further research opportunities.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The support for investigator meetings and the encouragement of community involvement facilitated by JGHT allowed for the creation and strengthening of networks, promoting collaboration beyond the life of the trial.</p>

⁶This is the impact framework used in UKCDR's 2023 report: [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)

➤ GCRF Interdisciplinary Hubs Programme

Funder	UKRI
Dates	2019-2024
Funding amount	£150m across 12 Hubs (each funded for £9-£15m)
Duration of grants	5 years
What is funded	12 Interdisciplinary Hubs
Implementation partners	Academic institutions, research institutions, LMIC institutions
Coordinating partners	Academic institutions in the UK and partners with NGOs, policymakers and UN agencies
Beneficiary countries	LMICs
Disciplinary focus	16 SDGs are addressed through the themes across the 12 Hubs
Unique funding feature	Hub autonomy to design research programme and allocate funding

The Interdisciplinary Hubs Programme was a flagship programme of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and consisted of 12 multinational and interdisciplinary research groups designed to tackle global development challenges in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The GCRF was managed by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) formerly the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), with UKRI being responsible for development and delivery. The Hubs have established strong stakeholder networks, with over 400 organisations across all the Hubs. These networks have laid a foundation for development impact, fostering research uptake, enhancing capabilities, and leading to early-stage outcomes even amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and ODA budget reductions.

Enablers of impact



Long-term thinking 5+ years of funding



Transdisciplinary research targeted at global development challenges



Equitable partnerships between UK and LMICs a requirement of proposals



Support for proposal development through seed funding to support partnership building



Co-production with research users by including non-academic stakeholders as research partners



Embedded capacity strengthening improving knowledge exchange and research capabilities in LMICs



Flexibility to respond to emerging needs with a specific fund for responsive work

One of the main things that made [the Hubs] stand out is that they were interdisciplinary... and that was really one of the keystones of the entire programme”.

Funder

“The Hubs have always been called the flagship of the GCRF. It isn’t just by nature of the size of them in terms of money, it’s also because of the ambition behind them and what we were trying to achieve with them”.

Funder

GCRF Interdisciplinary Hubs Programme

“I think the Flexible Fund was a really good initiative and I think having a lead institution that could manage the agreements so that when the inevitable need for slight variations comes up, that can be managed quickly and through relationships, I think is also a really good initiative”.

Award holder

“I think the strength is in having some clear directives in place that mean that having Global North and Global South representation on these projects is mandatory”.

Award holder

→ Funding flows
↔ Coordination

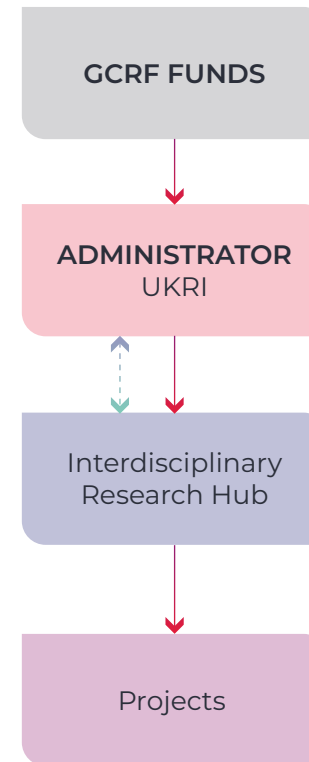


Figure 4 GCRF funding is administered by UKRI and distributed to each of the interdisciplinary hubs, where each hub had the capacity to fund individual projects.

Table 8 GCRF Hubs: Funder and award holder’s perspectives

Funder and Award Holders’ Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
	Funder	Award Holder
Hubs involved many institutions in multiple countries, with a single lead organisation responsible for coordination and integration.		
Strategy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clear strategic pillars and a four-stage selection process led to the funding of mission-driven proposals relating to global challenges and the SDGs. ● Hubs were expected to monitor and evaluate their work internally, aligning governance and project management structures with UKRI standards. ● UKRI organised cohort meetings to bring together the Hubs and provide guidance on specific issues, including evaluation frameworks and capacity strengthening. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The working framework for the Hubs ensured strong governance, compliance, and reporting mechanisms with an administrative and operational model designed to address large-scale global challenges. ● Applicants needed to show strong leadership capabilities for managing large and complex projects at scale, and how they would manage risk effectively.
Proposals were assessed and recommended for funding by a diverse group of independent experts, including from FCDO, LMICs, and policy makers and practitioners.		
Approach to Funding	A flexible fund within each grant gave each Hub the autonomy to steer research and other projects towards core objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The flexible funds allowed Hubs to decide how to allocate funds to their project partners, which provided flexibility to respond to emerging needs throughout the Hub’s lifecycle. ● Other flexibilities, such as the availability to provide payments in advance, were accommodating and supportive of working in LMIC settings, a notable exception to other models of funding activities in arrears.
The funding structure aimed to foster fair and equitable international research partnerships by allowing participation of LMIC-based institutions and granting flexibility of funding.		
Partnering with LMICs	Travel and agenda setting funds supported partnership development, expanding the types of partners who could be included. While some Hubs excelled in this area, others faced challenges creating networks from scratch.	Hubs were required to have a strong emphasis on partnerships and equitable collaboration, which led to strong networks being established to contribute to the work of the Hubs.

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives

Funding Delivery

	Funder	Award Holder
	Hubs had to be centred around a challenge related to the SDGs, underpinned by an interdisciplinary framework.	
Development Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Non-academic organisations were encouraged to participate. This expertise improved the quality of networks and impact on policy and practice. ● The GCRF's overall focus on SDG-related challenges faced by LMICs allowed for targeted and results-oriented projects being supported by each Hub. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hubs were required to provide mentorship and capacity building, which improved capabilities in areas including grant management and due diligence processes, particularly for smaller partners in LMICs. ● Even though risk management was part of the selection process and the governance structure, there were challenges around risk exposure for partners and its unintended consequences, particularly in conflict areas.
Sustainability	The work of the Hubs was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and UK ODA cuts implemented in 2021. Nevertheless, the resilience of the networks established continued to deliver results through a no-cost extension until September 2024.	The dependence of the Hubs Programme on ODA funding through GCRF meant it was fully exposed to funding cuts in 2021, affecting operations, the sustainability of projects, and their impact.

Impact

The impact achieved by research funded through the RPCs addressed areas including the delivery of health services and impact on vulnerable groups, contributing to evidence-based policymaking in LMICs.⁷

Table 9 GCRF Hubs: Impact achieved

<p>Conceptual Impact</p>	<p>Innovative approach to interdisciplinary challenge-led research The interdisciplinary approach and the participation of a diverse set of partners generated research that addressed the challenges faced by LMICs in areas related to the SDGs. The Hubs structure encouraged innovation by ensuring research was dynamic and adapted to complex global issues.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Action against Stunting Hub developed an “All-Hub Data Repository”. This enabled interdisciplinary analysis of datasets, which is crucial for understanding and preventing child stunting using evidence-based and scalable interventions in LMICs.</p>
<p>Instrumental Impact</p>	<p>Real-world applications and policy impact GCRF Hubs’ substantial and targeted funding allowed for the development of actionable solutions and supported policy engagement to drive change at local, regional, and global levels.</p> <p>The direct application of research findings solved practical issues. The emphasis on scalability and sustainability by each Hub enabled programmes to move beyond academic research, allowing them to implement pilot projects and interventions with real-world applications and policy influence.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Water Security and Sustainable Development Hub created a “Lab in a Suitcase”, a portable innovative solution that allowed researchers to travel to any remote location and screen for potentially hazardous water pathogens. This facilitated water quality assessment, positively impacting public health efforts through better water management.</p>
<p>Learning and Development Impact</p>	<p>Knowledge exchange and skills development The Hubs’ focus on fostering knowledge exchange and promoting skill development supported the improvement of research capabilities in LMICs. Hub funding had explicit targets for collaboration and capacity building, which resulted in the development of training programmes and educational resources to promote knowledge sharing and staff development at the local level.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The South Asian Nitrogen Hub launched free online courses on sustainable nitrogen management, enhancing stakeholders’ understanding of this critical environmental issue within the region.</p>
<p>Networking and Connectivity Impact</p>	<p>Networks beyond academia Although lead institutions were universities, the participation of non-academic organisations was encouraged. The Hubs created extensive networks of stakeholders, including civil society, government, and industry experts. The networks created by the Hubs enabled two-way transfers of knowledge and context-specific insights that enhanced the relevance and acceptance of research outcomes.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Gender, Justice and Security Hub worked with different stakeholders, including governments and local NGOs, to generate knowledge around gender issues in conflict-affected societies. Research findings were translated into practical actions to improve the lives of women and marginalised people in vulnerable situations.</p>

⁷ This is the impact framework used in UKCDR’s 2023 report: [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)

➤ NIHR Global Health Research Groups and Units

Funder	DHSC
Dates	2016 – ongoing ⁸
Funding amount	£351m for both Groups and Units
Duration of grants	Up to 5 years for Units 3 – 4 years for Groups
What is funded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups support institutions building research partnerships and capacity in Global Health • Units support established partnerships
Implementation partners	Academic institutions, research institutions
Coordinating partners	Groups and Units are led by UK HEIs and research institutions in equitable partnership with LMIC academic and research institutions
Beneficiary countries	LMICs in the ODA recipients list
Disciplinary focus	18 thematic areas of NIHR's Global Health Research portfolio
Unique funding feature	Long-term funding for mid-size and large research centres

The Global Health Research Groups and Units are two major programmes within the DHSC and administered by the National Institute for Health and Care Research's (NIHR) Global Health Research (GHR) Portfolio. The Portfolio, initiated in 2016, funds high-quality applied health research and training in areas of unmet need, addressing the health needs of people in LMICs. The programmes aim to encourage multidisciplinary collaborations and strengthen linkages among researchers, communities, practitioners, and policymakers both within and beyond individual projects.

- **Groups** comprise partnerships of UK- and LMIC-based researchers with limited experience in Global Health research. They are exploratory in nature. Groups are also open to those wishing to develop and expand partnerships into new health areas and/or geographies.

⁸ Both GHR Units and Groups have now been replaced by GHR Researcher-led programme.

Enablers of impact



Focus on LMIC priorities by funding high quality applied health research in areas of unmet need.



Transdisciplinary research strengthening linkages between research and uptake.



Equitable partnerships between UK and LMICs with co-leadership between UK- and LMIC-based partners



Co-production with research users engaging and involving communities, practitioners, and policy makers throughout the entire research process.



Focus on avenues for impact by using a Theory of Change to guide project delivery.



Embedded capacity strengthening promoting skills sharing and expertise exchange.

- **Units** comprise well established partnerships or networks of UK- and LMIC-based researchers, with a track record of delivering internationally recognised global health research. Units support ambitious interrelated programmes of work that inform policy and practice.

Both Groups and Units are led by researchers and institutions in the UK in partnership with institutions in LMICs. NIHR's Coordinating Centre provides strategic oversight and support with governance mechanisms, ensuring funded research contributes to the strategic objectives of the GHR portfolio, delivers research of relevance to local contexts, and supports capacity strengthening within LMIC-based institutions.

NIHR Global Health Research Groups and Units

“I really think that the benefits of the Units and Groups format is that it includes partnerships, not just with research institutions and organisations, but it has fundamentally got policy informing at the heart of it.”

Quotes below in relation to the response to a large Cholera outbreak in African countries as highlighted below:

“We would never have been able to bring these three countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Malawi) together without this funding, it would have been impossible... being able to do this work with a kind of regional focus in Southern and Eastern Africa actually feels really beneficial to us”. (Speaking about tackling childhood diarrhoeal diseases)

“[There is] immediate impact in terms of responsive funding, that is demonstrated with what happened in Malawi and what we are presently doing in Kenya where we will be able to respond to the cases of Cholera that are coming up there.”

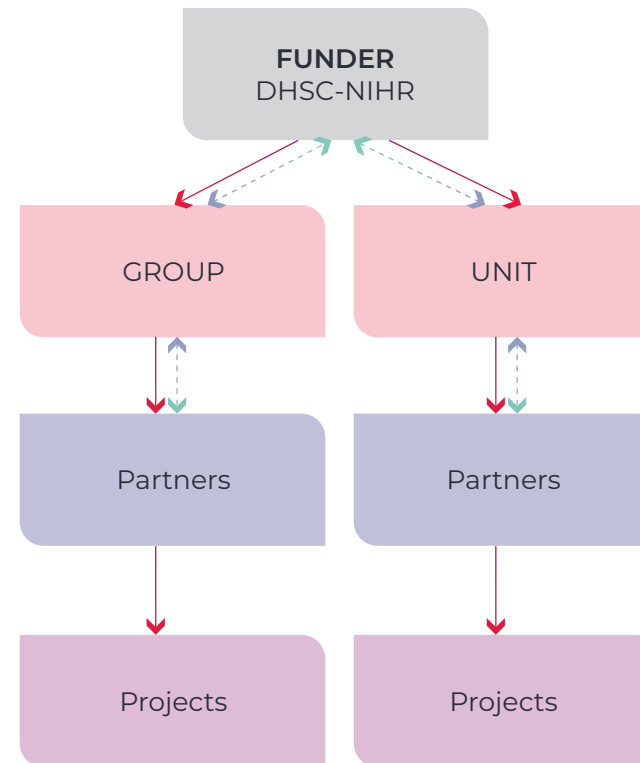


Figure 5 NIHR dispatches funds to UK-based HEI lead institutions, who act as the principal contractors for the Group or Unit and are responsible for the distribution of funds across their UK- and LMIC-based partners. Each Group or Unit undertakes a portfolio of projects with a coherent thematic focus aimed at capacity strengthening and generating impactful research outcomes.

Table 10 NIHR Groups and Units: Funder and award holders' perspectives

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
<p>A Theory of Change (ToC) articulates intended outcomes and impact of each Unit or Group. Applicants need to apply NIHR's framework for Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) throughout the entire research process.</p>		
	Funder	Award Holder
Strategy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategic objectives evolved over time and ensured the alignment of research activities with the health needs of LMICs. ● The ToC used by the Groups and Units improved oversight and accountability of the supported projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The governance structure put strategic focus on partnership development and research capacity strengthening. ● The structure also allowed for flexibility, providing rapid response to health emergencies such as cholera outbreaks in partner countries. ● The CEI requirement ensured an equitable and inclusive approach to engaging vulnerable and marginalised groups to support health interventions that are culturally and contextually relevant.
<p>The NIHR Coordinating Centre oversees the equitable and effective distribution of funds and ensure adherence to ODA principles. Grants are responsive to the needs identified by researchers, in alignment with LMIC priorities.</p>		
Approach to Funding	<p>Funding allocation for Groups and Units depended on the status and experiences of the partnerships involved, allowing for appropriately scaled funding. This approach supported partnership expansion and the exploration of new areas within Global Health research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Autonomy in financial planning allowed Groups and Units to tailor their financial management strategies to their specific needs, ensuring efficient disbursement and utilisation of funds. ● Flexibility in fund allocation, with mechanisms for reviewing and adjusting expenses, enabled adaptation to evolving project needs and promoted financial accountability.
<p>Co-leadership between the UK- and LMIC-based partners was a requirement, alongside the alignment of planned research with national health policies and strategies.</p>		
Partnering with LMICs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emphasising equitable and inclusive collaboration supported LMIC-based partners to shape research agendas and actively participate across the entire research lifecycle. ● The CEI approach supported research impact through early and sustained engagement with LMIC-based communities and stakeholders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnerships promoted skill sharing and expertise exchange, strengthening research capacity among LMIC-based partners and building robust academic networks. ● Emphasis on research capacity strengthening enabled partner countries to address critical health issues locally and fostered research growth in previously underrepresented areas. ● Groups and Units also supported LMICs to work together, sharing knowledge and expertise with each other.

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives

Funding Delivery

Groups and Units were required to engage meaningfully with diverse stakeholders, including LMIC-based researchers, community groups, policymakers, and civil society actors, to ensure the inclusion of a variety of perspectives.

	Funder	Award Holder
Development Impact	Each Group or Unit focused on real-world applications and policy-informing research, leading to meaningful change in health systems within LMICs.	The Groups' and Units' emphases on multidisciplinary research led to the integration of health economics and social science, supporting improved uptake of health interventions, such as vaccines.
Applications needed to show a plan for capacity strengthening and supporting equitable partnerships between UK - and LMIC-based research institutions.		
Sustainability	Funding supported a broad mix of new and existing partnerships with different levels of global health experience, promoting stronger, longer-lasting relationships between partners.	Careful partner selection formed the basis for enduring research collaborations and the continuity of research initiatives, laying the groundwork for future joint efforts and sustainability beyond the life of the initial award.

Impact

The Groups and Units have fostered successful collaborations, improved health practices and policies, and strengthened research capacity across numerous LMICs.⁹

Table 11 NIHR Groups and Units: Impact achieved

<p>Conceptual Impact</p>	<p>Improving approaches to community engagement and involvement Groups and Units shifted the conceptual understanding of health issues and priorities within LMICs. The engagement and involvement with communities supported inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups throughout the research cycle and ensured partners in LMICs could shape the research to meet local needs.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The multidisciplinary partnerships in the Groups and Units enabled Ethiopia, Kenya, and Malawi to explore the barriers to and enablers of the introduction of a new vaccine preventing Shigella diarrhoea into childhood immunisation programmes. Research findings and knowledge mobilisation activities encouraged new thinking around future vaccine introduction among ministries and other key stakeholders, including local communities.</p>
<p>Instrumental Impact</p>	<p>Working with Ministries of Health Research findings directly influenced policies and practices of LMIC-based governments. This impact was possible because the funding supported applied health research with a strong emphasis on practical outcomes, typically involving Ministries of Health in the research process.</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> Responsive funding supported the translation of research findings into policy briefs and recommendations, which informed government responses to health crises. For example, during a large Cholera outbreak in Malawi, the Group delivered a policy brief to the government demonstrating their capacity to influence policy during health emergencies through timely engagement with research evidence.</p>
<p>Learning and Development Impact</p>	<p>Formal training awards Formal training awards for LMIC-based researchers were a requirement of the funding, with Groups committed to a minimum of three students and Units to a minimum of ten. This institutionalised capacity strengthening and learning and development as core objectives of the funding approach.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> LMIC-based research teams partnered with established institutions and experts, allowing for knowledge sharing and hands-on training which fostered learning and capacity development for research support. This included specific training awards and support to Masters and PhD students, or postdoctoral researchers participating in each programme. Similarly, colleagues in Malawi will host colleagues visiting from Addis Ababa University to provide training in laboratory methods that are not currently available.</p>
<p>Networking and Connectivity Impact</p>	<p>Networks to support impact New or improved networks among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers boosted the application of funded research, spreading the benefits. These networks were a direct result of the flexible funding structure that allowed projects to form thematic networks, leveraging learning and networking opportunities.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> In Sierra Leone, the establishment of a network for stroke survivors and practitioners widened dissemination of research findings across the country, aiding individuals in other regions to gain access to crucial health information.</p>

⁹ This is the impact framework used in UKCDR's 2023 report: [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)

➤ Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership

Funder	DSIT (formerly BEIS)
Dates	2014 to present ¹⁰
Funding amount	Stimulated over £26m in funding
Duration of grants	Varied, depending on each programme
What is funded	Bilateral research partnerships
Implementation partners	UK Met Office and its LMIC-based counterparts
Coordinating partners	UK-based research institutions in collaboration with LMIC-based research institutions, including universities, research institutes, individual researchers, businesses.
Beneficiary countries	Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, South Africa, and Vietnam
Disciplinary focus	Strengthening the weather and climate resilience of vulnerable communities around the world
Unique funding feature	Partnerships with LMIC-based governments, including matched funding

The [Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership](#) (WCSSP) was funded by the Newton Fund and is administered by DSIT, formerly known as BEIS. The programme's central aim is to build partnerships between the UK Met Office and LMIC-based counterparts to deliver projects harnessing scientific expertise to strengthen global resilience to weather and climate challenges. Funded research has led to over 850 peer-reviewed publications within policy domains and the creation of over 30 new or improved weather and climate service prototypes. WCSSP partnerships are leading to significant institutional capacity strengthening and skill development in partner countries.

¹⁰ The WCSSP will continue operating under the International Science Partnership Fund

Enablers of impact



Focus on avenues for impact by supporting practical application of weather and climate science in LMICs.



Equitable partnerships between UK and LMICs joint agenda setting between UK- and LMIC-based scientific counterparts.



Co-production with research users' engagement from project design onwards.



Embedded capacity strengthening as a programme requirement.

Established in 2014, WCSSP includes high-impact projects around the world addressing diverse challenges such as tropical weather forecasting, climate and weather science innovation, and climate services for sensitive sectors like agriculture and health.

Over 100 projects have been delivered under WCSSP, involving 50+ institutes and organisations across nine countries. Activities range from facilitating knowledge sharing through 100+ exchange visits to improving understanding of how climate change will impact the Amazon rainforest.

Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership

“WCSSP allows us to bring...concepts and ideas out of research into end-use and trial them and pilot them to see what does and doesn’t work”.

Funder

“A team that supports the President has asked us to produce some material for them... the fire forecast is one of our outputs that went directly to the highest level of our government. So, this is something that has helped us to achieve visibility and hopefully secure future funding”.

LMIC-based Delivery Partner

“We’ve made some great friendships and working relationships as well. Another output has been we’ve been working on lots of scientific papers together as coauthors, so that’s been a great benefit of the project as well”.

UK-based Delivery Partner

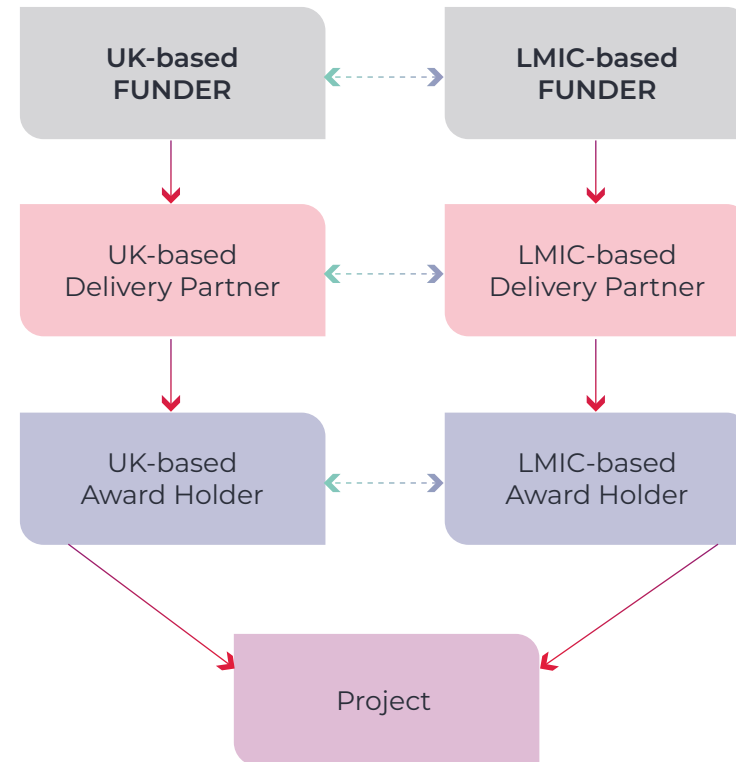


Figure 6 WCSSP has required collaboration between UK- and LMIC-based institutions at different levels. Delivery partners in the UK or in LMICs typically covered the costs of their respective side of the partnership. UK-based award holders are expected to collaborate with LMIC-based award holders who are funded through their own national funding bodies.

Table 12 Weather and Climate Partnership: Funder and award holders' perspectives

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
<p>WCSSP funding calls were developed through close collaboration between scientific staff from the Met Office and their LMIC-based partners. A shared vision, outlined in a joint science plan for each partnership, guided thematic priorities for each call.</p>		
	Funder	Delivery Partners
Strategy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WCSSP was designed to build and strengthen partnerships, creating opportunities for deeper scientific collaboration on weather and climate initiatives. ● Governance structures, such as the executive committees and science review panels, helped define agendas and programmatic focus jointly with LMIC-based partners. ● Funding calls were informed by joint science plans developed with LMIC-based partners, ensuring funding of relevant research and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnerships were established through agreements between the UK and LMICs at different governmental levels, ensuring alignment of priorities from the start. ● Joint planning processes set scientific priorities and project plans were co-developed with LMIC-based partners.
<p>Matched funding from LMICs includes in-kind contributions and other non-financial resources. The Newton Fund covered some costs which LMIC-based partners could not finance themselves.</p>		
Approach to Funding	<p>Matched funding included in-kind contributions from LMIC-based partners, fostering shared priorities between UK- and LMIC-based researchers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Funding was primarily allocated to UK-based researchers with the expectation that LMIC-based partners would secure their own funding. There were instances where UK funding supported delivery in LMICs and facilitated visits to/from LMICs to foster collaboration. ● More equitable mechanisms are needed to support partnerships with countries that cannot match financial and non-financial resources.
<p>Applications for funding needed to demonstrate plans for genuine collaboration with weather and climate partners in LMICs and a focus on strengthening capacity within targeted countries.</p>		
Partnering with LMICs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● UK-based award holders were required to engage in long-term partnerships to collaborate with LMIC-based researchers. These were established at different levels of government, from ministerial level to researchers. ● The programme evolved in response to the needs of partner countries, with the flexibility to bring in additional partners to enhance expertise and impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partnerships facilitated capacity strengthening and knowledge sharing through workshops, student exchanges, and joint scientific publications, strengthening partnerships between UK- and LMIC-based researchers. ● Engagement with LMICs was strategic and targeted, addressing specific challenges such as natural disaster management, with the aim of creating beneficial services.

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives

Funding Delivery

The Met Office convened town hall meetings in the UK ahead of calls for potential UK-based applicants to understand programme and the focus of calls.

	Funder	Delivery Partners
Development Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As of October 2024, 260 policy documents with 490 citations from 25 different countries relate to WCSSP research, indicating the impact of the programme on government policy. ● Impact-based forecasting has provided crucial information to LMIC-based partners during emergencies such as cyclones, allowing for better assessment and preparedness, demonstrating its value to decision-making processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● WCSSP research improved forecasting tools in LMICs. This has empowered scientists in partner countries and facilitated scientific progress through rigorous research. ● The development of an interactive fire model and a seasonal fire forecast has resulted in practical tools for the benefit of local communities in LMICs.
WCSSP research has facilitated and been built upon by wider programmes, for example, the WCSSP in Brazil and the WCSSP in South Africa.		
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The WCSSP partnership model has facilitated ongoing engagement and could leverage resources to continue work beyond the funded period. ● WCSSP partnerships, such as those in Southeast Asia, have facilitated ongoing communication and collaboration among multiple countries, particularly in sharing information on tropical cyclones, with networks continuing to grow beyond the funded period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Matched funding was beneficial for ownership and co-creation; however, there were risks as some programmes depended on funding from LMICs to support certain activities. ● High visibility outputs from partnerships, such as materials used by top government officials, have attracted new funding and continued collaborative efforts in LMICs. ● WCSSP programme is ongoing and continuing unchanged under the new DSIT International Science Partnership Fund (ISPF) with the aim to continue for as long as funding is available.

Weather and Climate Science for Service Partnership

Impact

The WCSSP has significantly enhanced weather and climate resilience in LMICs by strengthening local scientific capabilities, fostering collaborative partnerships, and influencing policy through globally relevant research.¹¹

Table 13 Weather and climate partnership: Impact achieved

Conceptual Impact	<p>Changing approaches to applied climate science</p> <p>The WCSSP influenced understanding of climate science in LMICs, moving towards the practical application of scientific research and focusing on translating science into services, driving a bottom-up approach more in-sync with local needs.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> In Brazil, a new fire model was designed in partnership with local experts and based on a robust understanding of Brazilian biomes. Successful implementation indicates the importance of working with people who understand local processes.</p>
Instrumental Impact	<p>Strengthening capacity for weather forecasting</p> <p>The WCSSP has enriched the capacity of stakeholders and researchers in LMICs through a funding structure that prioritised skill development and training for early-career researchers and forecasters.</p> <p><i>Examples:</i> In Southeast Asia, strengthening the capacity of forecasters and meteorologists has improved institutional capacity for Impact Based Forecasting. This is evidenced by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration's (PAGASA) ability to disseminate knowledge aligned with government and ODA priorities.</p>
Learning and Development Impact	<p>Platform for knowledge transfer</p> <p>The length of funding within WCSSP has provided a platform for sustained capacity strengthening and knowledge transfer, crucial for long-term learning and development outcomes.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Collaboration with the UK Met Office built institutional capacity of Brazil's recently established National Centre for Monitoring and Early Warning of Natural Disasters (CEMADEN), raising its profile through international partnerships.</p>
Networking and Connectivity Impact	<p>Strengthening collaborations and partnerships</p> <p>The WCSSP leveraged existing partnerships and developed new ones with LMIC-based institutions. Engagement of research users in project design highlights the benefit of involving end-users throughout the project process to enhance impact.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> For the WCSSP China project, the continuity of funding provided by the Newton Fund was crucial for building and cementing collaborations. These research partnerships are now continuing under DSIT's ISPF.</p>

¹¹ This is the impact framework used in UKCDR's 2023 report: [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)

> Darwin Initiative

Funder	Defra
Dates	1993 – ongoing
Funding amount	£50,000 to £5m depending on funding scheme
Duration of grants	Between 1 to 5 years depending on funding scheme
What is funded	Research Projects
Implementation partners	Academic Institutions, NGOs, INGOs
Coordinating partners	Academic Institutions, NGOs, INGOs both in the UK and elsewhere
Beneficiary countries	ODA eligible countries (LDCs, LMICs and UMICs)
Disciplinary focus	Biodiversity and conservation, sustainable development
Unique funding feature	Staged grants to support scalability

The Darwin Initiative is a grants programme aimed at supporting local communities and other stakeholders to support improvement in policy and practice leading to gains for biodiversity and reductions in multidimensional poverty. It is funded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). The initiative targets biodiversity loss by aligning its projects with national policy and international commitments, like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Projects funded under this initiative are innovative, scalable, and designed to build local capacities for achieving transformational change. Since 1993, the Darwin Initiative has awarded over £230m to more than 1,275 projects across 159 countries. The Darwin Initiative has several funding schemes¹², including:

- Innovation grants: 1-2 years, focused on testing new approaches.
- Main grants: 1-5 years, ranging from £100,000 to £800,000, aimed at strong biodiversity conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction.

¹² The specific funding structure of the Darwin Initiative varies annually. The schemes and funding limits stated are applicable for the current round (R31), with the upper limit for main projects recently adjusted. Projects at the £800k level for main grants have not yet been funded. These specifics are subject to change in future rounds and may not apply to previous ones.

Enablers of impact



Focus on avenues for impact promoting evidence-based decision making by creating impactful knowledge products



Embedded capacity strengthening to ensure long-term project legacy



Flexibility to respond to emerging needs crisis response, and partial advance payments for project start-up



Co-production with research users' emphasis on establishing collaborations with local organisations



Transdisciplinary research ensuring diverse forms of knowledge to inform solutions



Focus on LMIC priorities alignment with national policies and relevant international commitments

- Extra grants: £800,000 to £5m, require scaling evidence from previous Biodiversity Challenges Fund projects.
- Capability & Capacity grants: 1-2 years, £50,000 to £200,000, focusing on building local and national capabilities and capacity.

Research activities funded by the Darwin Initiative have helped improve the information base on ecological, socioeconomic, and environmental attributes of local communities in ODA eligible countries, informing conservation decisions. By producing impactful knowledge products, such as baseline data and biodiversity monitoring tools, funded research has enhanced the understanding and management of biodiversity and contributed to the conservation and recovery of species and ecosystems, while benefiting the communities that live alongside them.

Darwin Initiative

“Working through a Darwin Initiative application forces you to think through clearly and carefully what you want to do, how you want to achieve it and with whom you want to achieve it”.

Award holder

“Once you get past that initial challenge of the front door, the projects find it to be a supportive and collaborative atmosphere”.

Funder

“We encourage inclusive project design and in-country partnerships to facilitate knowledge transfer and capacity building”.

Funder

“Darwin Initiative understood the importance of the types of questions we are trying to answer, and then also the context in which we are trying to answer them”.

Award holder

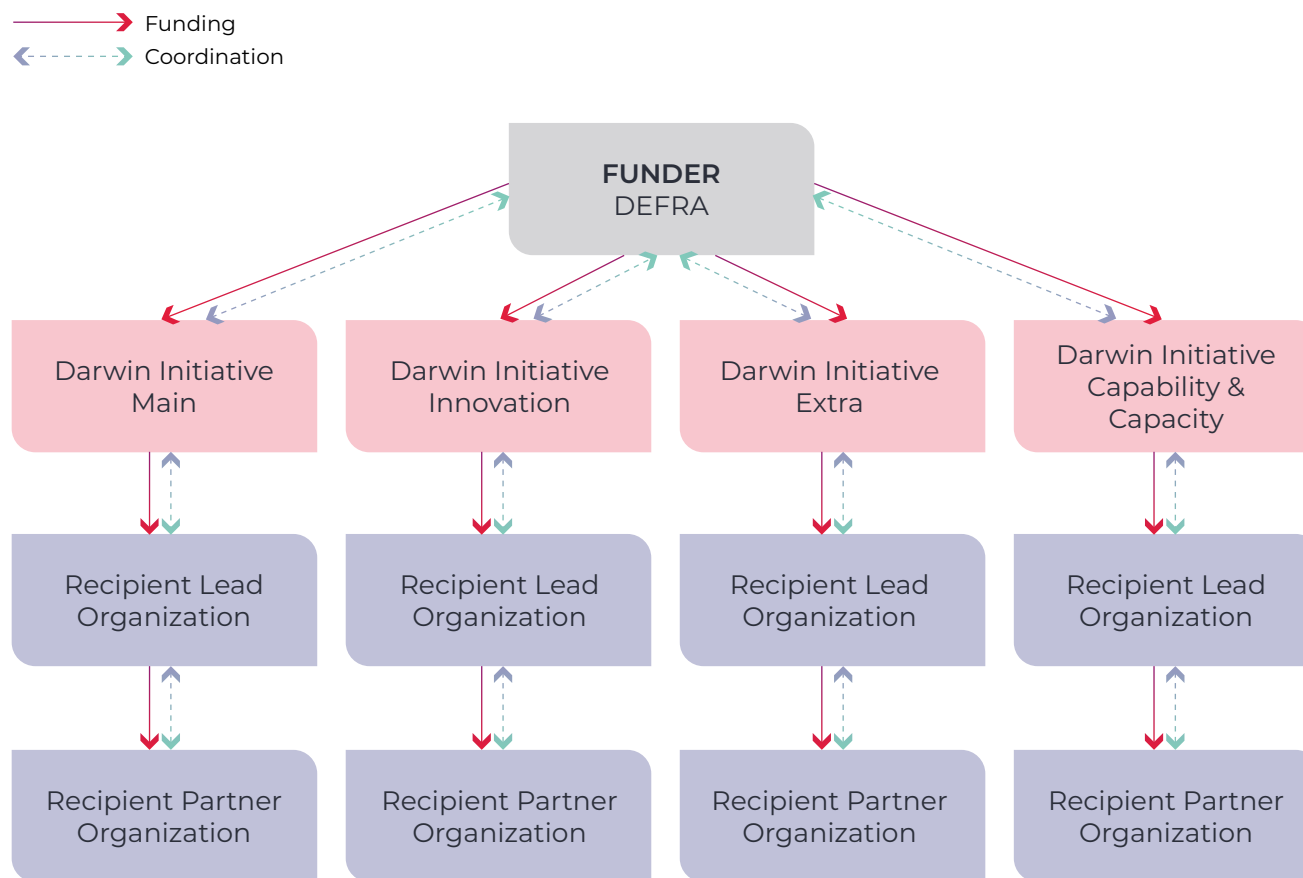


Figure 7 Defra funds the Initiative’s schemes. Funding is allocated to lead organisations that can be based anywhere in the world, including the UK, and these organisations are responsible for distributing funds to partner organisations in each project.

Table 14 Darwin Initiative: Funder and award holders' perspectives

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives		
Funding Mechanism Design		
All partners involved in a project have a governance role.		
	Funder	Award Holder
Strategy and Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Darwin Initiative emphasises transparency with publicly available guidance and scoring criteria, aiming to ensure equal opportunities for all applicants. ● Standardised indicators and robust reporting mechanisms aim to aggregate diverse project results and help measure outcomes and impact across diverse projects. ● Flexibility in project adjustments, like log frames, allows research teams to respond to emerging challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A conceptual clarity in funding design leads to more organised ways of working and better outcomes. ● The Darwin Initiative allows for more flexibility in project implementation, trusting in project teams. ● Rigorous application and evaluation processes ensure the quality of projects funded but can be a barrier for smaller organisations that may not have time and/or resources to meet them.
Proposals must demonstrate an emphasis on biodiversity conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction.		
Approach to Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The various funding schemes available, such as Darwin Initiative Innovation and Darwin Initiative Main, ensures a scalable model for improvement. ● Encouraging matched funding or other funding sources supports scaling up of project activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The encouragement of matched funding, although not strictly required, is a good option if available. ● Flexibility in funding is a strong asset, and is particularly responsive to crises that can arise in partner countries. ● Partial funding provided in advance supports setting up projects in recipient countries.
All projects are required to be led by or partner with local/national organisations of the country(ies) in which it is based, with the meaningful and early engagement of stakeholders. Partnerships aim to strengthen the capacity of local partners.		
Partnering with LMICs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The emphasis on inclusive partnerships supports knowledge transfer between recipient countries and UK partners. ● The explicit encouragement of former project participants who have become leaders in their projects and continue to engage with the Darwin Initiative highlights a long-term commitment to capacity development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The emphasis on establishing collaborations with local organisations strengthens capacities in recipient countries. ● Interdisciplinary approaches to projects provide a wealth of knowledge that can translate into more impactful outcomes.

Funder and Award Holders' Perspectives

Funding Delivery

Funding calls seek applications with fresh ideas and solutions in response to broad challenges and must go through competitive evaluation rounds where proposed projects are assessed based on their potential impact and alignment with the fund's overall goals.

	Funder	Award Holder
Development Impact	The Darwin Initiative funding model encourages innovative project proposals that can lead to significant biodiversity conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction impacts.	The Darwin Initiative has provided an opportunity to join UK and recipient country expertise in biodiversity and conservation efforts, leading to scientifically sound programmes.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus is on establishing long-term project legacy by developing capabilities in partner countries. ● Mid-term project reviews are carried out to ensure ongoing relevance and address challenges. ● Independent evaluations and impact assessments are integral to ensure sustained outcomes, evidence, and legacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Darwin Initiative funding can act as an avenue to secure future funding opportunities from other sources due to its positive reputation and high bar of entry. ● Funding encourages sustained stakeholder engagement and capacity strengthening to ensure long-term success.

Impact

The Darwin Initiative has significantly advanced biodiversity conservation and multidimensional poverty reduction through community-driven projects, influencing policy, enhancing research capacity in recipient countries, and fostering partnerships globally.¹³

Table 15 Darwin Initiative: Impact achieved

<p>Conceptual Impact</p>	<p>Enhancing awareness of biodiversity and conservation issues The thematic focus of the Darwin Initiative has allowed the creation of impactful knowledge products that contribute to identifying biodiversity priorities and enhancing conservation awareness.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> In Kenya, projects have enabled the development of multi-level conservation plans, such as the Tana Delta Indigenous and Community Conservation Area Management plan. This plan incorporates traditional knowledge and engages local communities to redefine management strategies and conservation approaches, leading to greater local and national understanding of conservation priorities.</p>
<p>Instrumental Impact</p>	<p>Supporting evidence-based policy making The Darwin Initiative promotes the use of evidence in decision making. Its outputs have influenced policy and management practices by integrating scientific findings. This includes adapting ToCs to better fit real-world complexities, subsequently guiding more informed policies.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> A Darwin Initiative funded project in the Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo influenced local policy by demonstrating the need to approach fauna relocation policies more cautiously. The team involved advised against scaling up initiatives without sufficient evidence, showing impact on local policy discussions directly linked to their research findings.</p>
<p>Learning and Development Impact</p>	<p>Enhancing research capacity and skills Darwin Initiative funded projects require emphasis in Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) practices. This has led to enhancement in research capacities and skills development among local partners.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Projects have employed postdoctoral researchers and worked with institutions like the World Agroforestry Centre to bring advanced expertise, which has been foundational in developing scientifically sound programmes. This has equipped local researchers with skills that are transferable to future projects.</p>
<p>Networking and Connectivity Impact</p>	<p>Strengthening partnerships Darwin Initiative applications must include local partners based in the project country. This has been instrumental in strengthening partnerships between UK-based institutions and recipient countries.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Projects have successfully connected local and national stakeholders, strengthening biodiversity conservation efforts. For instance, in Raj Ampat, Indonesia, the Ridge-to-Reef project facilitated coordination among governments, NGOs, and local communities, leading to comprehensive conservation strategies that addressed both ridge and reef ecosystems.</p>

¹³ This is the impact framework used in UKCDR's 2023 report, [The landscape of development research impact: An analysis of REF2021 impact case studies](#)