



External Rapid Evaluation of The British Academy Global Challenges Research Fund, Challenge-Led Programmes

By The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC)
13th September 2024

Acknowledgements

From The Social Investment Consultancy

TSIC would like to thank the Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-Investigators (Co-Is) for their time and commitment to this evaluation process. We would like to thank the British Academy Monitoring and Evaluation Team for their support with access to data and their valuable trust and insights during this process.

Acknowledging the context

By The Social Investment Consultancy

It is important to the authors of this report that we acknowledge that social research and evaluation (including funding sources) have been shaped by societal systems and structures that have traditionally upheld inequities, for example colonialism and patriarchy. Often, research and evaluation in the charity and public sectors in the UK are commissioned, delivered, and consumed through a dominant, unconscious narrative that upholds these societal structures of inequities. We made efforts to ensure the process is comfortable, accessible and safe for the people involved. However, we acknowledge that there are limitations in this.

Throughout this report we have on occasion included some of our own reflections, which are clearly highlighted in text boxes where they occur.

Executive Summary

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) was supported by the UK's aid budget, aimed at addressing global challenges through innovative research. The fund specifically focuses on supporting the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aim to improve life and opportunities in developing countries.

The British Academy, a partner in the GCRF, has supported research through its Challenge-Led Programmes. These programmes were designed to tackle significant and complex issues in developing countries by bringing together interdisciplinary research teams. In total, 105 research projects were funded between 2018 and 2021. Projects were usually for 24 months and with a maximum of £300,000.

TSIC were invited to conduct a rapid evaluation of the programmes. Our methodology included a desk review of application forms and project reports, surveys of PIs (n=48) and Co-Is (n=75), and interviews with project stakeholders and the Programme Director for Urban Infrastructures for Well-Being.

TSIC's evaluation has found that:

Research teams value being able to work across disciplines and recognise this contributes to stronger and sustained impact

The interdisciplinary approaches supported by the programme led to the creation of new frameworks, extensive data sets and comprehensive studies that were perceived to enhance methodological rigour and innovation.

Strong evidence of impact at local community level

Strong partner networks in the Global South contribute significantly to the impact of projects, particularly through their engagement with local communities. This engagement led to notable outcomes at the community level. In addition, there have been some examples of impact for practitioners such as teachers and youth workers. Projects that employ a variety of dissemination methods tend to achieve broader reach and more substantial impact as their research findings engage new audiences. Innovative dissemination techniques helped to ensure that the benefits of the research were widely distributed and deeply felt.

Strengthened research partnerships

There are examples of skills development amongst researchers including data analysis, cross cultural communication, and research capacity for NGOs. Around 90% of PIs and Co-Is rate the quality of partnerships as exceptional or good and approximately 70% of partnerships are expected to continue after the funding period ends.

A flexible funder who placed trust in the grant holders

Applicants experienced a smooth and satisfactory application process. Whilst some Co-Is would value more involvement and direct communication with the Academy, and there were some administrative challenges with getting funds to partner organisations, the British Academy was perceived to be a supportive and flexible funder especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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1. Introduction to the Global Challenges Research Fund and the evaluation

2.1. About the fund

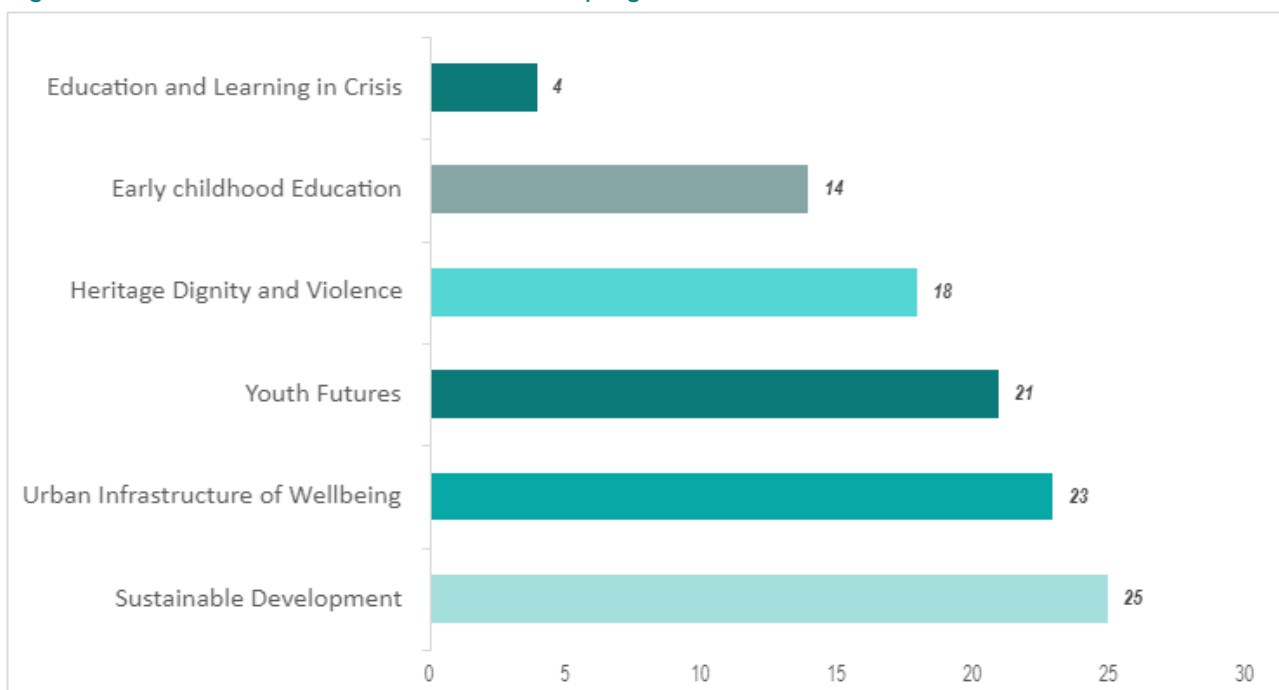
The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) was supported by the UK's aid budget, aimed at addressing global challenges through innovative research. The fund was part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA). The fund specifically focuses on supporting the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aim to improve life and opportunities in developing countries.

The British Academy, a partner in the GCRF, has supported research through its Challenge-Led programmes. These programmes were designed to tackle significant and complex issues in developing countries by bringing together researchers from the UK and beyond.

In total, 105 research projects have been funded. Each project has a UK-based Principal Investigator and a wider research group from partner countries. Projects were usually funded for 24 months and with a maximum of £300,000.

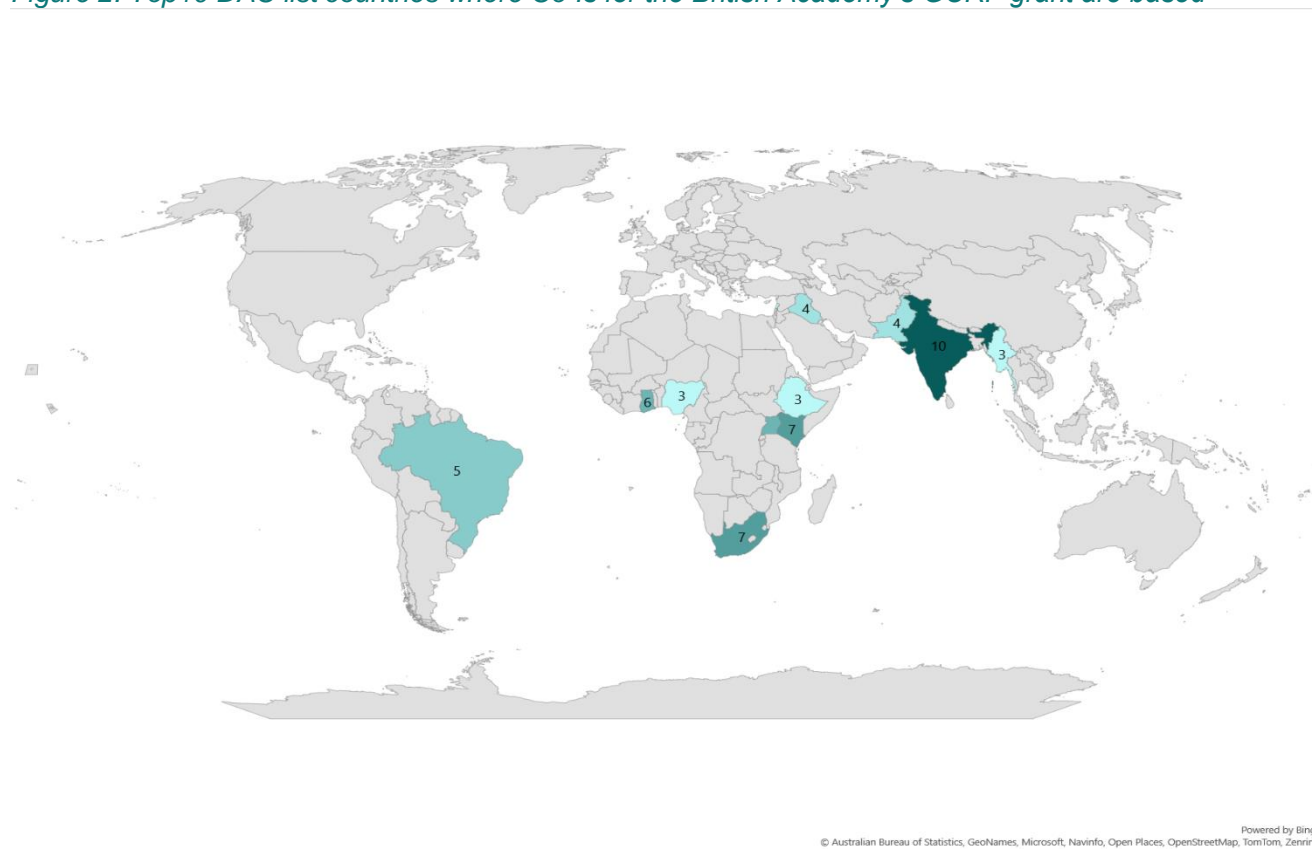
The GCRF Challenge-Led programme represents a portfolio of six programmes as illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Number of awards made under each programme



A requirement of the fund was that Principal Investigators (PIs) needed to be based in the UK. Co-Investigators (Co-Is) could be based globally. Our analysis shows that India will benefit the most from the British Academy's GCRF grant, as it has the highest number of projects amongst the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list countries.

Figure 2: Top10 DAC list countries where Co-Is for the British Academy's GCRF grant are based



2.2. About the evaluation

2.1.1 Objectives of the evaluation

This report evaluates the outcomes of these programmes, how they've contributed to the wider goals of GCRF and what future programmes should consider.

The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC) amalgamated the British Academy's evaluation objectives into 6 evaluation questions (EQs) which were:

- EQ1: To what extent does the programme's research demonstrate excellence and innovation?
- EQ2: What are the strengths and challenges associated with programme design and delivery (including application processes and Academy support)?
- EQ3: In what ways have the programmes implemented interdisciplinary approaches, and to what extent has this approach contributed to generating new knowledge and insights?
- EQ4: To what extent are research findings relevant to policymakers and practitioners? How effectively are these insights communicated and applied to effect change?
- EQ5: To what extent have the programmes facilitated sustainable and equitable partnerships between researchers from the UK and Low- and Middle- Income Countries (LMICs)?

- EQ6: To what extent have the programmes contributed to building capacity for future challenge-led research?

The British Academy also had an interest in further understanding the unique role and contribution of Social Science, Humanities and the Arts for People and the Economy (SHAPE) disciplines. We have included some reflections on this in our conclusion.

2.1.2 Evaluation methodology

Our methodology was designed to address the specific EQs and included:

- Desk review of application forms and project reports.
- Survey of PIs (n=48), with relatively strong representation across all six programmes. The only discrepancies were in the Sustainable Development programme (19% of survey respondents, lower than its share of 28% of all projects), while Early Childhood Education was overrepresented (19% of survey respondents compared to 13% overall).
- Survey of Co-Is (n=75), with strong representation across most programmes except Sustainable Development Programme (made up only 12% of respondents, compared to 28% of all projects), and Urban Infrastructures of Wellbeing (15% of survey respondents compared to 21% overall). Education and Learning in Crises was overrepresented with a share of 13% of survey respondents compared to 4% overall.
 - 44 (60%) of Co-Is who responded to our survey report that they are from a Low- or Middle-income Country (LMIC).
- Interviews with 33 project stakeholders including 17 PIs and 16 Co-Is. This included 15 participants based across the Global South and 18 across Global North. Our sampling was broadly representative of the 6 programmes and Co-Is based in the Global South were prioritised in our sampling framework.
- Interviews with an additional 3 PIs were conducted based on recommendations from the International Team at the British Academy to inform some of the case studies (known as spotlights) in this report.
- Interviews with the Programme Director for the Urban Infrastructures Programme and the Head of International at the British Academy.

Fieldwork was carried out during March, April, May, and June 2024.

We are broadly satisfied with the representativeness of the sample in this evaluation.

- All PIs and Co-Is were invited to complete our surveys.
- The sample of PIs invited to take part in interviews was broadly representative of the scale of individual programmes.
- Co-Is based outside of the UK were prioritised for our sample of Co-I interviews to maximise the opportunities for voices/experiences outside of the UK to be included in the evaluation.
- All projects submitted application forms and project reports so the data analysis from these sources can partially off-set any underrepresentation or positivity bias in our sample.

The diverse range of PIs and Co-Is provides a reasonable cross-section of experiences and insights across the various programmes and disciplines. However, there are a few limitations that we would like to acknowledge:

- We have not been able to directly consult practitioners or policymakers.

- Approximately 7% of the survey outreach emails to PIs and Co-Is bounced back due to change of work (and emails not being in use) since participating in their respective GCRF programme. These stakeholders were no longer available/contactable for the purposes of this evaluation.
- We recognise that there can be biases, both negative and positive, in those who volunteer to take part in evaluation activities.
- Most of our case studies were identified systematically from our sampling and fieldwork and were selected to illustrate broader evaluation points. Three case studies were identified based on recommendations from the Academy and therefore have more of a positivity bias.
- Unsuccessful applicants were not interviewed following a recommendation from the British Academy to avoid consultation fatigue and recognising the fact that unsuccessful applicants may be unmotivated to participate.
- Panel Leads were not interviewed based on a recommendation from the British Academy to avoid consultation fatigue and to maximise the evaluation resource available for fieldwork with grant holders.

2.1.3 *This report*

This report is structured as follows:

- Excellence, innovation and interdisciplinarity (section 3) responds to our evaluation questions around interdisciplinarity and innovation.
- Research impact (section 4) discusses our findings about the impacts of the projects beyond research and academia.
- Partnerships and capacity building (section 5) discusses our findings around equitability, partnership working and building research capacity.
- Lessons learned about programme delivery (section 6) includes learning about the administration and management of the funds.

Our report includes the following:

- Spotlights (sometimes referred to as case studies) which provide illustrative narratives about specific projects, themes and/or programmes. In most cases, spotlights have been viewed by the relevant PIs and Co-Is to ensure accuracy.
- *TSIC reflections are insights from the evaluation team. These reflections often explore ideas, identify gaps in our knowledge or highlight curiosities that have emerged among the team rather than being directly informed by our fieldwork or evaluation methodologies. We have included these insights because we believe they can offer valuable perspectives for any subsequent evaluation activities.*
- Concluding comments at the end of each section summarise what we have learned in relation to the Evaluation Questions.

2. Excellence, innovation and interdisciplinarity

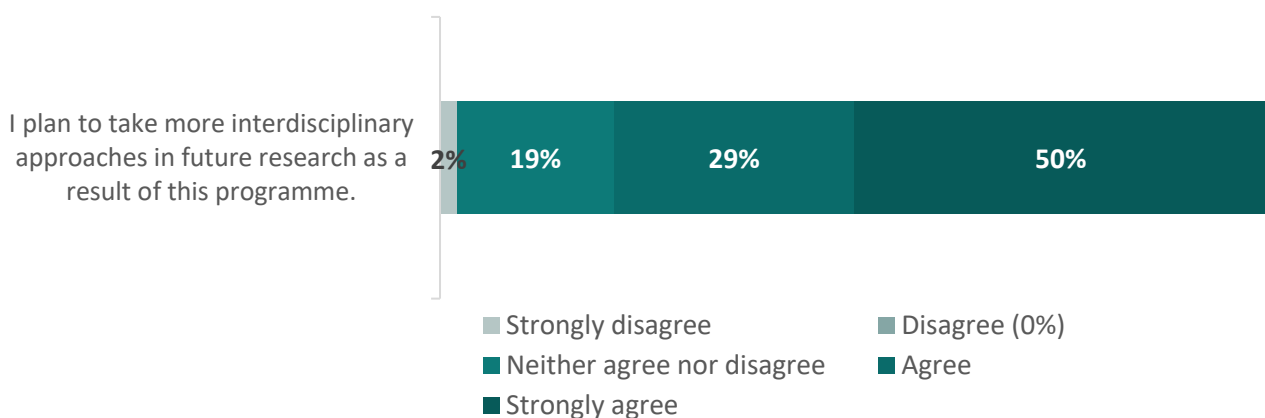
2.3. Key finding: Researchers appreciate the opportunity to collaborate across disciplines

Applicants were asked to provide evidence in their application forms of *“how the project will bring together relevant interdisciplinary expertise in the humanities and social sciences, as well as more broadly if appropriate, to address the problem identified”*. On the whole, the projects funded through the programmes encouraged collaboration between disciplines.

When describing their research approach, 76% of PI survey respondents and 76% of Co-I survey respondents believed their project strongly integrates knowledge and methods from different disciplines.

Some researchers reflect that their disciplines are inherently interdisciplinary – international development for example. In some cases, where a range of disciplines were described, relatively few respondents were able to describe the ways in which the research was truly interdisciplinary rather than multi-disciplinary.¹ We observed that interviewees use the term loosely or interchangeably with multi-disciplinary i.e., interacting with but not necessarily synergising of approaches. While the distinction between interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research could be debated, the general sense of respect for and value of having several disciplines coming together was evident through our consultation with PIs and Co-Is.

Figure 3: PIs are influenced to take more interdisciplinary approaches as a result of this programme (n=48)



Source: TSIC PI survey 2024

The interdisciplinary approaches taken by research teams supported them to deal with complexity:

¹ Interdisciplinarity differs from multi-disciplinary. Interdisciplinary refers to when disciplines work together to produce new knowledge and understanding. Multi-disciplinary draws on knowledge from different disciplines but stays within its own boundaries.

"Let's say you're working with a young child, this child is not living in a vacuum, and there are very many different aspects that impact their lives. So what I learned is that there's a need to take a holistic approach when considering any issues that you're working on." (Co-I, Early Childhood Education).

Several award holders reflect that interdisciplinary projects are easier to initiate when building on pre-existing relationships (rather than starting from scratch). It can take time to build relationships, trust, and shared research interests amongst researchers from different disciplines.

A small number of challenges were mentioned regarding interdisciplinary working. For example, there can be a tension between traditional research and research for development and a difficulty of reconciling different writing styles – for example, urban planners and chemists had to find common groups in their publications which required negotiation. A PI noted, *"I don't think the publishing ecosystem has caught up with interdisciplinarity"* (Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

2.4. Key finding: Some examples of new knowledge and innovation achieved through comprehensive data analysis and interpretation

The interdisciplinary nature of the programmes has contributed to new knowledge and innovation.

- 73% of PIs survey respondents believed that employing interdisciplinary approaches was highly instrumental in generating new knowledge and 23% believe it was somewhat instrumental (93% in total reporting an instrumental impact).
- 67% of Co-I survey respondents believed that employing interdisciplinary approaches was highly instrumental in generating new knowledge and 23% believe it was somewhat instrumental (90% in total reporting an instrumental impact).

Multi-disciplinary interaction allowed for a more nuanced understanding of complex issues, leading to new insights that would not have been possible in single-disciplinary work.

"We had this cross fertilisation of ideas in collecting the data, for example, the fieldwork data. It wasn't just the engineers going off and doing their things. We had to engage with that process as well. So, it allowed us to learn along the line and it made it perhaps easier to negotiate to navigate through the process of articulating the research results" (Co-I, Urban Infrastructures of Wellbeing).

The diverse disciplines led to engaging outputs such as online exhibitions and videos which have enhanced the communication and impact of the research findings. One of the projects in the Heritage, Dignity and Violence programme partnered with an online museum to create a digital exhibition due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic. The museum repurposed the exhibition to develop arts-based resources for schools, which were downloaded over 300 times.

Projects involving multiple regions provided valuable insights by combining social, technical, and humanities perspectives.

Project name: Examining the role of Schooling in the cognitive and wider development of children in the Province of Punjab (Pakistan) and State of Gujarat (India)

Early Childhood Education (ECE), GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: India, Pakistan, and the UK

Research institutions: Durham University, Newcastle University, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA-Centre of Education & Consciousness), and MyCor Human Capital Solutions.

Case study respondents: Professor Nadia Siddiqui, PI

Brief overview of the project

This pioneering study explored the impact of schooling on children's cognitive and social-emotional development in the Punjab province of Pakistan and the Gujarat state of India. By comparing children who were attending school with those who were not, the research provided robust evidence on the importance of school attendance in early years, and more so for children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The impact of attending school was found to be more positive for children's social-emotional well-being than for cognitive learning. The attainment gaps widen with children's age if they drop out from school in the early years.

The project design was a difference-in-difference design, assessing children aged 3 to 8 years, some of whom were enrolled in school, and some were not. A total of 1,123 children were assessed regardless of their school attendance status, on tasks of basic numeracy, literacy, and social-emotional learning using a standardised measure of assessment, implemented at two points in time with a gap of 12 months. The attainment comparisons matched participants based on family socioeconomic status, parental education, access to schools, and regional characteristics. This approach allowed for an in-depth analysis of how much early school education matters for children's learning patterns and overall development. The study collected large-scale narrative data contextualising the meaning and purpose of attending (or not) school in the life of parents and children. The study also presented findings from structured reviews of evidence. These showed that giving families (or schools) financial incentives to increase children's enrolment and attendance is the most promising approach to promote children's right to school education.

Significance of the project: Implementing interdisciplinary approaches

Innovations and improving the evidence base:

Recognising the multifaceted impact of schooling, the research applied an interdisciplinary approach, integrating nuances from education, health (emotional and physical), and social sciences. This allowed for a holistic understanding of how attending formal schools can influence children's cognitive and social-emotional development:

"The research needed an interdisciplinary approach, since the impact lays beyond schools and measuring the effect of attending school or not on children's development. [It] required involving households in urban and rural settings instead of schools. In the context of developing countries selecting children from only among those attending school is a major bias as we cannot apply those findings to a large number who do not attend schools or who dropped out from schools" (PI).

The grant enabled a rare and direct collaboration between academics in India, Pakistan, and England, and this research supported large-scale field work in both South Asian countries. Given the sensitive political dynamics between India and Pakistan and the lack of collaboration between

the two countries, this research was only feasible through the involvement of the British researcher, thereby enabling a successful collaboration:

“As far as is known this is the only in-depth project in which India and Pakistan have directly collaborated in social science. Due to political tensions between the two countries collaboration and innovation in research is usually difficult. So the only way out was to be in a country outside and collaborate with research active groups in the two countries” (PI).

Learnings around the importance of resilience and capacity building

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 lockdown, the project team was hugely successful in gathering data through the capacity building of the local research team members. In both countries, the team recruited data collectors from local villages and towns and provided them with training for the data collection process. They had the cultural knowledge and outreach to households for effective data collection. The training was delivered to teach the local data collectors how to use digital tools to keep children engaged during any virtual sessions and accurately record the data. This study involved 90 trained and highly experienced enumerators leading to a sample of 1,129 children in both countries. Due to COVID, the team ran a pilot phase, collecting baseline information to see how well they could engage parents and their young children remotely where needed (other meetings took place in the open air):

“The research teams truly valued flexibility and adaptability in adopting innovative research methods in implementing data collection. Before the pilot, both countries collected some baseline information and found that it was easy to engage with parents who almost universally had mobile and internet connections as resources. A lot of local community members were trained in applying standardised assessment tests, data entry, and conducting interviews with parents and children. Shifting from paper-based to online testing required a lot of discussion, preparation, and piloting before we started actual fieldwork. It was something new as none of us had any experience of working in a global pandemic where lockdown halted everything. We faced this challenge and developed innovative approaches to applying research methods with very young children, adapting the IDELA test to suit. Our project set an example of conducting research in a hybrid manner, sometimes with young kids remotely using the internet and mobile phone technology” (PI).

Research impact, outreach and policy influence

Based on the findings of the research, the PI got funding for another project for inquiring/studying the associations between children's attainment and household income, and policy for funding schools for disadvantaged children's learning. It also enabled better visibility for the researchers in the field of educational research:

“The study findings were published in the book, Making Schools Better for Disadvantaged Students, which was voted 2023 Educational Research Book of the Year by the British Education Research Association, I was invited by the Education Endowment Foundation to share findings at their annual meeting with teachers to discuss the role of schools in this light of findings from this study. The study findings have been presented in several international conferences and invited talks. All project members in the UK, India and Pakistan published research papers and book chapters from this study. The study contributed immensely to the professional development of early and mid-career researchers, many of whom were promoted as a result” (PI).

Evidence and implications were also shared with practitioners, and at the same time the work done by Save the Children also shaped the project:

“The key stakeholders were practitioners who wanted to study the impact of school education. Save the Children showed interest in the study and guided us in implementing the children’s assessments. They made it very easy to use their resources as they have previously worked in Africa” (PI).

Role of local organisations and stakeholders

The collaboration with local organisations was pivotal in implementing the research methods effectively. Local teams were trained to administer standardised assessment tests and engage with parents, transitioning from paper-based to online testing. For media outreach and public engagement, Ziauddin Yousafzai, Malala’s father, was invited to give a keynote speech on the launch event of the final project report.

2.5. Key finding: The programme has enabled methodological rigour and innovation

Based on PI and Co-I perceptions and experiences, research excellence is defined and perceived through various dimensions including rigour, innovation, impact potential, collaboration, and ethics. Some of the ways in which these have been supported through the programme include:

2.1.4 New frameworks

Research funded by the programme led to new methodological frameworks including:

- The development of innovative tools for measuring FGM/C (Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting) practices allowed for anonymous reporting in low-literacy populations. These tools, initially designed to address the sensitive nature of the subject and the illegal status of FGM/C, enabled individuals to report anonymously, ensuring their responses were handled confidentially. This methodological innovation has generated interest from UN agencies, which are now considering the application of these survey techniques for other sensitive topics in various low and middle-income countries. This was delivered by “The Social Dynamics of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)” funded by the Heritage, Dignity and Violence Programme.
- As part of the “Home Environments Supporting Learning Mastery (HELM)” project (Early Childhood Education Programme), the implementation of LENA technology² across 22 centres marks a significant innovation. It is the first time this technology has been used in any ODA country. Traditionally applied in school and parent-child settings, LENA technology now enables a detailed analysis of both the type of language used by parents and the turn-taking in conversations, offering a comprehensive view of communication patterns. This helps partners measure the effectiveness of interventions more accurately.

2.1.5 Large data sets

² LENA is a small wearable device that provides feedback to adults when talking with children. The associated software processes audio into reports that can be shared with caregivers.

In some case, research funded by the programme was done on a larger scale, which adds to the credibility of the findings. An example is discussed in the spotlight below.

Spotlight 2: A world-first study into the impact of early childhood education on refugee children in the Global South

Project name: Building an Inclusive and Equitable Early Childhood Education for Refugee Children: Framework for Action

Early Childhood Education, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Malaysia

Research institutions: University of Oxford and Universiti Sains Malaysia

Case study respondents: Prof. Iram Siraj, PI, Dr. Kimberley Kong, Co-I

Context

This project investigated the impact of Early Childhood Education (ECE) on the development of refugee children in Malaysia, which has one of the largest urban refugee populations in the world. Refugees in Malaysia experience the unique challenge of being unable to access mainstream education among other state services due to Malaysia's lack of legal recognition of refugee rights. Researchers from the University of Oxford (Professor Iram Siraj) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (Dr. Kimberley Kong) conducted a mixed methods study of over 1000 refugee children, which is one of the largest studies of ECE for refugee children ever conducted. The study involved refugee children assessed one to one, families and teachers who were interviewed to compare the developmental outcomes of refugee children who did and did not access and participate in preschool education. Findings revealed that children with preschool education had markedly better developmental outcomes than those who did not, with the biggest discrepancies in academic skills such as a language, emergent literacy, and numeracy.

Dissemination

The research team utilised a variety of platforms for dissemination, which enabled them to engage a variety of stakeholders, including academics, practitioners, and government leaders. They published several peer reviewed journal articles and blog posts, as well as presenting their findings at multiple international conferences with attendees from approximately 50 countries. They also conducted a systematic literature review of refugee ECE in the Global South, and a full technical report. Both are published on the British Academy's website.

Given the lack of rigorous, largely quantitative, mixed methods research on refugee children outside of high-income countries, the team has been able to develop strong relationships with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Malaysia. This led to the UNHCR nominating the Co-Investigator (Co-I) to work with Penang State Government as part of the Penang Refugee Coordination Group. Although it can be challenging to determine the impact of dissemination efforts, the Principal Investigator (PI) noted the rapidly increasing relevance of this study:

"I've learned as a researcher in the last 40 years that a great idea takes about 10 years to mature. Now you know, given when we started, there were 72 million people who were displaced that year [2020]. Last year, it was 132 million who were displaced and became refugees. This is a growing world phenomenon" (PI)

The need for more ECE studies of refugee children was further demonstrated by the UNHCR's request to the Co-I to apply for further funding from the British Academy to conduct a follow-up longitudinal study.

Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge to the data collection phase of the study. The PI was unable to travel to the field due to travel restrictions and had to deliver trainings virtually. As a result, the team was granted a no-cost extension from the British Academy, providing them with an additional 18 months to complete the research. Although children were assessed in person, the team was able to adapt some of their data collection methods to an online format, which enabled them to maintain the momentum in their study.

“British Academy was brilliant in handling the situation during COVID. I loved their flexibility in allowing us to interview teachers virtually about their observations of the children as we were unable to go into classrooms to observe quality. The teachers’ independent views matched our statistical data that the children who had pre-school education were more school ready.” (PI)

Capacity building

The study has been able to have an immediate impact through the connections the research team built with their local research assistants and translators: *“We trained refugee young people who spoke good English and the language of the community, and they went on to do language and research jobs”* (PI). The team was also able to advance gender equity through hiring women, which created income opportunities that are often limited due to patriarchal structures in Malaysia.

Despite being unable to travel to each other’s respective countries during the research process, the PI and Co-I both felt that they were able to maintain a regular collaborative and equitable partnership. The Co-I also shared that they plan to collaborate in future research but now with the project roles reversed:

“The PI has been really responsive. Whenever I had questions or hit a wall, she was always there. And her research fellow was also very helpful. [...] And now in the second round [of research] that I am applying to, the PI encouraged me to be the PI but she is coming on board as a Co-researcher, and she wants it to be on a pro-bono basis” (Co-I).

2.1.6 Creative methods

Several research projects demonstrated a strong commitment to creative methodologies to enhance data collection, visualisation, and community engagement. Examples include:

- Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping to visualise and share findings, providing a clear, interactive representation of data that could be easily understood by stakeholders, including policymakers and local communities.
- Crowdsourcing techniques to gather a wide array of data, leveraging the collective input of community members and ensuring a more comprehensive and participatory approach.
- Creative methods such as interactive body mapping allowed research participants to express their experiences and perceptions in a tangible and impactful way.
- Storytelling was used in multiple projects to capture and convey the lived experiences of individuals, transforming research findings into compelling narratives and sometimes visual art that resonated with both local and global audiences.

Project name: Resisting violence, creating dignity: negotiating Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) through community history-making in Rio de Janeiro

Heritage, Dignity and Violence, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Research institutions: King's College London, Queen Mary University of London, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and Redes da Maré

Case study respondents: Prof. Cathy McIlwaine, PI, Prof. Paul Heritage, Co-I³

This project combined social sciences with applied arts to understand how women resist Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the favelas of Maré in Rio de Janeiro Brazil, which has one of the highest femicide rates in the world.⁴ Whilst most research on gender-based violence focuses on victims, this project sought to shift the focus towards survival and dignity through community resistance. The research team built on their work from a previous project by focusing on qualitative data through conducting interviews and focus groups as well as hosting creative workshops involving body-territory mapping and digital storytelling. The project's findings were brought together in three research reports, including policy recommendations that outlined actions to reduce gender-based violence.

Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinary research methods were crucial to understanding the themes of this project:

*"We had to be able to understand the human experience in a very rounded way, and you're only going to do that through interdisciplinary work. **You're not going to quantify dignity. You're not going to count survival**" (Co-I). Since the research team had previously worked together on an earlier project, their trust facilitated meaningful interdisciplinary collaboration. Yet this did not exempt them from the common challenges that come with working across disciplines: **"It seems very easy to say 'let's all be interdisciplinary' but it's often very difficult.** We speak different languages, we publish in different journals, and we have different publishing regimes and research protocols" (PI).*

Dissemination

The project not only incorporated interdisciplinary approaches into its research, but also deployed a variety of media for dissemination. The research team adapted to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic by partnering with Museu da Pessoa (Museum of the Person) to conduct digital storytelling and to deliver an online exhibition that included interviews with ten female community artists from Maré. In addition, the museum repurposed the Feminine Lives exhibition to develop arts-based resources for schools, which were downloaded over 300 times. The research team also received funding to collaborate with the Latin America Bureau in the UK to publish a book as well as a three-part podcast series, both of which are titled 'Women Resisting Violence', as well as publish a book with Manchester University Press (Gendered Urban Violence among Brazilians).

³ Co-Is Miriam Krenzinger (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro) and Eliana Sousa e Silva (Redes da Maré) were not interviewed for this case study.

⁴ People's Palace Projects, QMUL: 'Resisting Violence, Creating Dignity'.

<https://peoplespalaceprojects.org.uk/en/projects/resisting-violence-creating-dignity/>

The researchers were intentional in reaching a variety of stakeholders to maximise the uptake and impact of their findings:

*“The research affected civil society organisations that have good links to the municipal, state, and federal authorities. But that's not how change happens. It's about identifying key organisations who have dialogue with policymakers in which this research will enable them to make arguments to policymakers at city, state, and federal levels. **I think we need to move away from focusing on getting the research in front of a minister or get them to come to the event**” (Co-I).*

The research team's partnership with Redes da Maré strengthened this NGO's work in combatting gender-based violence through deepening their understanding of community-based resistance, which led them to adapt their services accordingly. As a result, Redes da Maré presented the research findings to the Municipal Council of Policies for Women and delivered training on gender-based violence in favela communities.

2.1.7 Comparative studies or working in multiple sites

By examining similar issues across different contexts, many studies allowed for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of complex societal issues. Comparative approaches can support understanding of cultural and social dynamics that might have been overlooked in a single-country study. A Co-I shared: *“I love the fact that it allowed us to work across different regions. So it was South Sudan, Uganda, and Tanzania because that's also rare. You usually just focus on one area, one region, one study site. And the insights from that, I think, have been super, super useful”* (Co-I Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

Other examples include:

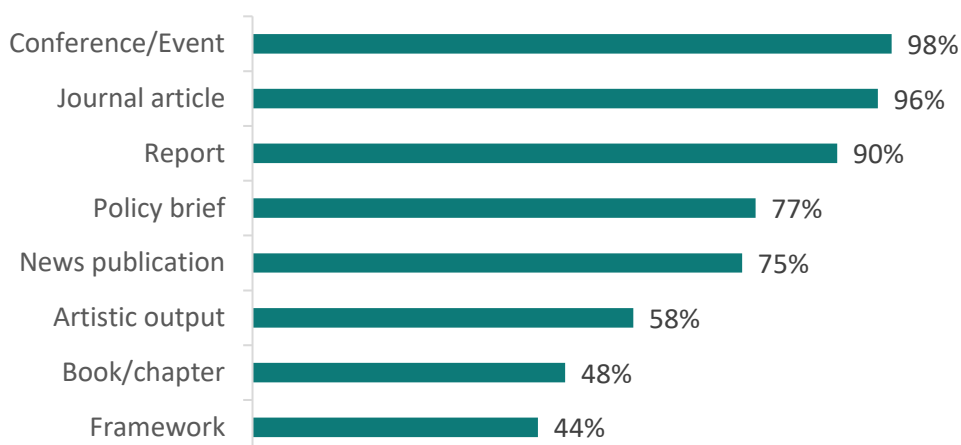
- The "Shaping Futures: Youth Livelihood Options in Conflict-Affected Areas" project (Youth Futures) involved local communities at all stages and compared the outcomes across different conflict-affected regions. This comparative approach helped to identify unique challenges and successful strategies in various contexts, contributing to a broader understanding of youth livelihood options in conflict zones.
- The “HELM” research project (Early Childhood Education) involved research teams from both Latin America as well as the UK. There was an emphasis on sharing learnings between the contexts since most of the research was being conducted in Global North countries (such as Europe and North America). However, the research was adapted to fit the context of Latin America, especially Chile and Cuba.

2.6. Key finding: Production of a diverse range of research outputs

The programme generated a wide variety of research outputs. This reflects the projects' commitment to both disseminating knowledge to new audiences and contributing to academic discourse.

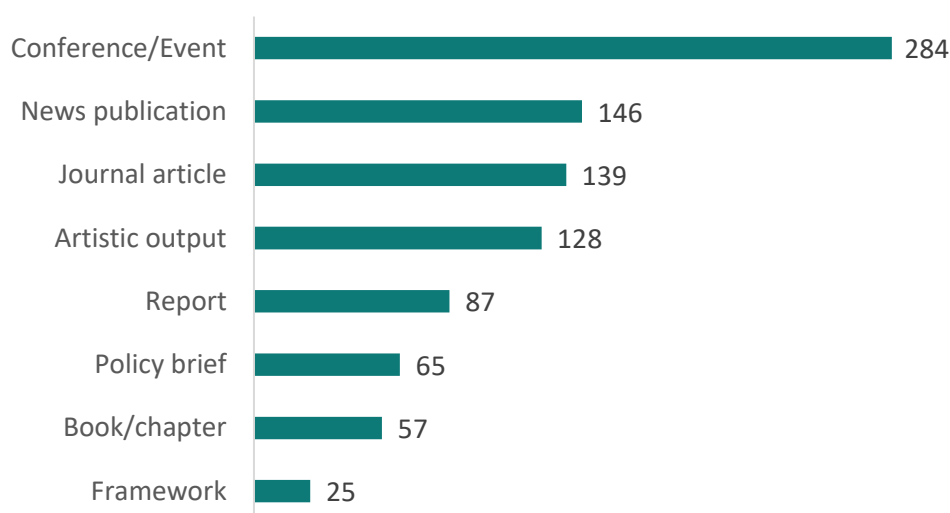
The most common outputs include conferences and events with 284 reported in our survey.

Figure 4: Over 90% of projects disseminated their findings via conferences, journal articles, and reports (n=48)



Source: TSIC PI survey 2024

Figure 5: Conferences and events were the most frequently utilised mode of dissemination among PIs (n=48)



Source: TSIC PI survey 2024

The programme has demonstrated significant academic impact through the production of journal articles which are traditionally seen as indicators of research credibility and excellence. Based on data provided by the British Academy, an estimated 160 journal articles were published across four programmes, averaging 2.6 articles per funded project (see [appendix 2](#) for more analysis). This estimation aligns with survey data which indicates an average of approximately 2.9 articles per funded project. Given that we do not have data available for programmes of this scale, nature, and timing, it is difficult to benchmark this output precisely and difficult to make a judgment about whether an average of c.2.6-2.9 journal articles per funded project constitutes a strong performance. However, given that around 96% of funded projects have developed at least one journal article, we can surmise that there has been broad success with academic publications from the funded research.

We also note that over three-quarters (77%) of projects produced at least one policy brief, indicating their commitment to making findings accessible to policymakers (discussed in more detail in [3.4](#) of this report).

2.7. Concluding comments about excellence, innovation and interdisciplinarity

This section responds to our evaluation questions around excellence, innovation and interdisciplinarity. Our conclusions can be found below:

EQ1: To what extent does the programme's research demonstrate excellence and innovation?

The programme demonstrates high research excellence and innovation through methodological innovation (new tools and methods, large-scale data collection) and practical impact (influence on practice and community capacity building).

EQ3: In what ways has the programme implemented interdisciplinary approaches, and to what extent has this approach contributed to generating new knowledge and insights?

The programme has funded projects on a spectrum of interdisciplinarity (including cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research). Research teams value the bridging of disciplines and recognise that value is added from having multiple skills and perspectives.

TSIC reflection: *Traditionally, research quality has been measured by a number of indicators such as publications in peer-reviewed journals, journal impact factors, and citation rates. Our evaluation team was curious to note that respondents for this GCRF evaluation did not place great emphasis on such metrics and instead, described quality and excellence in terms of the extent to which research was novel, inclusive and creative.*

3. Research impact

2.8. Key finding: Strong partner networks contribute to impact

Projects found that building on established networks and collaborations play a role in impactful outcomes. The success of projects was bolstered by the involvement of local partners who had networks and contacts. Such partnerships contributed significantly to reach, relevance and impact. For example:

- In the "Towards Early Childhood Education by 2030 for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon" (Early Childhood Education) project, partners engaged with local authorities to coordinate educational policy approaches, demonstrating the importance of diplomatic networks in achieving policy impact.
- "Wellbeing: Indigenous Wells, Pastoralist Biocultural Heritage and Sustainable Livelihoods in Northern Kenya" (Sustainable Development) leveraged strong partnerships with local heritage and pastoral organisations which allowed access to remote areas and engaging with local communities.

The impact of such partnerships was noted by the researchers:

"We could do a workshop with 27 diplomats from around the region because of our partners" (PI, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

"The diverse team took the research findings back to their own circles, extending the impact" (Co-I, Education and Learning in Crisis).

2.9. Key finding: Community engagement and empowerment is both a process and an impact

Engaging local communities and adopting participatory approaches appear to have been successful and is likely to contribute to sustained impacts:

- "Medellin Water Management Project" (Urban Infrastructures for Wellbeing) engaged communities through a collaborative, inclusive approach including neighbourhood committees and city authorities. There was a focus on including communities in marginalised and informal settlements. Community members participated in interviews, workshops, and meetings to share their feedback. This engagement led to the development of a scalable prototype for rainwater collection. The approach empowered residents to take ownership of the solutions.
- The "HELM: Home Environments Supporting Learning Mastery" project (Early Childhood Education) promoted home-based educational practices among parents and caregivers, showing the benefits of these approaches for early childhood education. The project team understands that some parents and caregivers were intending to continue the home-based educational practices introduced by the research.
- "Shaping Futures: Youth Livelihood Options in Conflict-Affected Areas" (Youth Futures) involved local communities at all stages. The livelihood options were culturally appropriate.
- The "Heritage Sensitive Intellectual Property and Marketing Strategies (HIPAMS) project" (Sustainable Development Programme 2018) enriched the capacity of local artists from

marginalised communities to get recognition for their work: “So, our work which we call the Art for Life where we revived artists' livelihood, you know, that transformed the villages to cultural destinations and these communities were mostly very marginalized groups. You know, they are the subaltern groups. So, they found recognition and their identity was strengthened” (Co-I, Heritage Sensitive Intellectual Property and Marketing Strategies).

Spotlight 4: Research with young people for young people

Project name: Peak youth, climate change, and the role of young people in seizing their future

Youth Futures, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Uganda

Research institutions: University of Cambridge, Restless Development, Makerere University

Case study respondents: Dr. Anna Barford, PI

This project explored the lives and livelihood strategies of young people in Uganda, demographically the third youngest country⁵, examining the effects of climate change on young people's daily experiences and economic activities. Additionally, it also identified youth-led solutions to the challenges encountered. This project was led by Principal Investigator (PI) Dr. Anna Barford, from the University of Cambridge, in partnership with Co-Is at the youth NGO Restless Development and Makerere University.⁶

The research funded through the GCRF grant engaged young researchers to explore the impacts of climate change and responses to this. Engaging young people at the many stages of the research process allowed young researchers to shape the research, thus attuning the research to young people's experiences and perspectives, while also developing their skills and expertise.

Collaboration with the Young People

The research process began with **a series of discussions with young Africans working on climate change**. This was quickly followed by the recruitment of young researchers in Uganda. Recruitment was based on applicants' potential and sought to include young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, some of whom shared demographic characteristics with the intended research participants. Young researchers were intensively **trained in conducting social research**, using the youth-led research approach of the NGO Restless Development.

The young researchers played a key role in **reviewing and revising the data collection tools**, editing them to make the questions more comprehensible. They used a survey, interviews and discussion groups to **collect data, and conducted the first level of data analysis**. The PI expressed that:

“We engaged young researchers as much as possible throughout the research process. This included reviewing and editing the research tools, to make the questions more relevant and comprehensible to research participants. Young researchers were central to going out and doing the data collection as well. The first round of analysis was done by the young researchers, so they picked out key themes that were coming up and made sense of these

⁵ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/969961589175110707/pdf/Youth-Employment-Policy-Note.pdf>

⁶ This project was in partnership with Co-Investigators (Co-Is) Rachel Proefke at the youth NGO Restless Development and Dr Anthony Mugeere at Makerere University

by drawing upon both their experiences of data collection and of growing up in the research areas.”

Following this, young researchers were **engaged in disseminating the research findings**, alongside others from the research team. This involved giving presentations, including at dissemination events in the study areas and at national and international events. One young researcher had the opportunity to speak at the RewirEd Summit, an international education conference held in Dubai, where she shared key findings from this project. As the PI explained:

*“For this project, we prioritised the engagement of young people so it's not just research about young people, but it's **research with young people for young people**... So, that was the ethos of the project - to make space for young people to play an active role throughout that process.”*

The project enabled the young people to be at the forefront of research, this developed their research skills while also generating jobs and offering work experience in a country where youth underemployment is very high.

While the research involved young people, the collaboration between professional researchers and institutions was central to the project's conception, design, rollout and outputs. This multi-partner set up allowed the team to benefit from the variety of skillsets and diverse life experiences that each team member brought with them:

“It's important to focus on building understanding and appreciation between different people with different backgrounds, life experiences, and skillsets. And when you bring together such a team, you bring together all these skills to make something that's more powerful and exciting. Working together as a team – communicating regularly, complementing one another, collaborating and of course laughing together – were the ingredients that made this project work so well. And I'd say that is true for working with young people, but also for working between colleagues in a Ugandan University, a British University, and an international NGO (PI).”

Conclusion

The project focused on embedding young people within research across most stages. However, it was challenging to make the time needed to engage young researchers at the project design stage due to the looming funding application deadline and the lack of funding at that stage to pay them for their work. The PI expressed that:

“The one stage that we didn't manage to engage young people as fully as we might have done was the initial stage of designing the project before applying for funding, largely because of the tight turnaround. However, we had conducted a workshop with young people just before that, where the issue about young people and jobs and climate change had come up. So even though we hadn't directly consulted on this theme, we had held an international workshop where we'd brought in young people and professionals working on youth employment which laid solid foundations for the work that was to follow.”

The role of the British Academy was critical in enabling this partnership. As reflected by the PI, a clear specification in the call for funding that youth engagement and international collaboration should be prioritised ensured that this was the front of this research. Further, a thorough youth engagement approach requires time and money to be appropriately allocated to achieve the multifaceted benefits this can bring.

2.10. Key finding: The programme has influenced practitioners

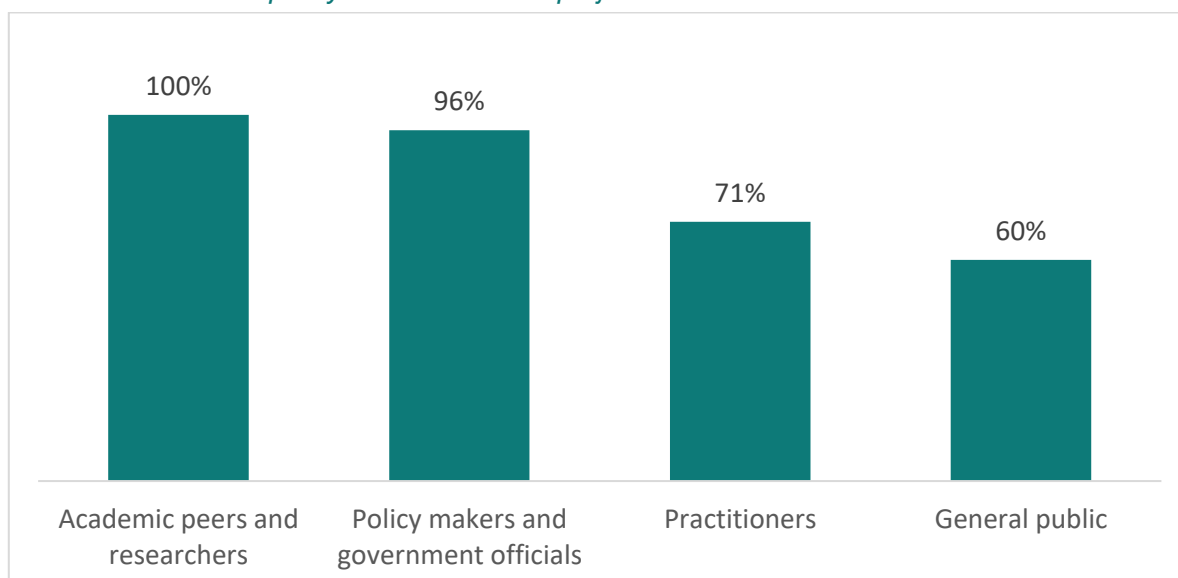
There are some examples of the projects intentionally supporting practice. Often this was built into the design of the project and its outputs. For example:

- As a result of the “Art Heritage Resilience and Humanitarianism in South Sudan” project (Sustainable Development), Plan International is using storytelling to create more culturally resonant and effective humanitarian programmes for gender-based violence (GBV). The research project documents South Sudan’s cultural heritage including dance, visual arts, and storytelling. The storytelling approach has been part of their response to gender-based violence in South Sudan and potentially beyond.
- In the “Development and Education in the Vernacular for Early Learners” (Early Childhood Education) project, partners trained teachers on effective educational strategies, improving their ability to navigate the educational landscape effectively.
- “Upskilling for Future Generations (GEN-UP): How Youth Employment Programmes Can Transform Futures (Youth Futures)” – the project provided training and capacity building initiatives for youth workers and other professionals. This equipped practitioners with new skills and methodologies. Outputs from the research included training materials to assist youth workers in implementing new methodologies.
- “Research-led Peace Education as Crisis Prevention in Afghanistan” (Education and Learning in Crisis) provided valuable insights and methods that influenced teachers and other educational professionals. Training and workshops were delivered to support peace education.
- “Conceptualizing, Defining and Measuring Sexual Violence in Conflict” (Sustainable Development Programme) – the project developed new frameworks for addressing sexual violence in conflict zones. Training sessions supported practitioners with the tools needed to complement this new framework.

2.11. Key finding: Challenge to identify direct policy impact

Our fieldwork suggests that research teams typically cite the production of policy briefs as a key output. In fact, 96% of projects cite policymakers and government officials as an intended audience.

Figure 6: Academics and policymakers are most projects' intended audience



Source: TSIC PI survey 2004

Analysis from the survey found that 77% of PIs created policy briefs (see 2.6)

However, when asked to provide detail on how the policy briefs were used or the influence they had, we have limited evidence. Barriers to achieving and evidencing policy impact included:

- Many projects experienced limitations due to resource constraints, including funding, logistical challenges, and infrastructure weaknesses. For example, travel and accommodation expenses fluctuated due to the volatile context in South Sudan, impacting project budgets and timeline. Projects in regions with limited technological and infrastructural development faced significant hurdles. Poor internet connectivity, lack of secure transportation, and inadequate facilities hindered smooth execution and data collection.
- Operating in regions with high levels of corruption and/or political instability limited the policy impact potential of some projects. Researchers working in Uganda and South Sudan, for example, faced difficulty navigating government-linked cartels. These conditions hindered direct policy impacts.
- The COVID-19 pandemic also posed challenges when engaging policymakers. There was an increased focus on addressing the immediate issues caused by COVID-19 in many regional contexts. This also made it difficult to engage with the policymakers for discussing or raising awareness issues that did not directly relate to the pandemic.

TSIC reflection: Establishing a direct causal link between specific projects and policy changes is challenging. Multiple research projects, stakeholders and external events can influence policy environments, complicating the attribution of changes to any one research project. Research funders and research teams often place a high value on achieving and demonstrating policy impact. However, proving policy impact can be time-consuming and complex, potentially distracting from other valuable types of impact such as those on practitioners, communities, and neighbourhoods. The impact of research on policy is nonlinear and takes many year (in some cases, over 10 years). Impacts on neighbourhoods, communities and practice can be observed in the shorter term.

Project name: In Defence of Maya Land, Lives, and Dignity: Co-Creating Pathways out of Structural and Slow Violence via Community Mobilising, Mapping, and Art

Heritage, Dignity and Violence, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Belize

Research institutions: University of Liverpool, University of the West Indies, University of Belize, Maya Leaders Alliance, and Julian Cho Society

Case study respondents: Dr. Levi Gahman, PI

Context

This project worked closely with Indigenous Maya communities in southern Belize to document the different forms of violence inflicted upon Maya communities whilst also understanding dignity through amplifying Indigenous voices and facilitating the Maya communities' efforts for self-determination. One of the central concepts to this project is Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which is a key principle in international human rights standards that supports Indigenous peoples' right to autonomy over the decision-making process pertaining to ancestral land and resources. In 2015, the Caribbean Court of Justice ruled in favour of Maya land rights, providing a legal mandate for the government of Belize to act in accordance with the FPIC of the Maya People. The work of this project builds upon this ruling through using qualitative methods to document violations of FPIC being committed by corporate and state entities.

Equitable partnerships

Given the project's focus on Indigenous communities, the research team intentionally centred equitable partnerships in every stage of the project:

*"For our project, the team prioritised co-production, creative methods, and research led by Indigenous people. A key aim was to respect local customs and Indigenous ways of knowing by collaborating directly with village leaders, elders, and activists. This meant that **Indigenous perspectives shaped the project from start to finish.**" (PI)*

The Co-investigators were Indigenous members of the Maya communities, and the team utilised a variety of participatory methods such as photovoice (a participatory research method that uses photography and storytelling to express participants' experiences), walking interviews, and focus groups throughout the data collection and analysis processes. The project also incorporated creative methods such as arts-based envisioning exercises that sought to uphold dignity through understanding the dreams and desires of Maya farmers, activists, young people, and women. The team also sought to advance gender equity by prioritising outreach with Maya women and holding a series of community-based reflection and discussion sessions, with the aim of increasing the participation of Maya women in local governance.

Despite the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the team saw this as an opportunity to centre community-based and grassroots-led approaches to research:

*"The pandemic revealed just how significant it is to put research in the service of social movements. In fact, **had the team not built trust and been working alongside an established grassroots movement and seasoned activists, the project would have suffered tremendous setbacks.** That we were collaborating with movement leaders not only saved the project but became a force multiplier for impact during the pandemic." (PI)*

The team trained participants such as Indigenous youth so that they could conduct their own photovoice projects in the future. The young people gained technical skills in participatory research

and creative methods, which fostered both unity and self-efficacy amongst participants. This enabled a reciprocal relationship between the research team and participants.

Dissemination and stakeholder engagement

The team engaged with a wide range of stakeholders by producing both academic and non-academic outputs with the intention of documenting FPIC violations and slow violence, amplifying community aspirations, and advancing the Maya communities' efforts for self-determination:

*"I don't want the project to take sole credit for doing that because the communities were already invested and engaging in these things. **We wanted the research to be relevant to Indigenous participants and were thinking about how it could have an impact beyond academic writing that would advance self-determination.** We also aimed to document and amplify the 'joys, pains, and dreams' of the communities, which is a research idea and agenda that is owned by our Indigenous collaborators."* (PI)

In addition to publishing journal articles, the team has produced a forthcoming book that will be open access and published alongside a companion site featuring photovoice images and narratives as well as other digital content created during the project.

Members of the research team have gone on to engage with policymakers in various ways: one of the co-investigators was invited to COP27, and a collaborator was appointed advisor to UN General Secretary on United Nations voluntary fund for Indigenous Peoples. The Maya Leaders Alliance have used the research on FPIC violations in their negotiations with the Government of Belize and the Caribbean Court of Justice and have also submitted a report on Indigenous peoples' rights to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The project team also supported policy impact on a local level by providing a platform for women's desires to be heard in relation to revising customary bylaws under the Maya communities' governance system so that women have better access to communal land.

Future collaboration

When asked whether there are plans for future collaboration with the research team, the PI shared, "Am I continuing to work with the co-investigators? I will be forever! [...] It's been a wonderful and beautiful experience with all the co-investigators." The team has secured additional grants from other funders and seek to continue working together in the long term.

2.12. Key finding: A range of dissemination strategies leads to broader impact

Projects shared their results through exhibitions, workshops and policy briefs and are thought to have reached more diverse audiences than traditional journal and academic outputs. The use of social media and digital platforms also widened the visibility.

A range of outputs (beyond traditional publications) can contribute to policy influence, community engagement, international reach, and educational impacts.

Spotlight 6: How exhibitions and digital storytelling can reach new audiences

Project name: Well Being: Indigenous wells, pastoralist biocultural heritage and community archaeology for sustainable development in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia

Sustainable Development Programme, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia

Lead research institution: British Institute in Eastern Africa

Case study informed by: Final reports submitted by Freda Nkire, PI

The project "Wellbeing: Indigenous Wells, Pastoralist Biocultural Heritage and Sustainable Livelihoods in Northern Kenya" aimed to empower pastoralist communities by documenting and preserving their biocultural heritage. This initiative, part of the Sustainable Development Programme, used community archaeology to share the historical and cultural significance of indigenous wells in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. The dissemination of research findings through exhibitions and digital storytelling played a significant role in raising awareness and influencing policy. This included:

- **National Museum in Nairobi:** Opening with significant public interest, it ran for six months, far longer than initially planned due to its popularity. The exhibition attracted over 107,000 visitors in the first three-and-a-half months, including policymakers, community leaders, and the general public. Interactive displays featured GIS maps, archaeological artifacts, and visual data collected during the project, helping visitors understand the distribution and significance of wells in pastoralist landscapes.
- **Kalacha Cultural Festival, Marsabit:** A mobile version of the exhibition was showcased at the Kalacha Cultural Festival in Marsabit, Kenya. This event, attended by around 300 people, including school children and local community members, further extended the reach of the project's findings. The festival provided a platform to engage directly with audiences.
- **Borana University, Ethiopia:** The exhibition was also displayed at Borana University in Ethiopia, drawing considerable attention and a sense of pride and ownership among local students and faculty. This display helped to integrate the research findings into academic and local community contexts, promoting further discussion and engagement.
- **Digital storytelling:** In addition to physical exhibitions, the project used digital storytelling through platforms like BBC Storyworks. This approach helped reach a global audience, highlighting the community's plight regarding water scarcity and heritage preservation. The digital component extended the project's impact, engaging international viewers.

This shows how different outputs can contribute to policy influence, community engagement, international reach and educational impacts.

2.13. Concluding comments about research impact

EQ4: To what extent are research findings relevant to policymakers and practitioners? How effectively are these insights communicated and applied to affect change?

The relevance of funded research to policymakers varies significantly across contexts. In some regions, policymakers were less receptive to integrating research findings into policy often due to competing interests, lack of funds, or political instability.

Research findings were relevant to practitioners providing insights and methods that could be directly applied to improve professional practices.

Where communities have been meaningfully engaged in research processes, there is thought to be greater impact albeit at local, community levels where there has been upskilling and improved access to services and resources.

TSIC Reflection: *Our insights on impact do not include the experiences of practitioners, policymakers and community members. They are self-reported by PIs and Co-Is. This reflects a limitation of our methodology.*

4. Partnerships and building capacity for future research

2.14. Key finding: Skills developed within and beyond research teams

Skills development was significant for both academics, researchers, students, and people not in academia, including communities.

Examples of people gaining skills beyond academia include:

- Young people (e.g., peer researchers⁷) receiving training, mentoring and research skills
- NGOs and arts organisations learning more about research
- For one of the projects under the Education and Learning in Crises programmes,⁸ the researchers were able to use the innovative Language Environment Analysis (LENA) system for the first time.

Examples of academic capacity being built include:

- New course development (e.g. an agriculture university in India reached out to a team from the Urban Infrastructures of Well-being programme for support with setting up a new Masters programme in urban agriculture, as a result of their research)
- Academics being promoted and crediting the programme with being a highly influential reason

Eighty-five (85%) of PIs and 79% of Co-Is report that they have developed new skills or developed existing skills as a result of the programme. Skills development flowed in all directions. For example, senior members of the team learning from more junior members of the team and vice versa. Moreover, researchers from both the Global North and Global South report learning from one another.

"Our project involved researchers with differing levels of research experience. Junior researchers benefitted most from exposure, discussions, and joint contributions to writings with experienced researchers" (Co-I survey respondent).

Some Co-Is noted that having specific budget for capacity building activities would be useful for future programmes. Follow-up funding and direct funding for Co-Is were named as ideas to improve capacity and build on the capacity developed through this programme. Some report that while skills have been developed and capacity has been built, this is not useful unless there are funding opportunities to maintain momentum, continue research and put the skills into practice.

There was feedback that capacity building was perceived to be "patronising and unwelcome" by at least one experienced research partner in the Global South. This perhaps points to an implicit interpretation that capacity building is for Southern partners' benefit.

⁷ A peer researcher is person with lived experience of the issue being researched involved in conducting (and sometimes designing) the research

⁸ Project name: HELM: Home Environments supporting Learning Mathematics: Understanding the impact of the home environment on early mathematical development in a global context

Spotlight 7: Empowering researchers: Capacity building in maths education

Project name: HELM: Home Environments supporting Learning Mathematics: Understanding the impact of the home environment on early mathematical development in a global context

Early Childhood Education, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Cuba and Mexico

Research institutions: Ulster University, University of Chihuahua, Cuban Neurosciences Centre, Carleton University, Purdue University, University College Dublin, Barnardos, Ministry of Education- Chilean government, Regional Center for Child Development and Early Stimulation Mexico, Central Institute for Educational Research of the Ministry of Education Cuba

Case study respondents: Prof. Victoria Simms, PI

Prof. Simms, a professor at the School of Psychology at the Ulster University in Northern Ireland was the Principal Investigator (PI), leading the project focused on understanding the impact of home environments on early mathematical development in a global context. The Co-investigators (Co-Is) for this project were from the Department of Psychology at the University of Chihuahua in Mexico and the Cuban Neurosciences Centre in Cuba. This collaboration emerged amidst the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, presenting the investigators with various obstacles, including lockdowns in partner countries. Despite these challenges, the researchers were able to conduct the study effectively, yielding valuable insights that contributed to the advancement of their career trajectories and research endeavours.

Skill Development for the Researchers

The GCRF grant enabled the researchers working on this project to hone their skills and technical know-how. For Prof. Simms, the PI, this research enabled her to develop a deeper understanding of participatory research, an area she had *“never been as deeply involved in before”*. On the other hand, the Co-Is shaped their statistical analysis skills by receiving training in advanced statistical analyses.⁹ The flexibility of the British Academy in its funding approach also enabled the researchers to use the innovative Language Environment Analysis (LENA)¹⁰ technology for the first time in an ODA context in this research.

“We wouldn't be able to do a whole set of the project because there's no kit and we had the kit in the UK, but, you know, the partners (in Mexico and Cuba) didn't have it. And thankfully the funder (British Academy) was flexible and allowed us to purchase that. And so now we've got new centers that are using LENA technology, which is fabulous, which is an innovative piece of kit that has been used quite a lot, in school settings and with some parents, but it has never been used in any ODA country” (PI).¹¹

The use of the LENA system not only strengthened the technical skills of the Co-Is but also equipped them with the know-how of different methods to measure the effectiveness of interventions.

⁹ Latent Transition Analysis (LTA) is a statistical method used in longitudinal research to examine transitions between different states or categories over time.

¹⁰ Language Environment Analysis (LENA system) is a research tool designed to capture and analyse audio and video recordings of children's interactions in naturalistic settings.

¹¹ The British Academy generally prohibits the purchase of equipment under the GCRF grant. However, this was an exceptional case, with the allowance made due to the unique and specific circumstances of the project

Professional Development for the Researchers

The research conducted by the researchers through GCRF continues to be recognised widely through “*increasing references to the research paper published in 2022*” (interview with PI). This has also enabled the investigators to secure more funding opportunities to continue to work together. For the researchers based in the UK alone, they were able to secure funding worth £10 million for five years and continue to develop an intervention study based on the data gathered through GCRF-funded research. The PI reflected that

“So, we took some of the information that we had gathered from the GCRF grant and applied for another grant. Currently, we’re nine months into an intervention study. So really for me, the GCRF grant opened up the global networks even further. And we continue to work together with the data from the GCRF with our partners. The experiences that I gained through this grant has also meant that I’ve been able to generate a huge amount of other work, which has been fantastic.”

As the opportunities to work together continue to grow for the research team, the GCRF-funded research has been pivotal in their career progression. The Co-I in Mexico and the PI in Northern Ireland have been promoted to the position of professor, all the research associates that were employed on the project are now pursuing their PhDs or further studies.

“I suppose it (the funding opportunity) was the last chunk in my profile to get promoted to professor. So, I got this (promotion), after the funding came in” (Prof. Simms, PI)

Role of the British Academy

While the grant enabled both the PI and Co-Is to strengthen their skills, the role of the funder was critical in enabling this capacity building. The opportunity for no-cost extensions was instrumental in the success of the project and allowed the research team to invest significantly in capacity building, which greatly enhanced the project’s outcomes. Additionally, the funder’s flexibility in reallocating funds across different categories proved invaluable. This flexibility enabled the team to adapt their resources, particularly for travel and capacity building activities, ensuring continued collaboration and effective data analysis and training despite changing circumstances. However, it is essential to note that not all the research sites are primarily focused on capacity development. Therefore, funders like the British Academy need to continue to provide flexibility and opportunities for capacity development through funding and ensure that capacity building meets the needs of researchers in different country contexts.

TSIC reflection: *Another GCRF scheme, led by The Royal Society on behalf of the National Academies (and therefore including The British Academy), was active at a similar time to those within this evaluation. The aims of this cross-academy GCRF scheme were to “Strengthen research capacity in developing countries through collaboration, sharing of knowledge and skills and exchange of staff between research groups in the UK and their partners in developing countries”. While this isn’t a GCRF wide aim, it is however critical to note that this reflects a widely regarded assumption that benefits flow from Northern to Southern institutions.*

However, we believe that some researchers in both the Global North and Global South are in a place to consider mutual capacity building and the bidirectional benefits to enhancing both Southern and Northern researchers' skills and knowledge. This is a reframing of who the 'expert' is. We are curious about the extent to which framing capacity building informs the equitability of research partnerships. For example, what happens when all parties are encouraged to acknowledge that capacity building is reciprocal?

2.15. Key finding: Some examples of partners leveraging additional research funding

Fifty-nine (59%) of PIs and 56% of Co-Is agree or strongly agree that they have been able to access more funding because of this programme. The reasons behind this include increased confidence and expanded connections, as PIs reported:

"Capacity building was most successful for our overseas partners and the project gave them the confidence to apply for funding themselves" (PI survey respondent).

"The project has been a brilliant platform for future collaboration and funding. Including a new BA project and a new collaboration with Northwestern University" (PI survey respondent).

"The connections the BA has supported allowed me to submit new bids with the Royal Academy of Engineering and to now have access to a number of relevant calls coming in the next two months" (PI survey respondent).

Spotlight 8: Enhancing research capacity through the Pneuma City Project

Project name: 'Pneuma-city': Frictional Infrastructure, road ecologies and valorisation of end-of-life tyres (ELTs) towards more sustainable urban economies in West African mega-cities

Urban Infrastructure for Wellbeing, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Lagos, Nigeria

Research institutions: University of Kent, University of Toronto, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University, University of Lagos

Case study informed by: Impact Briefing and Final Reports submitted by Dr. David Garbin, PI

In 2022, the project delivered training sessions to enhance the skills of junior researchers and assistants. The sessions included research methods and data analysis. Researchers in Lagos were reported to gain new skills in the urban ethnography.

A collaboration with award-winning photographer Andrew Esiebo improved the team's expertise in visual storytelling. Researchers report being able to better engage a broader audience using photography as a result.

The project has paved the way for forthcoming publications on diverse topics, including the socio-spatial dynamics of informal economies, gender dynamics in the urban landscape, waste management, and the circular economies of end-of-life tyres.

Additionally, the project successfully secured further funding, including:

- £49,000 grant from the British Academy

- £8,000 for public engagement from the University of Kent.

These grants will enable the team to expand their research scope and design more ambitious proposals for larger grants to study informal tyre-related work on a global scale.

The project expanded the teams' research horizons, as reported by the PI:

"This award has been highly beneficial to my research and professional development, as well as that of my team. It has allowed us to broaden our academic horizons and approach the intricate connections between the city and its infrastructures in a fresh and innovative manner. This perspective, distinct from our previous work on religious urbanisation within the same urban context of Lagos, has enriched our understanding of urban dynamics and the role of infrastructure in shaping the city's socio-economic landscape."

2.16. Key finding: Partners report equitable partnerships, especially where partners were involved in project development

On the whole, PIs and Co-Is reflect that there was a good level of equity amongst their project partners. Indicators of this include:

- Around 90% of PIs and Co-Is reflect that the quality of partnerships is either exceptional or good
- Around 70% of partnerships are reported as very likely to continue once the funding period ends
- The vast majority of PIs and/or Co-Is have published multiple publications with researchers in lower- or middle-income countries as a result of the GCRF programme

Figure 7: Most PIs and Co-Is report that partnerships were exceptional or good

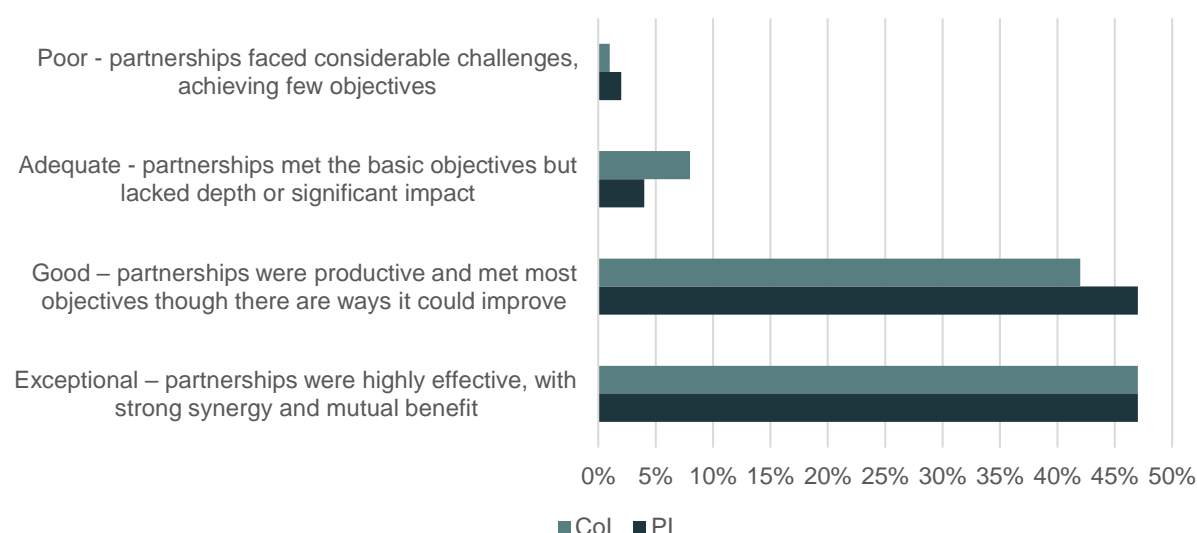


Figure 8: Many partnerships are very likely to be sustained beyond the GCRF funding period

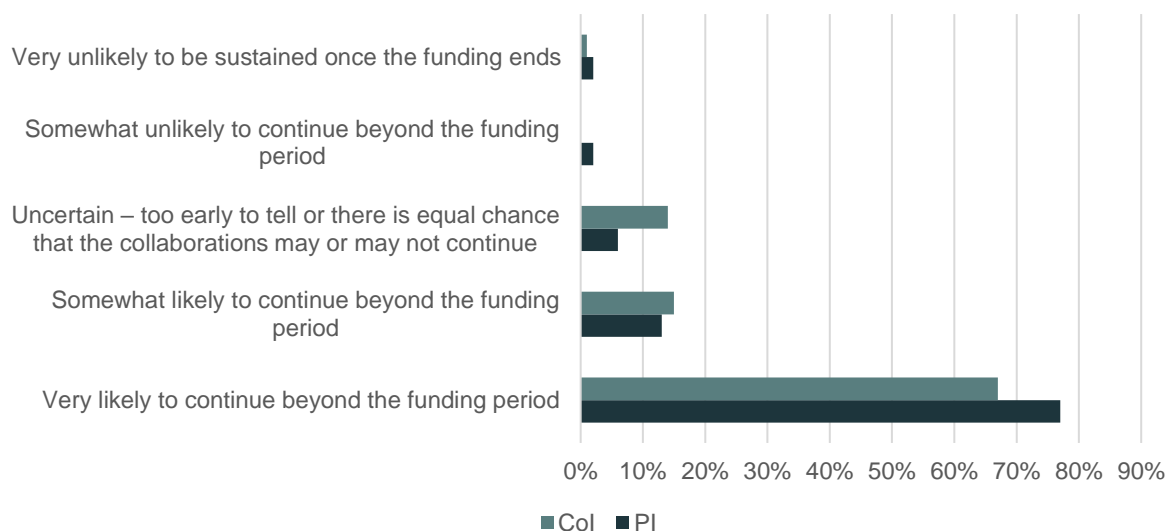
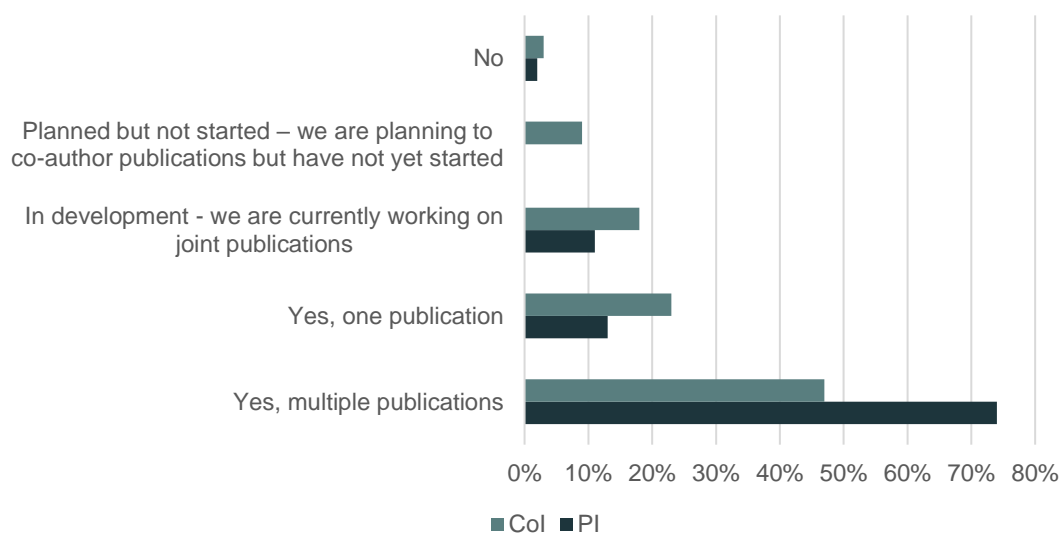


Figure 9: Most PIs and Co-Is report having co-authored publications with researchers in low- and middle-income countries as a result of the programme



PIs and Co-Is mention that the degree of equitability reported appears to be influenced by the project's structure, leadership styles and collaborative mechanisms in place. Some partnerships demonstrated a high level of equity with substantial involvement from all partners in decision-making processes and a balanced distribution of responsibilities and benefits. Where there was a deliberate

effort to engage partners from the Global South in the early stages of project conception, there is thought to be greater equity throughout the partnership.

Projects, where all partners were involved in co-designing research questions, methodologies, and outputs, tended to report higher satisfaction of partnership dynamics and a strong sense of ownership over the research process and outputs. These collaborations often led to more innovative approaches and outputs that were more applicable to specific contexts.

"After we all decided what we wanted to study, what was interesting and what the research questions would be, it allowed each partner to feel that their research interests were being included. We then designed the method. I remember different groups – ecologists, social scientists etc – who designed or proposed how to go about answering the methodology questions [...] This was great because when the grant was approved, everyone pretty much knew their part: what the method would be [...] There was quite a lot of freedom given to each group to come up with the methodology that they thought was most appropriate to answer those research questions" (Co-I, Heritage, Dignity and Violence Programme).

Where partnerships were less equitable, there was often a more hierarchical structure where decision-making was predominantly controlled by PIs. In some instances, partners from the Global South felt that their roles were more about research delivery/implementation rather than setting the direction of the research. Some researchers reported challenges of maintaining equitable partnerships – issues such as administrative delays hindered equity and collaboration.

"Being a PI on this type of work for me was very hard. Because I don't want to seem like the white woman from the UK coming and telling my partners this is the way this should happen, but it kind of sometimes made me feel slightly uncomfortable that I was holding the purse strings" (PI, Early Childhood Education).

COVID-19 necessitated greater reliance on partners based in the Global South, which inadvertently enhanced the equitable nature of these partnerships. Local teams in the Global South demonstrated their capabilities and took on leadership roles effectively.

Spotlight 9: Equitable partnership in practice: challenges faced, and strategies employed

Project name: Harnessing Afro-Ecuadorian women's heritage to promote peaceful and equitable development in Esmeraldas, Ecuador

Heritage, Dignity and Violence, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Ecuador

Research institutions: Northumbria University, American Faculty for Social Sciences at Quito (FLACSO), Universidad Nacional de Colombia (National University of Colombia), Las Diversas, Acción Ecológica, Defensoras de la Pachamama (Defenders of Mother Earth and Comité Académico Técnico de Asesoramiento a Problemas Ambientales (CAPTA)

Case study respondents: Prof. Katy Jenkins, PI

This project harnessed the heritage of Afro-Ecuadorian women to promote peaceful and equitable development in Ecuador. The Principal Investigator (PI) for this project, funded through the GCRF grant was Prof. Katy Jenkins, was based at Northumbria University in the UK and is Co-Director of the Centre for Global Development. The Co-Investigators (Co-Is), on the other hand, were based in Ecuador at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, alongside partners at the Mujeres de Asfalto Collective in Esmeraldas. The case study demonstrates the challenges in building an equitable

relationship between partners in the Global North and Global South and how the partners in the UK and Ecuador overcame these challenges to build an equitable partnership.

Language barriers

A significant challenge in collaborations between researchers from the Global North and Global South lies in managing languages. Researchers need diverse language skills to collaborate effectively with field data collectors and communicate seamlessly within the team. In this project, the PI and lead Co-I were both fluent in English and Spanish. This was invaluable for bridging language gaps within the wider team and for the success of the project, allowing Spanish to be the main working language of the project team.

Research dissemination and co-writing

In the early stages of a project focusing on Global North-South partnerships, a critical consideration is ensuring mutual agreement on authorship roles and considering how to write collaboratively across languages. The complexities of co-authoring and determining lead authorship pose significant challenges, requiring careful discussion to ensure equitable representation and satisfaction among all collaborators. For this project, these challenges were addressed by having **open and inclusive discussions** early in the project and agreeing on clear principles that guided the team's approach.

*"I think there are quite a lot more challenges than you might think when it comes to writing together equitably. Like, not only doing the research equitably, but then making sure that in the dissemination phase, you are representing everyone equitably and no one feels like they're being taken advantage of in any way or, that everyone gets the opportunity to lead a publication which we've tried very much to do. So, I think **having those conversations is really important and not just assuming that we know that we're all thinking the same** or we all know how it's going to work because often when you come to try and do it, you realise that it's a bit trickier than that" (PI).*

Expectations about the scope of the research

Like any research, managing differing expectations regarding the research scope can be a challenge for the team, particularly concerning budget allocation. In this context, as the PI was based in the UK and the Co-Is in Ecuador, it was essential to align expectations and collaborate closely to design the scope of the research and conduct the research. The PI and the Co-Is **collaborated closely to draft the application** and develop the budget. The PI took the lead in consolidating the financial details, incorporating input from each partner organisation regarding their respective costs. Furthermore, clear communication to align these expectations was also useful to navigate this hurdle and foster an effective partnership among the partners, as demonstrated by the PI

"I guess just the importance of communication and being very clear about expectations and budgets and what the remit of the project is and what money can be spent on and can't be spent on to make sure everyone is very aware of those things" (PI).

Role of the funders to ensure equitable partnerships

Fostering an **equitable partnership is time-consuming**. The challenge lies in dedicating substantial time and effort to ensure a fair and non-exploitative collaboration. This requires careful attention to stakeholder satisfaction with the process and outcomes, which inherently slows progress. Consequently, where possible the British Academy should ensure that researchers are

allocated adequate **budget and time to engage in inclusive discussions**, to be able to build an equitable partnership over time.

As for this partnership, the researchers have established a sustainable relationship that continued beyond the project's original scope, sustained through follow-on funding from the British Academy. This underscores the success of fostering an equitable partnership where all stakeholders actively and fully engage throughout the research process.

TSIC reflection: *Several respondents noted the unexpected ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic led to greater reliance on partners in the Global South to take on more leadership of fieldwork design and delivery. In many cases, this was positive as the Southern-based partners were able to deliver to a high standard. Our evaluation team observed that for some respondents based in the Global North, there was a sense that giving more responsibility to partners in the Global South was somehow equitable. PIs praised the British Academy for their flexibility in realigning funds where needed. However, our evaluation does not clearly indicate whether budgets were routinely and consistently adjusted to ensure that partners in the Global South were reimbursed for this increased responsibility and workload. While we have only heard this raised by one respondent as a potential problem, it wasn't something we routinely asked about and remains an open question. We would like to know more about this from the perspective of research teams in the Global South to better understand their views on equity.*

2.17. Concluding comments about partnerships and capacity building

EQ5: To what extent has the programme facilitated sustainable and equitable partnerships between UK and LMIC researchers?

The programme facilitated sustainable and equitable partnerships with 90% of PIs and Co-Is rating the quality of partnerships as exceptional or good and 70% likely to continue post-funding. Most have co-authored publications with LMIC researchers. Equitable partnerships were stronger with early involvement of Global South partners and collaborative decision-making. However, some administrative delays hindered equity.

EQ6: To what extent has the programme contributed to building capacity for future challenge-led research?

The programme has built capacity for future research. Both PIs and Co-Is report new or enhanced skills and access to additional funding.

5. Lessons learned about programme design and delivery

2.18. Key finding: Importance of the British Academy's agility in funding processes

The ability of the British Academy to respond to funding opportunities from the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) has been a factor in the success of the research programme.

The British Academy's strategy of avoiding long-term financial commitments beyond spending review periods has protected them from reputational damage following funder cuts, a challenge faced and experienced by other research funders.

By maintaining agility, the Academy has provided timely opportunities for researchers despite financial and temporal constraints imposed by DSIT. As the Academy didn't commit to funding ahead of confirmation, it required a rapid turnaround in opening calls for funding within days of government approval (as opposed to the months that would be optimal). This quick response capacity is due to British Academy's staff and the dedication of assessors and panel members assisting with the assessment process, enabling the Academy to operate at pace.

2.19. Key finding: Applicants experienced a smooth and satisfactory application process

Compared to other grants, applicants describe the British Academy's process as smoother and less demanding in terms of the information and writing required. They described clear instructions and some flexibility in the process.

The application form and fund management were recognised by award holders as conducive to innovation and collaboration.

"We could go for something quite high-risk in the short format of the application form. That means you're more likely to do something a bit innovative" (PI, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

"It was nowhere near as laborious as putting in an ESRC grant. It was a much more straightforward process" (PI, Early Childhood Education).

For some, the application and proposal development were highly collaborative. Partners contributed through shared documents (e.g., Google docs) allowing for real-time input. Where this was the case, the collaboration extended to the methodology design and a sense of inclusion from partners.

The importance of a longer lead in time for funding calls was highlighted by some PIs and Co-Is. A longer lead in time can allow for building genuine relationship.

The review process was described as 'friendly' and within a reasonable time period, unlike some other programmes that could take up to a year for responses or feedback. The timely review process was received as a positive aspect of the British Academy's process.

Figure 10: The majority of PIs found the application process easy to navigate n=48

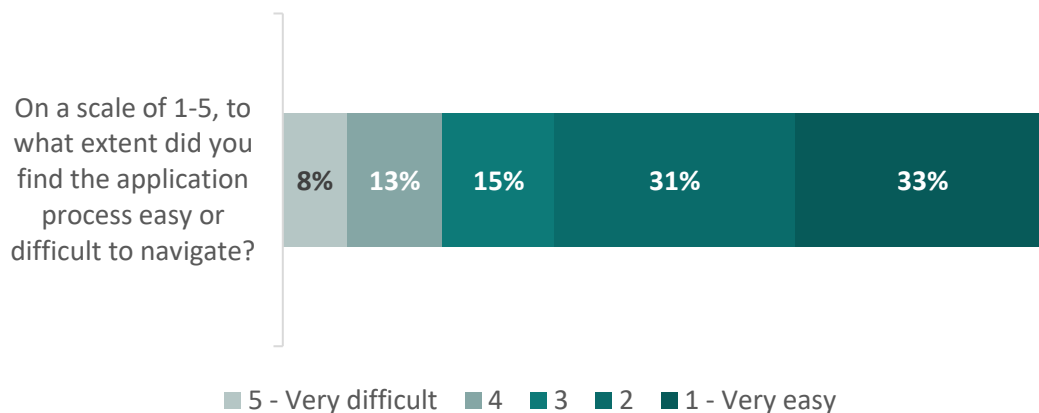
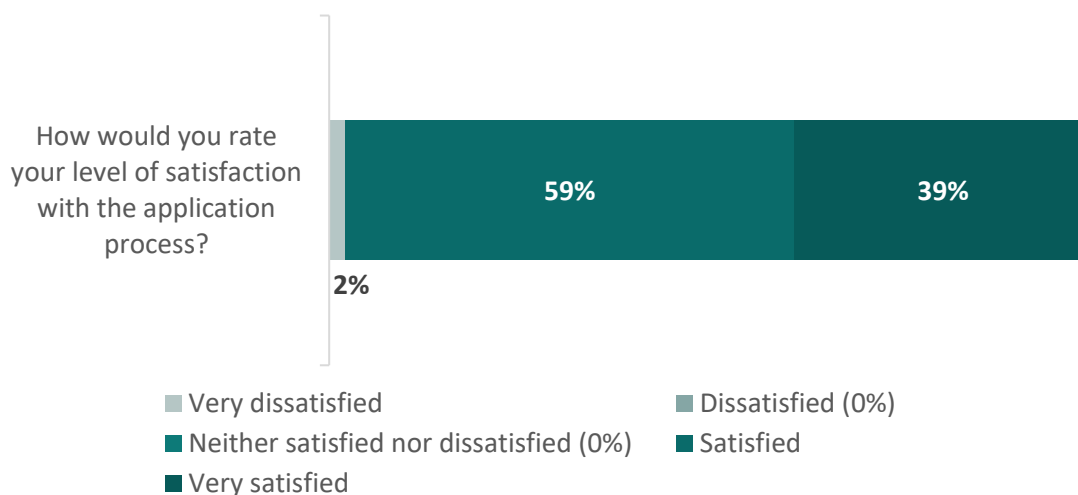


Figure 11: Most PIs were satisfied with the application process n=46



2.20. Key finding: The British Academy perceived to be a supportive and flexible funder

Researchers consistently reflect that the flexibility of the programme is a significant enabler for the success of the projects. The Academy allows researchers the autonomy to design projects that are tailored to the needs of their specific regions and disciplines. There was a sense that some projects were experiments or able to 'fail' within this programme, which was welcomed as an enabler to innovation.

"We worry about the appetite among funders to take on projects that might actually fail. And, you know, I don't think it helps anyone to get into the game of academics pretending that there's not going to be risk." (PI, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

The British Academy's flexibility in extending deadlines and adapting to changing circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic and political insecurities was critical for the successful delivery of the research projects.

PIs found that the reporting and administrative requirements were less onerous compared to other funding bodies, which was refreshing and welcome. The provision of extensions allowed researchers to manage delays and inflation spikes. In some cases, these no-cost extensions enabled teams to do some of the capacity building work (see Section 5) which was likely to help embed the sustained impact of the work.

"The flexibility and responsiveness of the funder to allow us to move our funds across codes were really, really brilliant. This meant that we could still meet up as a large team and do a lot of data analysis together and a lot of training together just in slightly different contexts" (PI, Early Childhood Education).

Researchers felt that the Academy placed trust in them to make decisions.

"The flexibility of The British Academy was absolutely fundamental. It's enabled everything that's come out of the project really. So that's definitely an enabler. I think also the trust that they put in the researchers to make decisions about the research. [...] It's a high-risk project and I think that speaks volumes for them to place that trust" (PI, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

"The impression I have of the British Academy is that staff there do feel trusted to be able to support the people they're helping in their research" (PI, Youth Futures).

"I felt the British Academy trusted me as a PI to know what I was doing" (PI, Education and Learning in Crisis).

2.21. Key finding: Co-Is would value more involvement and communication

Co-Is shared suggestions on how future funding programmes could better support their contributions to meaningful collaboration and capacity building. Their responses indicate a need for increased involvement and communication:

"Future funding programmes [should] support co-applicants to attend international conferences so that we can prepare and present the research findings together to international participants" (Co-I, Youth Futures).

"Funding programmes could organize networking events or online platforms where co-applicants can connect, share expertise, and identify potential collaborators, enhancing collaboration and knowledge exchange" (Co-I, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

Concerns were raised about the requirement for co-investigators to have a PhD, which could exclude experienced individuals and organisations.

"In our co-application process there was a requirement for the co-investigator to have a PhD. While I understand the reason for this, in work such as ours (participatory ethics research), this can exclude individuals and organisations with a significant and robust experience of participatory approaches." (Co-I, Youth Futures).

It is important to note that a PhD is not a requirement under the British Academy's GCRF eligibility criteria. This misunderstanding may have resulted from a miscommunication.

2.22. Key finding: There were some administrative challenges, mostly at UK-based Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Some researchers report bureaucratic challenges, particularly when their host or partner institution had complex or slow-moving systems. On occasion, these challenges delayed payments.

"But [UK HEI], it was just endless difficulties with [UK HEI] to get them to pay people, to get collaboration agreements set up to get [UK HEI] to follow through on the things that they were legally required to do" (PI, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

"But getting money into Cuba is really, really difficult and that is not something that I nor my institution had experience of. Because we don't, we don't generally collaborate with Cuban partners and I now know why. Because the process of getting funds transferred from the UK to the Cuban partners was mind boggling" (PI, Early Childhood Education).

"If there's anything that funders can do to encourage or to push universities to have more enabling systems and structures in place, to enable this kind of research, it would be helpful because universities are actually getting worse around these things, not better" (PI, Heritage, Dignity and Violence).

2.23. Concluding comments about programme design and delivery

EQ2: What are the strengths and challenges associated with programme design and delivery (including application processes and Academy support)?

The British Academy's programme design and delivery has strengths in flexibility and support for innovative and context-specific projects.

Strengths include:

- Researchers' freedom to design context-specific projects
- A smooth and straightforward application process
- A supportive and flexible funder, especially during the pandemic

Challenges include:

- Administrative hurdles for people based at UK HEIs especially for getting funding to partners based in the Global South
- Co-Is seek more support for networking opportunities

6. Conclusions

This evaluation has demonstrated contributions to research excellence, innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The funded projects have produced valuable insights and tools that are being used by practitioners including teachers and youth workers.

The SHAPE research funded by the programmes has been significant by enabling an understanding of human behaviour, cultural dynamics, and social structures. Creative and participatory methods ensure that research is inclusive and relevant to the communities they serve. There are examples of SHAPE researchers working with STEM researchers such as engineers and computer scientists and the interdisciplinarity has been a positive experience for the PIs and Co-Is funded through the programme.

There appears to be a significant number of projects that have successfully engaged local communities, ensuring that research is not only conducted with them but also for their benefit. There are examples of how these approaches have empowered communities, contributed to sustained practices, and ensured the practical application of culturally sensitive research findings. This has only been possible due to the contributions of researchers in the Global South including academics, NGOs, and community-based researchers.

The programme (including call for proposals and panel review processes) has been designed with a commitment to interdisciplinarity and equitable partnerships. This appears to have translated into project delivery, with PIs and Co-Is reporting an overall positive experience. The flexibility of the British Academy, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic has been credited, with research teams feeling trusted to make good decisions about how to proceed with their research.

7. Recommendations

Our recommendations are drafted for research funders who are interested in supporting SHAPE disciplines to address global challenges. While our recommendations are written predominantly with the British Academy in mind, they should be of interest to all research funders working in SHAPE and/or research for development.

Our recommendations coalesce around two broad themes: 1) research for impact and 2) research funding administration.

2.24. Recommendations for research for impact

Supporting pre-award interdisciplinary relationship building – given that interdisciplinary research often builds upon pre-existing relationships there may be a need to consider pre-award support to facilitate early interaction amongst researchers.

Recognise that community-driven research is likely to generate impact – research approaches that are co-developed with communities appear to have meaningful impact. Research funders who want to see impact may wish to prioritise projects that include community engagement and where research proposals are co-developed with community input. This will help to ensure that the research addresses real-world challenges.

Recognise and value community-level and practitioners' impact – given that SHAPE disciplines often build upon community engagement, we recommend that impacts at community-level (e.g., neighbourhood) and for frontline practitioners are valued. While policy influence will be appropriate for some projects, ensuring that research benefits those directly on the ground can, in some cases, lead to more sustainable and immediate improvements in people's lives. We recommend that funders develop criteria that assess and reward the engagement of and impact on communities and practitioners, balancing the focus between policy-driven outcomes and local-level changes.

Recognise that impact is not linear – the importance of building intended impact from early stages in the project design was important. However, several projects had unexpected delays due to political conditions, COVID-19 and/or fragile contexts. It is recommended that while impact should be considered early in research design, it is important to have flexibility to adapt to changing conditions and respond to emerging opportunities.

Reframe capacity building to support equitable partnerships – recognise the importance of capacity building as a mutual and reciprocal process rather than a one-way flow from North to South. Funders should promote and support capacity building initiatives that enhance skills development across all stakeholders, recognising the bidirectional benefits.

2.25. Recommendations for research funding administration and management

Flexibility in the funding approach – the flexibility of the approach taken by the British Academy, especially during COVID-19, was warmly received by the research teams. Flexibility is important as it empowers projects to remain responsive to emerging community needs. Continue to offer flexible project timelines and budget reallocation to accommodate for changing contexts. Provide clear

guidelines on how to request adjustments, ensuring that all partners are aware of the process to seek flexibility.

Acknowledge and advocate for improved administrative processes - it is broadly acknowledged that clunky administrative processes for some HEIs can add delays and frustrations for research projects and undermine equitable partnerships. While the British Academy is somewhat limited by the constraints imposed by the Department for Science, Technology and Innovation (DSIT), it is important to acknowledge the problem and advocate for improvements. Funders should encourage UK HEIs to streamline their bureaucratic procedures and develop systems that better support collaborative and global research – especially where it involves getting funds to partners in the Global South.

Acknowledge that short timeframes can be challenging for truly collaborative proposals - our evaluation team recognise that the British Academy does an impressive job of mobilising funding from DSIT within a short timeframe. One of the impacts of this short timeframe is the limited window for research teams to draft proposals in response. A risk is that this could exacerbate inequalities within research partnerships, whereby a UK-based PI takes the lead on generating proposals with minimal input from partners in the Global South. For research proposals to be adequately co-designed, with maximised impact potential, a greater lead in time would be optimal.

Appendix 1: Case study: Transforming urban landscapes: the collective impact of the Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being programme

2.26. The programme in numbers

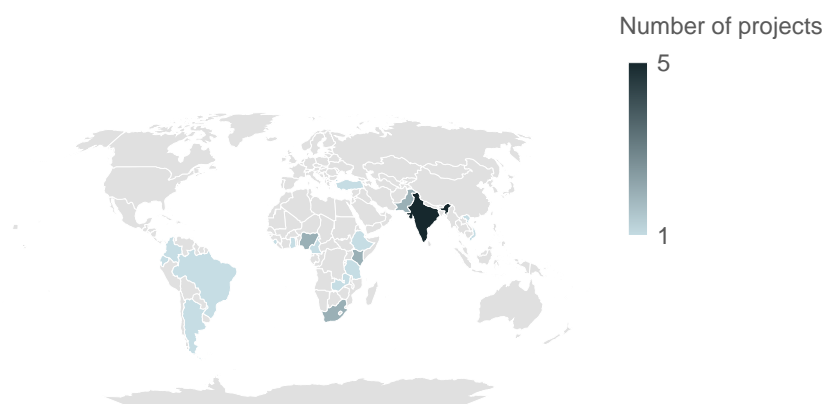
The Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being programme has funded 23 projects spanning a wide range of topics ranging from (but not limited to) energy and sustainability, urban transports, mobility, housing and built environment, waste management, health and well-being, water management, climate adaptation, urban agriculture, food security, social equity, and access to infrastructure. Based on the available data and for the purposes of this evaluation, TSIC has categorised awarded projects into impact themes. These themes give us a sense of the research focus throughout the programme. We acknowledge that there can be multiple or cross-cutting areas of focus.

Figure 12: Categorised areas of focus for the 23-awarded projects

Areas of focus	Number of projects with a primary focus
Energy and sustainability	5
Housing and built environment	4
Water management and climate adaptation	4
Social equity and access to infrastructure	4
Waste management	2
Urban transport and/or mobility	2
Urban agriculture and food security	2
Total	23

The programme funded projects in 20 DAC list countries with most in India (5).

Figure 13: Geographical distribution of Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being Funded Projects



2.27. Lessons learned from the funded projects

The Importance of Community Engagement

A recurring lesson across the programme was the importance of community engagement. Some projects initially faced resistance from local communities due to a lack of awareness and trust in new technologies and practices. The Cape Town Solar Energy Project encountered scepticism from residents about the reliability and safety of solar mini-grids. To address this, the project team invested in community workshops and engaged with local leaders, which proved instrumental in gaining community buy-in.

The Medellin Water Management Project engaged communities in co-designing water conservation practices. By involving local residents in discussions and planning, the project ensured that the strategies were practical and aligned with community needs. This collaborative approach enhanced the community's commitment to water sustainability.

A flexible definition of impact

The Programme Director recognises that while impact was built in from the beginning of the projects, there was not a rigid definition of what was expected or what 'good' impact looks like. The Director acknowledges that having an exploratory and fluid approach to impact allows the research team the freedom to generate gradual changes that downstream lead to significant results. For example:

- **Community impacts:** Positive changes and improvements for local residents and communities as a result of the research. For example:
 - In Cape Town, the Solar Energy Project improved educational opportunities and safety by providing reliable solar lighting.
 - The Wellbeing, Housing and Infrastructure in Turkey (WHIT) project engaged refugees and local students in participatory design processes, raising awareness of inclusive urban planning practices.
 - For the Dharavi Wellbeing project, housing solutions were co-created with community members to ensure cultural relevance and long-term sustainability.
- **Practitioner impacts:** The influence on professional practices, skills and methodologies amongst practitioners including (but not limited to) urban planners, architects, engineers, and others. For example:
 - In the Pneuma City-Lagos Project, urban planners and engineers worked closely with informal workers to develop sustainable infrastructure solutions, leading to the formal recognition and integration of informal practices into urban planning.
 - The Well-being Achieved from Earthen Residence (WAFER) Project promoted the use of sustainable building materials among architects and builders, demonstrating the environmental and economic benefits of earth materials over conventional concrete.
 - In the Karachi Waste Management Project, waste management professionals adopted new community-led practices for sorting and recycling, enhancing the efficiency and safety of waste disposal processes.
 - The WHIT project also provided valuable training and capacity building for future architects, encouraging them to consider the needs of poor and refugee populations in their designs.
- **Policy impacts:** The contribution of research to shaping, informing, and influencing local, regional or national policies. For example:

- In Gaza, the success of solar energy systems in health clinics led to policy recommendations for integrating sustainable energy solutions in healthcare infrastructure.
- The Pneuma City-Lagos Project's recognition of the economic and social value of informal workers informed policies aimed at improving working conditions and health and safety practices.
- Karachi's Waste Management Project provided data to support policy changes in organised and safe waste management practices.

Impact on a number of thematic areas

The programme has impacted on several crosscutting and complementary policy areas.

How the programme Contributed to Outcomes for Energy and Sustainability

Several projects under the Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being programme promoted renewable energy solutions, improved access to energy, and sustainable practices. Examples include:

- The Cape Town Solar Energy Project demonstrated the benefits of solar mini-grids in off-grid informal settlements, enhancing safety and educational outcomes by providing reliable electricity. For instance, a 13-year-old girl now studies safely at night, and local businesses have extended their operating hours, increasing income.
- The Pneuma City-Lagos Project repurposed materials to address urban infrastructure challenges and improve air quality. The project provided insights into the cultural significance of materials and designed sustainable interventions, facilitating discussions among waste pickers, vulcanizers, and researchers to develop policies enhancing working conditions and livelihoods.

How the programme Contributed to Outcomes for Housing and Built Environment

Projects focused on improving living conditions through innovative housing solutions and sustainable building practices. Examples include:

- Dharavi Wellbeing Project explored innovative housing solutions in high-density urban areas. It highlighted the work of waste pickers, raising important questions about the value and recognition of low-paid city workers. The project supported the ACORN foundation, enhancing its mission to provide a space for young people to envision a socially just, equitable, and sustainable urban life, benefiting the local community.
- The WAFER project in Bengaluru promoted the use of sustainable building materials. By reducing interior pollution, the research has the potential to inform policy makers. The project shows potential for scaling up across India and other countries with similar conditions.
- The WHIT project in Izmir aimed to enhance affordable housing and urban planning. The research produced significant data for housing and planning authorities, helping document, understand, and address housing conditions in low-income and refugee areas. By engaging Turkish architecture students with refugee communities, the project increased visibility and understanding of under-considered populations, challenging preconceptions, and promoting inclusive design. The project has potential for scaling up, addressing the needs of poor neighbourhoods and displaced populations globally.

Political and environmental contexts

In some cases, existing regulations were not conducive to the new materials or methods proposed by the projects. In Pakistan, for example, researchers working on the Water Management Project faced difficulties due to fluctuating political landscapes and frequent changes in local government officials. These changes often led to interruptions in project activities and necessitated continuous efforts to rebuild relationships and secure support from new administrations.

The WHIT project, which aimed to enhance affordable housing through innovative building practices, encountered regulatory hurdles that delayed implementation. The need to navigate and influence policy frameworks highlighted the importance of regulatory alignment for innovative projects.

The Gaza Solar Energy Project faced numerous challenges due to the volatile political environment, which made it difficult to maintain consistent progress and secure necessary resources. These conditions underscored the importance of adaptable project designs and flexible implementation strategies that can withstand and adjust to political and environmental fluctuations.

2.28. In conclusion

The greatest impact of the GCRF Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being programme appears to be at the community level, where projects frequently have direct engagement with local residents. This ensured that interventions were culturally relevant, widely accepted, and sustainable, leading to significant improvements in education, safety, health, and social inclusion. While the programme also influenced professional practices, such as promoting sustainable building materials and integrating informal practices into formal planning, this impact was somewhat less widespread. Policy impacts, although significant in specific projects like healthcare and waste management, were less prevalent overall. By focusing on community engagement and designing projects with and for communities, the programme has achieved the changes that are likely to be sustained at the grassroots level, improving the daily lives of residents.

Overall, the GCRF Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being Programme highlights the importance of flexible, equitable, and interdisciplinary approaches to research, demonstrating how small grants can lead to significant impacts in addressing global challenges. The programme's success demonstrates the value of community trust and collaboration in achieving meaningful and sustainable development outcomes. There has been impact on a number of broad areas including energy, sustainability, housing, the built environment and social equity.

2.29. This case study has been informed by:

- Data about 23 funded projects including applicant details, application form responses, interim reports provided by research teams, final reports provided by research teams
- Interview with the Programme Director in June 2024
- Interviews with 3 PIs/Co-Is from this programme as part of our core evaluation methodology in May and June 2024
- Review of 16 impact briefings prepared by the Programme Director, Professor Caroline Knowles following her visits to projects in 2021 and 2022. This case study includes a more focused review of the impact briefings for 9 of these projects which focus on 2 key impact themes (energy and sustainability and housing and built environment) for illustrative purposes.

2.30. List of projects funded by the Urban Infrastructures for Well-Being Programme

Full name of project	Summary name as used in this case study	Name of Principal Investigator
'Pneuma-city': Frictional Infrastructure, road ecologies and valorisation of end-of-life tyres (ELTs) towards more sustainable urban economies in West African mega-cities	Pneuma City-Lagos Project	Dr Garbin
Equitable Mobility for City Health and Well-Being		Dr Cinderby
Waste, Water and Well-Being: lessons from the interface of formal/informal urban systems in Dharavi, Mumbai	Dharavi Wellbeing project	Mr Jeffrey
Informal Appropriation of public space and urban infrastructure for Leisure Physical Activity in Lagos and Yaoundé (ALPhA)		Dr Oni
Kenya healthy diet and active Lifestyle Infrastructure for the NeXt generation (Kenya-LINX)		Prof. Stratton
Well-Being Achieved from Earthen Residence (WAFER)	The WAFER project	Dr Maskell
Experimenting with data-driven approaches to well-being in off-grid informal urban settings	Cape Town Solar Energy Project	Dr Caprotti
Urban and peri-urban agriculture as green infrastructure: implications on well-being and sustainability in the Global South		Prof. Rao
Scaling up and transferring community-managed rural water systems to urban settings		Dr Tan
What is in a meter? Working towards efficient, socially inclusive and environmentally sensitive energy and water infrastructures in the Global South		Dr Crosbie
Inclusive Green Infrastructures for Urban Well-Being		Prof. Marshall
REducing the impact oF extreme heat to Improve well-being in ciTies (REFIT)		Prof. Gough
Exploring the development and implementation of co-produced water management infrastructure solutions to adapt to climate change-related risk: The intersection of rural-urban areas in Medellin, Colombia	Medellin Water project	Dr Garcia Ferrari
A method for rapidly assessing context in urban communities to optimise public health interventions: the case of water infrastructure in sub-Saharan African cities.		Dr Bond
Rubbish, Resources and Residues: Waste and Well-being in Ethiopia and Pakistan	Karachi's Waste Management Project	Prof. Beall
Alleviating the Impacts of Gaza's Energy Crisis on Population's Well-Being through Sustainable Electricity Generating Technology		Dr Al-Dadah
Developing Infrastructural Solutions for Lebanon's Challenges of Mass Displacement		Prof. Moore

Well-Being, Housing and Infrastructure in Turkey (WHIT)	WHIT project	Dr te Lintelo
Urban Transport Modelling for Sustainable Well-Being in Hanoi		Prof. Malleson
Green rooted agriculture associations (GRASS): community-led pairing of urban agriculture and phytoremediation in Sierra Leone		Dr. Bryant
NOVel Approach for Vital Infrastructure post Disaster (NOVA VIDA)		Dr luorio
Engineering food: infrastructure exclusion and 'last mile' delivery in Brazilian favelas		Dr Jones
Breathing Infrastructures: green barriers for air quality, well-being, and community mobilisation in Buenos Aires		Dr Kanai

Appendix 2: Estimated number of journal articles

Based on the data provided by the British Academy, we have estimated the number of journal articles published as a result of the programme. We have focused on journal articles because traditionally, peer-reviewed journal articles are an indicator of academic excellence.

Some caution should be exercised with these numbers for the following reasons:

- Journal articles are provided for just 4 out of the 6 programmes in Final Reporting data
- The journal articles are listed by the PI completing the Final Report to the British Academy. Some of these journal articles were in development or under review at the time and it is possible that not all of those in development were completed or accepted by journals
- It is also possible that subsequent articles have been published since the submission of the final report. It is also possible that Co-Is and other members of the research teams have published unbeknownst to the PI completing the final report
- We don't know if these journal articles are peer-reviewed (and therefore an indicator of quality)

Programme	Number of journal articles (including those in progress and under review) as reported in final reports	Total number of projects in programme	Approximate average of outputs per funded project
Sustainable development	64	25	2.6
Heritage dignity and violence	38	18	2.1
Early childhood education	34	14	2.4
Education and learning in crisis	24	4	6.0
Total	160	61	2.6

Source: Data provided by the British Academy based on final reports and analysed by TSIC

Appendix 3: Case study: Navigating Instability in order to advance equitable access to early childhood education

Project name: Towards early childhood education by 2030 for all children in Lebanon - Exploring strategies for achieving equitable ECE access for both Lebanese children and Syrian child refugees and realising Sustainable Development Goal 4.2

Early Childhood Education, GCRF Challenge-Led Programme

Location: Lebanon

Research institutions: University of East London, Rafik Hariri University

Case study respondents: Prof. Eva Lloyd (PI)¹²

Context

This project sought to explore the integration of Syrian refugee children into Lebanon's public early childhood education (ECE) system by studying equitable access to learning opportunities for Lebanese and refugee children. The project also aimed to assess the effectiveness of governmental and non-governmental organisations in achieving an equitable ECE system in Lebanon and develop policy recommendations for achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.2: Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education by 2030.

Challenges

The project started in late 2019 and was thus significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The team had to find alternatives to several of their project plans, such as in-person visits to schools and face-to-face contact with research participants. In addition, the UK-based team members were unable to meet with their counterparts in Lebanon during the study. The team adapted to these unforeseen circumstances by shifting to online tools such as Microsoft Teams for team meetings and phone interviews with refugee parents instead of in-person focus groups. The team also expanded their research aims to include a focus on the impact of the pandemic on children in ECE, as well as on their parents and teachers.

Another major challenge was the worsening socio-economic and political situation in Lebanon, which affected the team's stakeholder engagement efforts. Many refugees left Lebanon to return to Syria in response to the rapid deterioration in their circumstances, which made it challenging for the research team to reach them again. A national election also took place during the project, leading to many senior civil servants being replaced, including those who had been interviewed for the project, and thus disrupting efforts to share the project's findings and recommendations at the policy level.

Dissemination

Despite these challenging circumstances, the research team was able to produce research outputs that engage a diverse range of stakeholders. The project produced a policy brief for policymakers and NGOs, as well as reports for the teachers and parent participants who were interviewed. All reports were translated into Arabic by the Co-I in order to be accessible to stakeholders in Lebanon

¹² Co-Is Prof. Hiam Loutfi (Rafik Hariri University) and Dr. Katie Wright (University of East London) were not interviewed for this case study

and beyond. The project was also featured in Nursery World, a UK-based magazine for practitioners in education and childcare. Further details of these outputs can be found on the team's [project website](#).