





## Version Control

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# Executive Summary

LTS International Ltd (LTSI) and Cloud Chamber were commissioned in January 2020 to conduct an evaluation of Phase 3 of the Joint Fund. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the value of the investment by reviewing the impact of the projects individually and the programme as a whole in low and middle-income countries.

Structured around three Evaluation Questions (EQs), the evaluation took place at a time of unprecedented global disruption, coinciding with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This had several very practical implications for the process and called for pragmatism in revising the evaluation process and methodology. The most obvious implication was restrictions on travel and in-person meetings, which did not allow us to go ahead with the planned in-country missions. Conscious of the difficult personal circumstances that grant holders may be facing, and the need to avoid placing undue burden with our requests for interviews, we offered a variety of modes of engagement over a longer period, including an online qualitative moderated discussion. We also tried to offset the challenges posed by the pandemic through a greater emphasis on data-driven quantitative review including analysis of data taken from the Digital Science *Dimensions* system.

**EQ1 looks at *whether, and to which extent, the Joint Fund has met its aim to be a provider of independent, high-quality social science research.*** Our analysis concludes that the Joint Fund, as a whole, has produced academic research that is significant both in quantity (as measured by the number of academic publications) and in quality (as measured by rate of citations), but with great variation across projects. Joint Fund researchers affiliated with institutions in the Global North have published significantly more than their counterparts in the Global South, and citation rates appear significantly higher for Northern academics. The findings presented in this chapter point to a possible (albeit not inevitable) trade-off between an emphasis on North-South partnership and Southern-led research, on the one hand, and conventional measures of academic excellence, on the other.

**EQ2 asks to *what extent the outputs from the Joint Fund have led to research uptake and the use of findings and recommendations by policymakers and practitioners.*** Whilst the Joint Fund exceeded all logframe targets concerning research uptake, our analysis finds that Joint Fund projects typically cite the production of policy briefs and participation in events when asked to describe uptake activities – with mixed (often low) levels of detail on the intended audience of these products and activities and how they have been received. It also confirms what the R4D community has known for some time: that effective research uptake is not a linear process whereby research is published and later picked up and “used” by non-academic actors. Rather, Joint Fund research is achieving influence via non-linear and iterative pathways as part of a more of a synergistic process – within which relationships between people and institutions become the medium for “uptake” rather than more traditional research outputs.

**EQ3 focuses on the impact achieved by Joint Fund research: *is there evidence that the Joint Fund has achieved the intended impact, namely that ‘Policy and practice to reduce poverty in low-income countries are demonstrably informed by the programme-generated evidence base’? If so, how significant has this been?***”. Despite the conceptual and practical challenges in assessing the impact of R4D investments (further compounded by the contextual constraints of this evaluation), we found several interesting examples of impact among Joint Fund projects, as well as indications of further impact in the process of accruing. Lessons emerging from the Joint Fund confirms wider R4D learning around the importance of planning ahead, seeing impact as an integral part of the research rather than an ‘add on’, as well as being adaptable and seizing impact opportunities as they emerge. More opportunities for impact enhancement funding throughout the lifetime of the Joint Fund (rather than at the end) would have been greatly welcomed by grantees.

Cutting across the three EQs, the evaluation found the following in relation to the three ‘enablers of impact’ identified in the Theory of Change developed for Phase 3 of the Joint Fund:

**Interdisciplinarity:** The majority of Joint Fund PIs considered their projects to be interdisciplinarity, and most projects used mixed methods. Researchers confirmed the value of interdisciplinary collaboration in producing relevant and impactful research. While interdisciplinarity is known to create challenges, it seems that the Joint Fund teams have been able to manage these collaborations without particular problems. This is likely in part a reflection of the fact that interdisciplinarity in the Joint Fund manifested itself mostly as a collaboration between close or adjacent disciplines rather than building bridges between disciplines with very different methods, values, and epistemological views.

**North-South Partnerships:** Research collaboration between institutions in the Global North and the Global South is integral to the Joint Fund DNA. Partners in the Global South have a variety of roles on research projects - in some cases acting as ‘field experts’ setting up and carrying out fieldwork, and in other cases supporting with research uptake. Partnership working is greatly valued by partners and regarded as critical to achieving successful high quality and impactful research. While the extent to which partnerships are equitable remains difficult to measure robustly, we note that Phase 3 has taken steps through its call documentation to minimise tokenistic partnership and to encourage participation in the research design phase. Grantholders cite pre-existing relationships between partners as a critical success factor, alongside the need to engage partners from the outset i.e. in the research design. Administrative and financial challenges are commonly mentioned.

**Co-production and community engagement:** Most of the Joint Fund projects include some engagement with non-academic actors, in particular national/ international NGOs and local community groups. In most cases, however, the engagement appears to be towards the ‘consultative’ end of the spectrum – with some examples of more immersive approaches also present, particularly at the community level, where there are a number of cases of participatory action research. Grantholders acknowledge that engaging local communities as research participants (as opposed to seeing them simply as ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘informants’) holds great potential for impact, but note that it also comes with challenges and risks. Building trust takes time, and power dynamics can be unintentionally affected by the project. It is also important to manage expectations of immediate and direct benefits for local communities.

Finally, in relation to **gender**, the evaluation finds that the approach taken to gender in Phase 3 of the Joint Fund was more progressive and explicit than previous phases, in recognition of the fact that grant holders often needed ‘a nudge’ to think in gender terms. While half of the projects in Phase 3 still did not consider gender at all in their Pathways to Impact, several Joint Fund projects actively contributed to understanding and addressing the structural causes of poverty and inequality as part of their research. Our analysis shows that mandating the application of a gender lens in the Joint Fund was clearly beneficial in encouraging consideration of this issue. The improved treatment of gender (albeit from a low baseline) is to be commended. Given that gender blindness still predominates in R4D, the Joint Fund has played a role in advancing practice, though there remains some way to go.

## Conclusions and key lessons

ESRC and FCDO appear to have worked well together during Phase 3 of the Joint Fund, mainly due to the strong relationships between individuals on each side who were consistent in representing their own organisational interests and developed a mutual understanding of their respective ways of working. This enabled trust and deep knowledge of the Joint Fund as a collaborative effort to build over time which has been much valued, particularly in comparison to earlier years where staff turnover was seen as a problem. Phase 3 of the Joint Fund happened at a time of profound changes, globally and in the UK, both in academic research and in international development, and as a result, during which it has shown a remarkable ability to engage dialectically with this shifting context.

The Joint Fund **commissioning process** has been inventive and focused on learning with the funders willing to ‘think outside the box’ and try different things – though stronger inputs from Southern stakeholders and the Impact Initiative team could have further enhanced impact orientation.

**Grant holder feedback** on management of the Joint Fund has been overwhelmingly positive, though some grant holders expressed frustration in relation to the challenges of engaging with FCDO as a research user. ESRC and FCDO were repeatedly described as ‘supportive’ and grant holders noted appreciating the flexibility to adapt their project in response to changed circumstances on the ground, particularly when working in complex contexts.

While avoiding a prescriptive approach to **equitable partnerships**, the Joint Fund has taken concrete steps to promote the emergence and consolidation of equitable North-South collaboration. Many projects also appear to have given in-depth consideration to the practical and ethical challenges of engaging with non-academic stakeholders, in particular with local communities. An overview of the Joint Fund portfolio shows many examples of strong work concerning partnership and community engagement, with good prospects for sustainability.

The creation of the Impact Initiative in Phase 3 has added significant **programmatic value** through the strong focus on synthesis, building relationships across research communities, and facilitating effective engagement with policy audiences. Having been created later in the programme period, disconnected from the commissioning and Follow-on Funding processes, there was a limit to the value the Impact Initiative could add in relation to impact thinking, research communications, and uptake on an award-by-award basis.

Relatedly, relatively light-touch **MEL systems** at the programme level – as manifest through ESRC reporting processes and the DFID/FCDO logframe – limited the ‘line of sight’ on project activities and progress meaning that opportunities to support project-level improvement, in relation to uptake and impact, were possibly missed. These systems collected data and measured progress using conventional academic metrics (as opposed to embracing a more holistic notion of research quality) and incentivised an outdated “more is more” approach to research uptake - i.e. the more policy briefs and similar outputs are produced, the better - which also likely constrained the ‘research into use’ quality of the portfolio of research the Impact Initiative had to work with.

**Overall**, the Joint Fund has funded a rich and diverse portfolio of projects and has been successful in reaching out to a community of impact-minded researchers – with many projects already showing clear progress in their pathways to impact. Having been created and delivered as part of a relatively small number of first-generation R4D investments, the Joint Fund can credibly claim to have helped to lay the foundation – in terms of experience and learning – for large-scale second-generation investments such as GCRF, both within the funder organisations and beyond amongst the network of potential grant applicants. In this way, it is beyond doubt that the rich learning generated by the Joint Fund investment continues to have urgent and far-reaching relevance.

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# Acronyms

BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Co-I	Co-Investigator
DFID	Department for International Development
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic & Social Research Council
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FoF	Follow-on Funding
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
IAC	International Advisory Committee
II	Impact Initiative
ITQ	Invitation to Quote
JF	Joint Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PI	Principal Investigator
R4D	Research for Development
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SAT	Strategic Advisory Team
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
ToC	Theory of Change

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The authors are grateful for the support and guidance provided by Catherine Flynn and Beverley Leahy at ESRC and Tim Conway and Andrew Shaw at FCDO throughout the evaluation process, as well as to many others in both organisations who shared their knowledge and insights. We greatly benefitted from conversations with James Georgalakis and Louise Clark at the Impact Initiative (IDS) to sense-check our approach and reflect on our initial findings. David Parsons (Leeds Beckett University) and Jennie Popay (University of Lancaster) provided important external perspectives.

We would like to express our appreciation to the many Joint Fund researchers and partners who contributed to the evaluation by participating in our online survey, online discussion, and/or interviews, as well as those who worked with us in developing impact stories. Particular thanks go to two community representatives based in rural Nepal who took the time to talk with us to inform our evaluation. This input was helpful for us to further understand how research funded by the Joint Fund has been experienced by communities. We would especially like to thank Rudra Neupane and Bikash Koirala from PHASE Nepal who set up these interviews and translated them into English for us.

# 1 Introduction

The Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research (Joint Fund) was set up in 2005, as part of a strategic partnership between the UK's Department for International Development (DFID, now Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, FCDO<sup>1</sup>) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The Joint Fund aimed to commission world-class social science research that provides a robust conceptual and empirical basis for poverty alleviation, with strong potential for impact on policy and practice. The Joint Fund investments covered a broad range of themes, and span over three partially overlapping phases: Phase 1 (2005-2010), Phase 2 (2009- 2016), and Phase 3 (2012-2021).

## About the evaluation

LTS International Ltd (LTSI) and Cloud Chamber were commissioned in January 2020 to conduct an evaluation of Phase 3 of the Joint Fund. As defined in the Invitation to Quote (ITQ), the objective of the evaluation is “to assess the value of the investment by reviewing the impact of the projects individually and the programme as a whole in low and middle-income countries” (p.1).

Three **Evaluation Questions (EQs)** are identified in the ITQ:

- EQ1: Has the Joint Fund met its aim to be a provider of independent, high-quality social science research?
- EQ2: To what extent have the outputs from the Joint Fund led to research uptake and the use of findings and recommendations by policymakers and practitioners?
- EQ3: Is there evidence that the Joint Fund has achieved the intended impact, namely that ‘Policy and practice to reduce poverty in low-income countries are demonstrably informed by the programme-generated evidence base’? If so, how significant has this been?

A number of key **guiding principles** have informed the design and implementation of the evaluation.

- **Theory-based evaluation.** We ground our evaluation in Theory of Change as an approach to tackle the complexity of the research-to-impact pathways, unpack the causality chains leading from activities and outputs to the intended development change, and critically examine underpinning assumptions of both funders and grant holders.
- **Evaluation ‘to prove and improve’.** The evaluation has a strong focus on learning, incorporating principles of formative evaluation. While the Joint Fund itself is coming to an end in early 2021 and will therefore not be directly influenced by the findings of the evaluation, our intention has been to capture key lessons to support future research collaborations between ESRC and FCDO, as well as R4D programmes more broadly, including the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).
- **Context-awareness.** The ecosystem of Research for Development (R4D) has changed considerably during the lifetime of the Joint Fund, and particularly since the start of Phase 3. Throughout the evaluation process, we have been conscious of the need to avoid holding the Joint Fund to standards that are considered ‘established practice’ today but had yet to

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<sup>1</sup> On 2 September 2020, the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office became the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) of the UK Government. For the purposes of this report, the name ‘DFID’ will be used for events and activities taking place prior to September 2020.

emerge at the time when decisions were made. Rather, we have focused our analysis on the way in which the Joint Fund has interacted with and helped shape this fast-changing context.

- **Programme approach.** There is an increasing awareness in the R4D community that a ‘programme approach’ can enable large, multi-year investments – such as the Joint Fund – to overcome the research-to-impact disconnects that emerge at the level of individual projects. From a learning perspective, we have focused our reflection on the achievements, and the challenges, of the Joint Fund in being ‘greater as a whole than the sum of its parts’.

The evaluation took place at a time of unprecedented global disruption, overlapping almost perfectly with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. This had several very practical implications for the process and called for adaptability and a degree of pragmatism in revising evaluation process and methodology. The resulting changes are discussed in detail in [Section 2](#).

### Box 1 – Overview of previous evaluations

#### Learning from previous evaluations

Since the beginning of the programme, one independent review and two evaluations have taken place:

- Joint Fund Review (2009), carried out by Technopolis. The review recognised the Joint Fund as being unique in providing a bottom-up, quality-driven research scheme in the area of international development. It recommended the continuation of the scheme, with a view of making it a permanent fixture of the international research funding landscape (Arnold & Jávorka, 2009).
- Joint Fund Evaluation (2012), carried out by INTRAC. The evaluation confirmed that the Joint Fund was achieving its objective of supporting quality research on development issues and poverty reduction, and recommended its continuation (INTRAC, 2012).
- Joint Fund Evaluation (2016), undertaken by Ecorys and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The evaluation focused on assessing the achievements of Phases 1 and 2 grants, for a total of 101 research grants (of which 46 from phase 1, and 55 from phase 2). The evaluation found that ‘[t]he range and depths of impact achieved across the Fund [were] laudable’, with “positive signs of tangible policy/practice change from a minority of projects, as well as the possibility of further impacts in the future” (France et al., 2016).

### About this report

This report represents the final deliverable of the evaluation, building on the inception and mid-term reports. [Section 2](#) provides an overview of the methodology and process of the consultancy, including a discussion of the changes made necessary by the Covid-19 pandemic and related containment measures. [Section 3](#) provides an overview of the context in which Phase 3 of the Joint Fund took place, as well as a description of the portfolio, funding calls, and impact support services. [Sections 4, 5, and 6](#) look at each of the primary Evaluation Questions, in turn, focusing on research quality (EQ1), research uptake (EQ2), and development impact (EQ3) respectively. [Section 7](#) focuses on three ‘enablers of impact’, i.e. interdisciplinarity, North-South academic partnerships, and engagement with non-academic actors and local communities. [Section 8](#) examines how gender has been approached in the Joint Fund and how this relates to impact. [Section 9](#) looks at how the programme approach has been conceptualised and implemented in the Joint Fund, and the extent to which the Fund has managed to be ‘greater as a whole than the sum of its parts’. Finally, [Section 10](#) summarises the key findings and highlights their relevance for future R4D programmes.

## 2 Process & Methodology

This section provides an overview of the methodology and process of the consultancy, including a discussion of the changes made necessary by the Covid-19 and related containment measures.

### 2.1 Process and timeline

The evaluation was conducted from January to December 2020, with a slight delay on the timeline envisaged in the ITQ. The first phase (*Inception*) ran from January to March 2020. An inception meeting provided an opportunity for the team to explore ESRC's and DFID's requirements in more detail; get feedback on the proposed methodology; discuss access to relevant documentation and contacts with key informants; as well as agreeing on process requirements.<sup>2</sup>

During the inception phase, we focused on gaining a better understanding of the Joint Fund as a programme. To this aim, we carried out a *desk review* of programme-level documentation, covering the Joint Fund's logical framework (logframe), annual reports and DFID reviews, previous reviews and evaluations, and a selection of materials produced by the Impact Initiative, along with a *review of academic and technical literature*. In parallel, we conducted a number of *sense-check Key Informants Interviews* (KIIs), with ESRC, DFID, and the Impact Initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the above, we designed an *indicative Theory of Change* (ToC) as a starting point in understanding the envisaged pathways from Joint Fund research to its intended development impact. A *ToC validation workshop* gave us an initial opportunity to gather feedback from ESRC and DFID.<sup>4</sup> The resulting Theory of Change was used as a living document throughout the evaluation (see Annex 2). Our findings are discussed in detail in [Section 3](#).

A draft *Design Specification Report* was submitted to ESRC and DFID in March 2020. The report summarised the evaluation team's understanding of the Joint Fund, specified the analytical approach to the evaluation questions, and outlined key issues of focus and preliminary findings. The report included a full-fledged *evaluation framework* (see Annex 3), as well as a *project-level sample frame* and initial list of projects for sample.<sup>5</sup> ESRC and DFID provided feedback on the Design Specification Report, and a revised version was submitted in May 2020.

The second phase (*Implementation*) ran from April to August 2020. The focus of this phase was at the project level, and we focused on reaching out to grantees through an online survey and interviews.

The *online survey* was our first port of call to engage Joint Fund researchers. The survey was launched in June 2020, using the online platform Survey Monkey, and promoted through three rounds of emails: a mass email to all Phase 3 Principal Investigators (PIs); follow-up individual emails to all PIs in original project sample; and emails to all Phase 3 Co-Investigators (Co-Is). The survey was also advertised on the Impact Initiative website and Twitter feed. The survey remained open until September 2020, and resulted in 41 responses, covering 27 projects. Statistics on survey responses can be found in Annex 4.

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<sup>2</sup> The inception meeting took place in Swindon on January 29th and was attended in person by Catherine Flynn (ESRC); Beverley Leahy (ESRC); Rebecca Murray (LTSI); Valeria Izzi (LTSI); Lachlan Smith (Cloud Chamber). Tim Conway (DFID), Andrew Shaw (DFID) and Emma Roberts (Cloud Chamber) joined remotely.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, an interview was also conducted with David Parsons (Leeds Beckett University) team leader for the recently completed *Review of the ESRC-DFID Impact Support, Synthesis and Cohort-Building Services used to support ESRC-DFID Joint Programmes*. A full list of interviews is provided in Annex 1.

<sup>4</sup> The ToC validation workshop took place online on March 11th, 2020, was attended by Catherine Flynn and Beverley Leahy (ESRC) and Tim Conway (DFID). Louise Clark (Impact Initiative) also provided initial feedback on the draft ToC.

<sup>5</sup> A like-for-like reserve list of projects was also included.

*Interviews* were carried out with 24 informants - PIs, CoIs, partners, and community members - covering 14 Phase 3 projects. Respondents were initially identified through the online survey. Using the snowballing sampling method, respondents were asked to identify colleagues, partners, and/or research users who may be interested and available to participate in the evaluation. Interviews used a semi-structured protocol and lasted a maximum of 45 minutes. Confidentiality of responses was assured (See Annex 5 for the topic guide).<sup>6</sup>

An *Interim Report* was submitted in August 2020, with the aim to update ESRC and DFID on the progress and changes in methodology, as well as sharing preliminary findings emerging from the project-level analysis. A revised version, incorporating feedback from the commissioning agencies, was submitted in October 2020.

The final phase (*Data-driven Analysis and Reporting*) started in September 2020, leading to the end of the evaluation in January 2021. According to the original plans, fieldwork would have been conducted in this phase, with three in-country visits. As the Covid-19 pandemic made this impossible, our focus in the final phase has been on portfolio-wide quantitative data analysis, and in particular:

- *Desk review of project reports.* Over 50 reports have been coded according to several key variables (around interdisciplinarity, capacity-building, role of non-academic stakeholders, and engagement with the Impact Initiative), along with qualitative analysis to identify key trends and recurring themes.
- *Computer-assisted text mining* of funding calls, project proposals, and project reports with a focus on gender.
- *Quantitative analysis of Phase 3 portfolio*, conducted by Digital Science Consultancy<sup>7</sup>, with a focus on publications and citation analysis, North-South partnerships, co-authorship of publications, and interdisciplinarity.

Alongside quantitative data analysis, we carried out an *online qualitative discussion* with Joint Fund researchers. The discussion aimed to provide researchers with a reflective space to think more deeply about the impact of their work. In so doing, the discussion complemented the interviews, providing respondents with an opportunity to ‘look back’ as well as engaging with each other. 16 Joint Fund researchers took place in the discussion, with a roughly even split between Global North and Global South institutional affiliation (see Annex 7 for more details on methodology and participation). During this phase, we also carried out many additional *interviews*, both at the project- and at the programme-level.

## 2.2 Effects of Covid-19 pandemic

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to partially re-think our approach and methodology. The most obvious implication is restrictions on travel and in-person meetings, which did not allow us to go ahead with the planned in-country missions. The Covid-19 situation also probably made it more difficult to engage researchers remotely. From the outset, we were aware that engaging project teams and partners may prove problematic. With the Joint Fund coming to a close, we expected that some grant holders would have ‘moved on’ and/or have multiple requests for engagement and feedback, on top of their already normally busy schedules. The outbreak of the

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<sup>6</sup> 29 survey respondents (over 70% of the total) expressed their availability for a follow-up interview. All those who had expressed availability were contacted to schedule an interview, regardless of whether their project featured in the original sample or not. However, several respondents who had initially expressed availability did not respond to the follow-up request for interview. The online scheduling system Calendly was used to ease the process and maximise the opportunity for respondents to have the conversation at a time of their convenience.

<sup>7</sup> Digital Science Consultancy specialises in bibliometric analyses to support research management and research evaluation. It is part of Digital Science, a technology company that developed Dimensions, a commercial scholarly search platform that allows to search publications, datasets, research grants, patents, clinical trials and policy documents. See <https://www.digital-science.com/>.



Covid-19 pandemic and related control measures (such as lockdowns and school closures) further complicated the situation, particularly for researchers with young children or other caring responsibilities. We followed UKRI guidance and were mindful to avoid over-asking and putting excessive burdens on researchers and partners during these difficult times. It was not therefore altogether surprising that we were not able to engage with project teams as initially foreseen.

In these unprecedented and unforeseeable circumstances, we recognised the need for flexibility. The main ways in which we adapted our approach were:

**A pragmatic approach to sampling:** We had envisaged having a sample of approximately 20 projects, selected according to a pre-set sample frame that we presented in the inception report. In addition, we intended to have 5-10 flagship projects, i.e. projects that emerged as being particularly interesting in terms of impact and/or learning. Having flagship case-studies was meant to enable a ‘deep dive’ into these projects without compromising the representative nature of the sample.

While initially, we tried to stay as close as possible to our sampling approach (including contacting a like-for-like reserve list of projects), we ultimately opted for a more pragmatic approach, where researchers self-selected for participation in the evaluation by responding on the online survey and agreeing to a follow-up interview. Snowballing sampling was then used to reach out to additional team members, as well as partners and research users, for each project. We recognise that there is an inherent bias in this approach, as those who volunteer are likely to have a greater awareness of, and closer engagement with, the Joint Fund. However, we felt that this was the most effective and ethical way to proceed in the circumstances, and still gave us exposure to a range of projects that are broadly representative of different funding calls, themes & levels of Southern engagement, etc.

**Thinking ‘outside the box’ and offering flexibility in engagement:** Throughout the process, we were conscious of the difficult personal circumstances that grant holders may be facing, and the need to avoid placing undue burden with our requests for interviews. In light of this, we offered a variety of modes of engagement over a longer period, as well as providing greater flexibility in terms of time to suit individual circumstances (e.g. offering evening meetings).

In addition to the online survey and the interviews, the online qualitative moderated discussion was aimed at providing participants with an additional way to engage. Participants could log in at any time during each day, thus addressing potential issues related to work/family commitments, etc.

**Greater emphasis on quantitative portfolio-wide analysis:** We tried to offset the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic through a greater emphasis on desk review and quantitative analysis. The data-driven quantitative analysis also served to partially offset the inherent bias of engaging with a self-selected group of researchers (who opted to participate in the online survey, interviews, and/or online qual survey), who are likely to have a higher satisfaction with the Joint Fund, as well as more ‘successful’ projects, compared to the average grant holder.

**Table 1- Summary of changes to the evaluation in response to Covid-19**

Mode of engagement	Implementation (effects of Covid-19 pandemic)
Programme-level interviews	As planned
Project-level interviews	Reduced
Online survey	As planned
Online qualitative discussion	As planned
In-country visits	Cancelled
Desk review	Expanded
Text mining (gender)	Added
Data analysis (by Digital Science)	Added

## 3 Overview of the Joint Fund

Phase 3 of the Joint Fund happened at a time of profound changes, globally and in the UK, both in academic research and in international development. As a result, the context of R4D today looks very different than it did back in 2012. The Fund has shown a remarkable ability to engage dialectically with this shifting context, adapting to it and contributing to shaping it. This section starts by placing the Joint Fund in context, then describes the commissioning process for Phase 3 and provides an overview of the resulting project portfolio, as well as the support services provided by the Impact Initiative as a key innovation of Phase 3. Finally, the section briefly discusses the governance structure of the Joint Fund, reflecting on the collaboration between DFID (now FCDO) and ESRC.

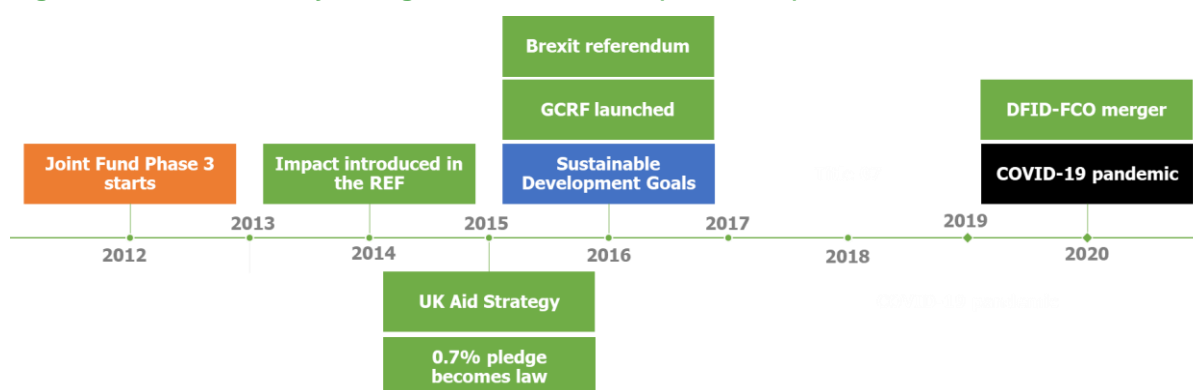
“The Joint Fund was a pioneer programme” (Professor Jennie Popay, Panel chair)

“The Joint Fund is genuinely open to innovative approaches that have an appropriate balance of risk and reward” (Online discussion participant)

### 3.1 A rapidly changing context

The context of both research and international development has changed considerably in the 15 years since the establishment of the Joint Fund, and even more so since the launch of Phase 3 in 2012. These changes are of different nature and scale, but they all converged to shape the R4D ecosystem within which the Joint Fund functioned.

**Figure 1 - Timeline of key changes relevant to R4D (2012-2020)**



The period covered by Phase 3 of the Joint Fund coincided with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the global framework for development.<sup>8</sup> Crucial dimensions of the SDG framework are the notion that the social, environmental, and economic dimensions are interconnected (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017) and the principle of ‘Leave No One Behind’ (Mangubhai & Capraro, 2015; Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Coming into force in January 2016, the Agenda for Sustainable Development replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the central United Nations (UN) platform for achieving ‘integrated and indivisible’ goals and targets across the three characteristic dimensions of sustainable development: the social, environmental and economic.

The SDGs have a stronger focus on gender compared to the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the intellectual debate surrounding the SDGs has been placing increased attention on the need to address the way in which structural inequalities overlap and intersect. Intersectionality has emerged as a theoretical framework to understand how various sources of inequality (based on gender, age, income, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and other factors) come together to compound the disadvantage experienced by individuals and groups (Mathews & Nunn, 2019: 32-33).

In the United Kingdom, the timeframe of Phase 3 of the Joint Fund coincided with substantial changes in the aid budget, its legal framework, and spending practices, as well as the public perceptions and political discourse surrounding it (Manji, 2019). 2015 saw the adoption of a new UK Aid Strategy, containing the principle of a twofold purpose for Official Development Assistance (ODA) – tackling global challenges and promoting the UK national interest. The strategy also promoted a new cross-government approach to aid, with a plan to allocate an increasing portion of aid to departments other than DFID.

“Phase 3 of the Joint Poverty Alleviation Research Fund is being commissioned at a time when the impact of international development efforts is coming under increasing scrutiny due to numerous factors, including global policy discussions around the successor to the millennium development goals, on-going pressures on public finances, and the changing geopolitical realities of globalisation” (Joint Fund Annual Report, 2012-2013: 8)

The vote to exit the European Union in the 2016 referendum came at a time when the UK was debating the purpose and scale of its ODA spending and introduced several further uncertainties for the future of UK aid (Manji, 2019; Olivé & Pérez, 2020). As an immediate consequence, a significant downward devaluation of the Pound following the Brexit vote caused the UK aid budget to lose some of its real purchasing power (Manji, 2016), directly affecting several of the Joint Fund projects.

A clear trend over the last few years is that an ever-greater proportion of the UK aid budget is spent on research, in turn covering an increasing share of the science budget. The launch of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) in early 2016 was a radical game-changer in R4D. The GCRF falls under the authority of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and works primarily through the UK’s Research Councils, National Academies, and the UK Space Agency. As noted by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact,

*“[w]ith a budget of £1.5 billion over five years from 2016 to 2021, [GCRF] marks a change in the overall pattern of UK government funding for science and research, making a notable part of this funding contingent on whether or not the research themes fall within the international ODA definition” (ICAI, 2017: emphasis added).*

The Joint Fund Annual Report 2014-2015 comments on the establishment of the GCRF by noting:

*“Unsurprisingly, the introduction of this large pot of money has had a substantial impact on the UK development research landscape, offering new and exciting opportunities for researchers to explore key issues impacting on developing countries, but also bringing with it a number of challenges.”*

Alongside these changes in international development frameworks and use of aid, the last decade has seen a radical reshaping of the meaning of ‘research performance’, largely driven by the pursuit of public accountability. Researchers are expected to operate under an ‘explicit social contract’,

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<sup>9</sup> SDG5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”) is much more expansive in its coverage and indicators compared to the corresponding MDG3.



giving back to society in return for public funding (Martin, 2011). Decisions on research investments are based on Value for Money, rather than simply on intellectual merit. In the UK, impact was introduced to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014, and became an increasingly important determinant of research funding, carrying strong reputational and financial incentives for both institutions and researchers.

This increased emphasis on research impact, combined with the use of ODA funding to generate compelling evidence to inform development efforts, has led to a renewed reflection – in the UK as well as globally – on what counts as ‘good research’. Traditional methods and metrics for research assessment are under significant scrutiny, and there is an emerging realisation that peer reviews and bibliometric measures are ill-suited to capture the complexity of new expectations bestowed by society on research. This has important implications for the present evaluation, as discussed in greater detail in [Section 4](#).

## 3.2 Phase 3 logframe

A logical framework (logframe) guided the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Joint Fund. The impact of the Joint Fund (Phase 3) is expressed by the logframe as ‘Evidence generated through the programme adds to and informs the body of research knowledge relevant to poverty reduction in low-income countries’. In order to contribute to this ultimate impact, the logframe specifies two outcomes, each, in turn, to be achieved through several outputs.

The first outcome (‘Evidence generated through the programme adds to and informs the body of research knowledge relevant to poverty reduction in low-income countries’) refers to the influence of the Joint Fund on academic knowledge and conceptual advancements and is measured through academic citations (‘Number of Phase 3-funded outputs cited in academic journal articles, books, and book chapters’). The second outcome (‘Evidence generated through the programme contributes to debates amongst policymakers and practitioners on poverty reduction in low-income countries’) focuses on how research findings are shared with, and used by, relevant stakeholders, and is measured through non-academic citations (‘Number of Phase 3 funded outputs cited in non-academic publications’).

These two outcomes are further unpacked through four outputs, each with different ‘weight’ concerning their contribution to the overall impact of the programme (as well as the resources allocated to the various activities), as summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2 - Logframe outputs with corresponding evaluation questions and dimensions**

Outputs	Evaluation dimensions	Impact weight
Output 1: A portfolio of high quality, policy-relevant research on poverty reduction in low-income countries is delivered.	Research quality (EQ1)	40%
Output 2: Research funded through the programme draws on diverse disciplines and methodologies, appropriately addresses core cross-cutting issues, and actively involves non-academic stakeholders.	Interdisciplinarity; Gender; Co-production	20%
Output 3: Programme funding is accessible to Southern researchers, and supports individual and institutional capacity to design, conduct and disseminate high-quality social science research on poverty reduction in low-income countries.	North-South partnership	15%
Output 4: Research findings are accessibly communicated and synthesised for broad audiences including potential policy and practice research users working to address international development goals and reduce poverty.	Research uptake (EQ2)	25%

### 3.3 Programme governance

The Joint Fund pools funds from DFID and the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in a 2:1 ratio and is managed by the ESRC using a 4% overhead charge. The Secretariat for the Joint Fund, based at the ESRC, is responsible for delivering research commissioning for the programmes, day-to-day liaison with research investments, and programme support functions.

For most of its lifetime, the Joint Fund has been governed by a *Management Group* of ESRC and DFID officers, responsible for management, administration, and policy development of the Joint Fund and other collaborative research programmes funded by the two organisations (France et al., 2016: 16). In its final stages, the programme has been managed more informally, through one-to-one interactions between senior officers in ESRC and DFID/FCDO.

An *International Advisory Committee* (IAC) was also established in 2010. The role of the IAC was to advise on general strategy to achieve the Joint Fund's overall objectives, acting as a 'critical friend' in relation to the overall shape, academic direction, and policy relevance of the research programme. The IAC would assist the SAT in horizon scanning and, on this basis, propose the themes for each call. It would also provide advice on how to maximise the impact of the fund, in particular with regard to communication, synthesis, and ways to maximise Southern participation. The IAC had a more structured role earlier in the programme concerning specification development, but in the latter stages has not been formally involved.<sup>10</sup>

As is to be expected in the case of organisations with different remits and agendas, it took some time for DFID and ESRC to learn each other's requirements, processes, institutional constraints, and ways of working (one interviewee described it as a 'socialisation process'). Frequent staff turnovers, in the first part of Phase 3, were described as a problem by one informant. This reportedly got better later in the programme.

DFID assessed the progress of the programme against the logframe through annual reviews. This meant that it was at times a challenge for ESRC to position itself as a 'strategic partner' rather than an 'implementing partner'. Overall, however, our analysis shows that the collaboration has been generally positive and fruitful for both parties – an even more commendable achievement when seen with a background of rapid changes for both organisations. This successful outcome seems to have been due more to the positive working relations among individuals involved on both sides, rather than the institutional systems in place.

#### Impact Initiative

A key change in Phase 3 was the establishment, in 2015, of the Impact Initiative (initially known as the Evidence and Policy Directorate<sup>11</sup>). Based at the IDS at the University of Sussex, in collaboration with the Research for Equitable Access and Learning Centre (REAL) at the University of Cambridge, the Impact Initiative was set up to support the Joint Fund as well as the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme (RLO), another collaborative programme of DFID and ESRC.

The Impact Initiative provided direct support to projects and facilitated their collaboration around key themes, as a way to achieve aggregate impact. The Impact Initiative also worked to capture and distil learning around R4D and pathways to impact. It produced a series of outputs including Impact

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<sup>10</sup> The 2016 Joint Fund Evaluation noted that "[a]t the time of the evaluation, the IAC had not recently been called upon (although members were consulted in the development of the evaluation specification), since the Joint Fund was largely in the delivery rather than development stage" (France et al., 2016: 17).

<sup>11</sup> The Evidence and Policy Directorate had taken over the functions of the Strategic Advisory Team (SAT), which was operational from 2010 to 2013. The role of the SAT included devising a strategic plan for research uptake; identifying and establishing effective mechanisms for securing and maximising impact; horizon scanning for key policy windows and opportunities for strategic engagement; and identifying opportunities for research synthesis to respond to specific policy needs. (France et al., 2016: 17).

Stories based on Joint Fund projects; online Learning Guides on impact-relevant themes; as well as a report series (*ESRC DFID Research for Policy and Practice*), which draws together policy relevant learning on sub-themes.

The role of the Impact Initiative in making the Joint Fund “greater as a whole than the sum of its parts” is discussed in [Section 9](#).

### 3.4 Phase 3 Commissioning Process

The current third Phase allocates £26.6 million through several funding windows. The breakdown of funding among the different calls is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3 - Breakdown of Phase 3 allocated budget by funding call**

Name of call	Year of call	Number of grants funded	Full Economic Cost of applications	Mean average value of the grant	The total value of grants within this call
Grant Call 1 (P3C1)	2013	13		£389,544	£5,064,076
Grant Call 2 (P3C2)	2014	11	£100k-£500k	£343,827	£3,782,102
Grant Call 3 (P3C3)	2015	14		£392,006	£5,488,089
Development Frontiers Call 1 – Stage 1	2012	7	Up to £100k	£87,662	£613,634
Frontiers Call 1 – Stage 2	2014-2015	4	Up to £200k	£180,902	£723,608
Frontiers Call 2	2016-2017	17	£200k-£300k	£254,397	£4,324,746
Research Programme Awards	2013	2	Up to £2m	£1,882,932	£3,981,426
Follow-on Funding	2019	7	£50k - £100k <sup>7</sup>	£98,840	£691,878

#### Commissioning process

There has been a conscious effort to ensure diversity in the peer review and assessment panels for all Phase 3 calls. Criteria taken into account for the composition of the panels included relevant thematic expertise, representation of the research users’ community (e.g. NGOs), geographical coverage, as well as gender balance. No fixed quotas were used for these various categories. In

practice, the degree to which commissioning panels included Southern and non-academic actors varied for the different calls.<sup>12</sup>

Funding decisions were guided by academic merit and ‘fit to call’ considerations. Clear pathways to impact, research dissemination and uptake, the involvement of non-academic impact, and potential for capacity-building were all important criteria. Promising proposals could be offered funding subject to addressing several conditions or requests for clarifications.

## Research grants

In Phase 3, the Joint Fund launched three open calls for research grants, previously known as small- and medium-sized grants. Applications had to address one or more of three overarching questions.<sup>9</sup>

1. What factors shape pathways into and out of poverty and people’s experience of these, and how can policy create sustained routes out of extreme poverty in ways that can be replicated and scaled up?<sup>10</sup>
2. What political and institutional conditions are associated with effective poverty reduction and development, and what can domestic and external actors do to promote these conditions?
3. What measures can be taken to reduce the risks and impact of violence and instability on the poorest and increase the effectiveness of peacebuilding, state-building, and wider development interventions in fragile and conflict-affected situations?

The two themes of *structural inequalities* and *measurements and metrics* were cross-cutting and needed to be addressed by all applications.

This was a two-stage call, with a first shortlisting based on outline applications (screened for call requirements, and then sent forward for peer review to the Academic Assessor Group), followed by an invite to shortlisted applicants to submit full proposals. The proportion of funded projects relative to number of applications received varies between 12% (P3C1) and 17%. (P3C3).

Feedback from research grants call panels pointed to a number of concerns, including the low level of applications from non-Anglophone countries, and the need to further clarify the requirement that research has “high potential for impact in Low-Income countries” when assessing proposals related to Middle-Income countries. It was also noted that many proposals needed greater emphasis on engagement with local context in the study sites, as well as a more nuanced understanding of local dynamics. Finally, panels recommended a greater emphasis on capacity-building within call specifications.

## Development Frontiers

The Development Frontiers Research Fund was a new scheme in Phase 3. The aim was to provide a pot of ring-fenced research for innovative, ‘blue skies’ research within the Joint Fund’s general poverty alleviation focus, with the potential of leading to radically change the understanding of important existing development concepts and/or practices. No thematic highlights or direct research questions were identified for this call.

As stated in the Funding Calls, the defining characteristics (and funding pre-requisites) of Development Frontiers research are:

- research that is exploratory and novel (not incremental) in nature;

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<sup>12</sup> For this evaluation, we reviewed a sample of six panel minutes, upon which these considerations are based. Within these panels, non-academic panellists included mostly representatives from NGOs and other non-profit organisations (International Alert, Oxfam, Save the Children, Initiative for Global Development, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature), other donors (USAID) and UN agencies (WHO). Southern Universities represented were the University of Ghana, Makerere University, the University of Cape Town, the University of Nairobi, the African Centre for Technology Studies (Nairobi), South Asian University and the University of Dhaka.

- research that is likely to be ahead of the field on emerging issues;
- research that is likely to produce new thinking/insights and has the potential to generate results that could radically change accepted thinking;
- research whose outcome(s) may be uncertain or which has potential to lead to unexpected insights;
- research that involves novel forms of partnership with and between researchers in developing countries and with non-academic partners and potential research users.

Given the high-risk, high-potential nature of this research, a process of stage-gating was introduced to fund small initial grants (with a maximum value of £100,000), which were to be extended at the midway point if they were found to be promising.

Out of 45 Stage 1 applications submitted, only 7 were recommended for funding. In its feedback, the Commissioning Panel found that, contrary to the intention of the call, few applications took notable risks in their proposals and the majority stayed on relatively safe ground. The panel hypothesised that the emphasis on ‘demonstration of practical development impact’ in previous ESRC/DFID calls may have led the research community out of the habit of thinking in terms of ‘blue sky’ research.<sup>13</sup>

The stage-gating process took place in late 2014 to determine which projects would proceed to the second stage of funding. All Stage 1 grant holders were invited to attend a one-day Innovation and Ideas Development workshop in September 2014. It was made clear that application to Stage 2 was not compulsory, and that Stage 2 was not simply extension funding, but rather a separate grant, albeit one with a clear relation to Stage 1. The stage gate was also not competitive: all proposals for Stage 2 would be assessed on their individual merits and quality, and not in competition with other proposals: only proposals which clearly met the requirements for Stage 2 were to be funded, but there was no quota for how many projects would be supported.

All seven Stage 1 grants submitted proposals for Stage 2. These were sent out to three reviewers, including a Stage 1 panel member who originally assessed that proposal, to build in continuity of assessment. These reviewers provided comments and scores, which were shared with the members of the Stage 2 assessment panel. The panel recommended four Stage 2 applications for funding, and feedback was provided to non-successful applicants.

A second Development Frontier call was launched in late 2016. This call had a number of important differences compared to the first one. Thematically, it had a strong focus on the intersection of poverty, environmental sustainability, and conflict and fragility. The requirement to focus on the intersection between these three issues, rather than each of them separately, was explicitly based on the SDG framework. Geographically, the call introduced a list of countries across three regions (Horn of Africa, West Africa, and South/Southeast Asia).<sup>14</sup> As noted in the 2015-2016 Annual Report, this was a direct consequence of the arrival for the GCRF, which “caused a significant shift in the research landscape, and the shape of the Development Frontiers call therefore needed to be adapted to ensure it was offering something different and valuable in this space”.

The Commissioning Panel for the first call had noted that, while the focus on the call was on innovation, the selection process itself was fairly conventional. In response to this feedback, the second call of Development Frontiers was commissioned through a non-standard process, which consisted of:

<sup>13</sup> The panel also suggested that the stage-gate approach and the low funding limit of Stage 1 may have discouraged researchers from applying.

<sup>14</sup> The countries were Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sao Tome and Principe, and Togo in West Africa, along with the island of Saint Helena; Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan in the Horn of Africa; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, and Timor Leste in Asia.



- an anonymous first review stage, where the Case for Support and Pathways to Impact statements were to be assessed by a panel of experts with no reference to the applicants' identities; and
- a Pitch-to-Peers workshop, where shortlisted applicants were invited to present their proposals to the assessment panel as well as the other applicants (their 'peers'). The PI for each project was given seven minutes to pitch to the panel and other people in the room, and all participants had to give comments and rank each other. Funding decisions were made by a commissioning panel following the assessment workshop.

The Pitch-to-Peers was based on learning from the ESRC Transformative Research Call. Some alterations were made to the model: in particular, while the standard Transformative process remains anonymous throughout, for Development Frontiers, anonymity was lifted in the second stage of the process to allow the strengths of partnerships and Southern inclusion to be taken into consideration by the panel.

Following the 'Pitch-to-Peers' Assessment Workshop and subsequent Commissioning Panel meeting in April 2017, 17 grants were recommended for funding having successfully met the quality threshold and other key criteria for this call.

Feedback on the Pitch-to-Peers method, which we gathered through interviews and online discussion, was mixed, with a prevalence of positive reactions. Most grant holders considered the experience to be interesting and stimulating, and more favourable to Early Career Researchers (ECRs) compared to standard selection processes, as well as genuinely welcoming of innovative (and possibly risky) ideas and approaches. A minority of grant holders expressing more critical views. There was some concern that the Pitch-to-Peers would reward the 'best pitcher' rather than the best proposal. One PI noted that this could lead to bias, for example against female PIs (as it is known that teaching scores for women are consistently lower than for men). It was also noted that the requirement for PIs to be at the pitch workshop in person does not take into account the challenges faced by Southern PIs for travel and visa requirements. Finally, there was some confusion as to how the peers' comments were used and whether they had any influence on the final decision.

## Box 2 - Feedback to the Pitch-to-Peers process, gathered through interviews and online discussion

### Pitch to Peers – feedback from grant holders

"It was a new thing. It was very good – way better than I expected."

"The Pitch-to-Peers was a really interesting (and terrifying!) event. We did a lot of rehearsing."

"Seeing all the other projects was an interesting experience."

"I thought it was interesting - I enjoyed it."

"The application process was diabolical. I have never heard about it with any other grant scheme."

"This is not the Dragon's Den. The standard process is fairer."

"I didn't mind the pitching, and it was good to see other ideas, but ultimately it was a bit opaque how the peer scores were actually used in the final decision."

"We were attracted [to the call] because it seemed genuinely welcoming [of] ECRs, as it was fully anonymous with no track record section. So our idea could stand on its own without us being judged purely on our previous papers and projects."

"The reason we decided to apply to this scheme was because it seemed genuinely open to innovative approaches: there is often a sense with other funding schemes that funders say they are encouraging innovative approaches, but in practice reviewers can often be risk-adverse and [innovative ideas] seldom get funded. Here there was an explicit welcoming of projects [with] a level of risk associated with untried approaches."

"The Pitch-to-Peers was a much more enjoyable experience than we expected. We anticipated a very competitive environment, but actually it seemed very supportive."

## Programme grants

Programme grants were commissioned in 2013 to cover larger programmes of work (up to 3 years and up to £2 million) to provide funding for new, in-depth research on critical but relatively under-researched themes. Two thematic areas were identified: (1) Poverty in Urban Spaces and (2) Disability, Inequality, and Poverty.<sup>15</sup>

Each proposal was reviewed by academics with expertise in the specific research area. Applicants were given the opportunity to respond to peer review comments. The application, peer review comments, and applicants' responses were then forwarded to designated panel members for assessment. Finally, applicants shortlisted by a decision panel were invited for an interview.

Applicants were encouraged to think imaginatively about the appropriate structure for their proposed programme (e.g. having a lead organisation with overall management and financial responsibilities, or a 'hub and spokes' model, or any other model that could help deliver the programme). Partner and co-investigator institutions could include any combination of academic, civil society, and private organisations.

For each thematic area, 16 applications were received, and one was funded. Funded Research Programmes had an inception phase of four months to allow the team to develop a detailed research plan, a partnership framework, an impact plan and Research Uptake Strategy, capacity-building activities, as well as financial and management protocols.

## Follow-on Funding Call

A call for Follow-on funding was launched in late 2019, by invitation only, and comprising two different schemes:

*Area 1 - Impact Enhancement:* Activities that build on and further the existing impact work of Joint Fund grant, to develop policy relevance and research user uptake – open to all Phase 3 projects (PIs / Co-Is). Example of activities that could be funded under this area included: tailoring communication to a non-academic audience through the production of short documents or media products; organising an event in-country which involves a wide range of stakeholders including policymakers and practitioners; coordinating activities to establish networks and relationships with research users; and developing activities to influence policy.

*Area 2 - Cross-Grant Synthesis:* Collaboration between Development Frontiers Cohort 2 researchers to synthesise research findings - only available to PIs or Co-Is from the second Development Frontiers call. Examples within this stream could include: cooperating with other Development Frontiers Call 2 teams on co-authoring publications; liaising with other Development Frontiers Call 2 teams on co-produced outputs to reach a wide range of stakeholders; and liaising with other Development Frontiers research teams to co-organise events.

Seven awards were made from this call in 2020, of which five were for Area 1 and two for Area 2. The Impact Enhancement grants are discussed in more detail in [Section 6](#), and the synthesis grants are discussed in [Section 9](#).

## 3.5 Overview of Phase 3 Portfolio

As a result of the funding calls examined above, the Joint Fund supported a portfolio of 75 research grants which vary in size, theme, duration, and degree of innovation and risk (DFID, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> In addition, the 'Commissioning for the Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge' (Urban ARK) programme was run in conjunction with the Phase3 research programme competition. Urban ARK was funded by DFID and ESRC for a total of £3.3m (£2.2m DFID and £1.1m ESRC). See <https://www.urbanark.org/about-us>.

## Geographic location of lead institutions and partners

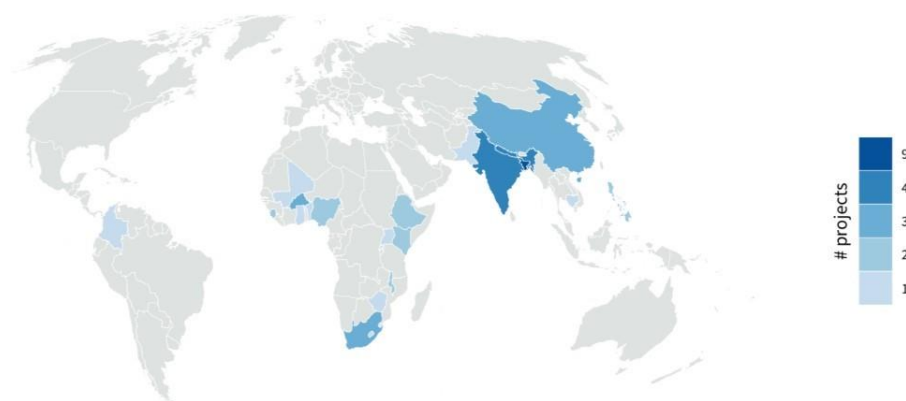
In terms of geographic location, the majority of PIs are based in the UK (62 out of 75). Of the non-UK PIs, 6 are based in the Global North (4 in the United States, and one each in Denmark and Italy), and 7 in the Global South - of which three in Upper Middle-Income countries – (South Africa and Colombia) and four in Lower-Income Countries (Tanzania, Ethiopia and Bangladesh). Most Southern-led grants are in the Development Frontiers scheme (4 out of a total of 7).

**Table 4 - Southern-led Joint Fund projects**

Title	Call	Lead institution	Country
Graduation as Resilience	P3 Frontiers C1S1	BRAC Centre	Bangladesh
Graduation as Resilience Stage 2	P3 Frontiers C1C2	BRAC Centre	Bangladesh
Holding local leaders and local service provision to account: the politics of implementing a local governance performance index	P3C1	Mzumbe University	Tanzania
Armed Group Governance and the Sustainability of Environmental Resources: The Case of the Philippines	P3 Frontiers C2	University of the Andes	Colombia
Shifting In/equality Dynamics in Ethiopia: from Research to Application (SIDERA)	P3 Frontiers C2	Institute for Peace and Security Studies	Ethiopia
Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa	Programmes	University of Cape Town	South Africa
Consuming Urban Poverty Impact Enhancement Project	Follow-on Funding	University of Cape Town	South Africa

50 grants have at least one Southern Co-I. Almost all Frontiers Call 2 grants have at least one Southern Co-I (16 out of 17). This is a much larger proportion than any other call. About 40% of the funding, or around £10million, went to Southern institutions. Bangladesh is the country with the highest number of researchers engaged in Joint Fund Projects (8) as well as the highest number of project engagements (9).

**Figure 2 - Global South countries by number of Joint Fund projects**





## Types of lead institutions

The overarching majority of Lead Institutions are academic institutions. Eight projects are led by other kinds of institutions. Specifically, four projects were led by research institutions (IIED, ODI, Innovations for Poverty Action, and Biodiversity International); two by BRAC, a large international NGO based in Bangladesh; and two by Leonard Cheshire Disability, a UK-based health, and welfare charity.

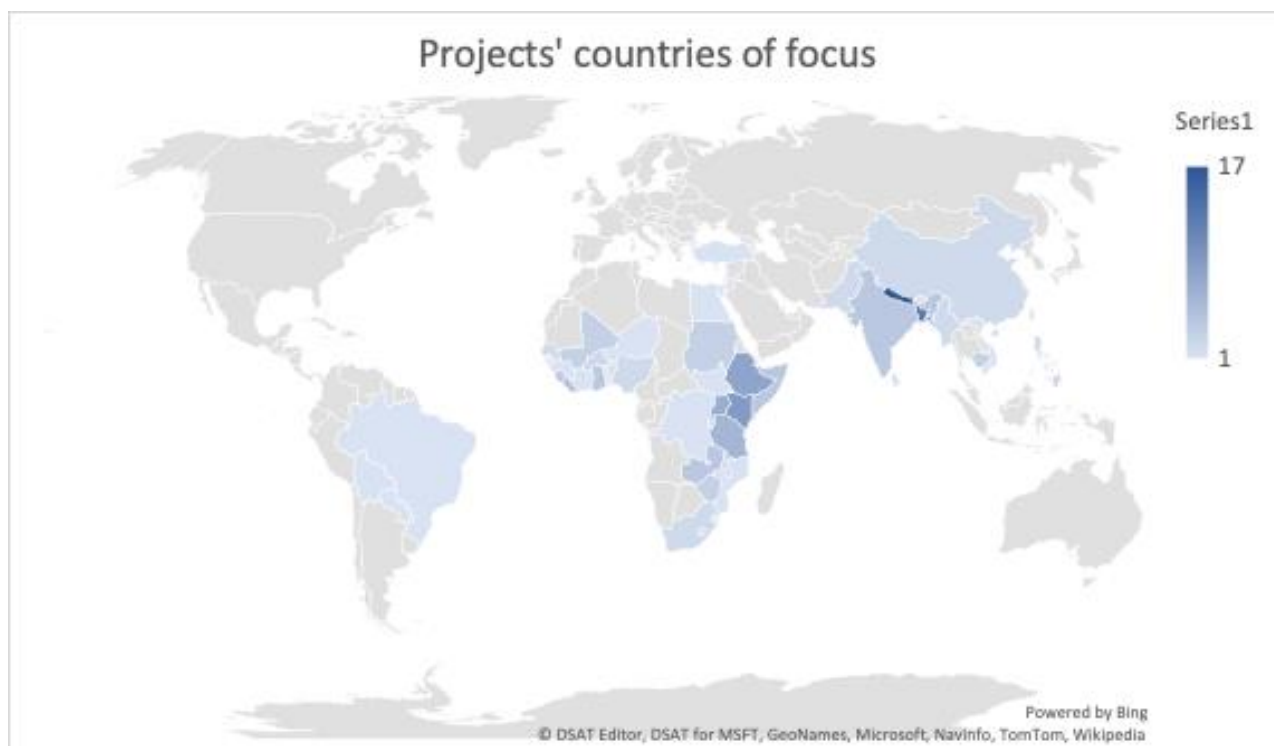
**Table 5 - Phase 3 Lead Institutions other than Universities**

Title	Call	Lead institution	Country
Graduation as Resilience	Frontiers C1S1	BRAC Centre	Bangladesh
Graduation as Resilience Stage 2	Frontiers C1C2	BRAC Centre	Bangladesh
Determinants of Health Care Decisions: Children's Health in Mali	Frontiers C1S1	Innovations for Poverty Action	USA
Understanding the Political and Institutional Conditions for Effective Poverty Reduction for Persons with Disabilities in Liberia	P3C1	Leonard Cheshire Disability	UK
Bridging the Gap: Examining Disability and Development in Four African Countries	Programmes	Leonard Cheshire Disability	UK
Understanding and supporting sustained pathways out of extreme poverty and deprivation	P3C2	Overseas Development Institute (ODI)	UK
How the Urban Poor Define and Measure Food Insecurity and Nutrition	Frontiers C2	International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)	UK
Pathways out of poverty for Burkina Faso's reservoir-dependent communities	Frontiers C2	Biodiversity International	Italy

## Geographical and disciplinary focus of projects

A total of 46 countries are cited as 'countries of focus' in project proposals. Of those, 28 are in Africa, 12 in Asia (excluding the Middle East), 3 in Latin America, and 3 in Europe and the Middle East.

**Figure 3 - Heatmap of countries of focus**



The majority of projects (48, or 64% of the total) have development studies as the primary disciplines. The others are split between economics (6 projects), Political Science and International Studies (5), Human Geography (5), Social Policy (4), Sociology (3), Management (1); Food Science (1); Energy (1), Social Anthropology (1). The majority of projects are multi- or interdisciplinary in focus, as discussed in [Section 8.1](#).

### 3.6 The Joint Fund Phase 3 Theory of Change

The evaluation used a programme-level Theory of Change (ToC) as a starting point to understand the envisaged pathways from Joint Fund research to its intended development impact (see Annex 2). The ToC shows how Joint Fund funding has been used to commission high-quality, relevant social science research to consolidate and expand the evidence base for development.

As agreed by ESRC and FCDO during an online workshop, the ToC demonstrated that the principal pathway to development impact for the Joint Fund intervention is through Research Into Use (or 'instrumental impact' in the ESRC terminology): in other words, Joint Fund research teams engaged potential users and/or ultimate beneficiaries at different stages of the research process (positioning themselves at different points on the co-production spectrum). This involvement is assumed to maximise relevance and utility so that new knowledge and outputs are positioned well to influence decision-makers, who go on to produce better plans/policies, shape development practice more effectively, and make better investment decisions. These improvements should ultimately lead to improvements in the lives of poor people in the Global South.

A secondary pathway to impact for the Joint Fund investment has been to build the capacity of individual researchers through participation in high-quality Joint Fund research, both on academic content and by working in new, impact-oriented ways. Enhanced research capacity – in the Global North and Global South – should also promote sustainability as these researchers go on to deliver more / better social science development research in the future.

Having now completed our assignment, the evaluation team can confirm that the conceptualisation of the Joint Fund programme as specified in the ToC broadly holds. Research Into Use has certainly been the primary way for the Joint Fund to deliver impact, as described in the following sections. The Joint Fund programme ostensibly saw research capacity enhancement as a secondary benefit which was expected to accrue somewhat organically, and correspondingly, the evaluation has found less evidence of significant achievements in this area.

## 4 Research Quality (EQ1)

The first evaluation question (EQ1) looks at *whether, and to which extent, the Joint Fund has met its aim to be a provider of independent, high-quality social science research*. To address this question, we need to be able to define what constitutes ‘research quality’ – in other words, what are the criteria against which performance is assessed. This is not a straightforward task, as the very notion of what counts as ‘good research’ has been the subject of much debate, in academia and beyond, throughout the Joint Fund’s lifetime.

Traditionally, ‘research quality’ has been understood as a combination of innovative thinking, methodological rigour in research design and execution, robustness of findings vis-à-vis evidence, as well as influence on academic debates. This is conventionally measured through a number of standard indicators: publications in peer-reviewed journals, journals’ impact factors (an aggregate measure assessing how much articles published in a given journal are published<sup>16</sup>), as well as citations rates for authors and individual articles (Neylon, 2020).

The value, objectivity, and universal applicability of these concepts and associated metrics have been coming under increased scrutiny over the last few years (Ferretti et al., 2018; Kraemer-Mbula et al., 2020; McKercher, 2019; Neylon, 2020). There are concerns that relying on such limited number of indicators can encourage “gamesmanship practices” by individual researchers and institutions alike. An over-reliance on standard metrics as a criterion for career advancement can also discourage junior researchers from pursuing innovative research, steering them instead towards safe areas that are likely to generate peer-reviewed publications and high levels of citations (McKercher, 2019: 137). Interdisciplinary research – which is inherently riskier - often pays the price. It has also been noted that women in academia are often penalised by such standard metrics of success (Kraemer-Mbula, 2020).<sup>17</sup>

Things are further complicated when we look at the role of research not only as an intellectual value in and of itself but as a vehicle to produce evidence to inform policy and practice. Lively debates are ongoing as to what counts as ‘good evidence’ – and whether this coincides with, or departs from, conventional notions of good academic research (Nutley et al., 2013).

These concerns about traditional measures not being ‘fit for purpose’ have informed initiatives such as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, 2012) and the Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics (2015). New methodologies for research assessment have been developed – including the Research Quality + (RQ+), outlined below in Box 3, launched by the International Development Research Centre in 2012 (Ofir et al., 2016).

<sup>16</sup> A journal’s impact factor is an aggregated measure assessing how much articles published in a given journal are cited, and is measured as the ratio between citations and citable items published. The impact factor is generally considered as a proxy of the importance of a journal in a given field.

<sup>17</sup> Studies have shown that men publish more papers on average than women. Female authors are far less likely to publish single-authored papers, or be listed as the main author in co-authored papers. Women are also less likely to publish in top-rated journals, and female authors attract fewer citations than their male counterpart (Kraemer-Mbula, 2020).

### Box 3 - RQ+ framework

The Research Quality+ (RQ+) framework: dimensions of research impact (Ofir et al, 2016)	
In the RQ+ framework, “Research quality” is seen as having four key dimensions: <i>Integrity</i> , <i>Legitimacy</i> , <i>Importance</i> , and <i>Positioning for use</i> .	
<b>Research Integrity</b>	Technical quality, appropriateness, and rigor of the design and execution of the research (e.g. research design, methodological rigor, the relationship between evidence gathered and conclusions reached and/or claims made).
<b>Research legitimacy</b>	Extent to which research results have been produced by a process that took account of the concerns and insights of relevant stakeholders, and the research process itself was deemed fair and based on the values, concerns, and perspectives of that audience. Legitimacy also considers the potentially negative consequences and outcomes for populations affected by the research, as well as gender-responsiveness, inclusiveness of vulnerable populations, and engagement with local knowledge.
<b>Research importance</b>	Perceived relevance of research processes and products to the needs and priorities of potential users, and the contribution of the research to theory and/or practice. Subdimensions include the originality and relevance of the research.
<b>Positioning for use</b>	Extent to which the research process has been managed, and research products/ outputs prepared in such a way that the probability of use, influence, and impact is enhanced. Subdimensions include knowledge accessibility and sharing, actionability, and timeliness.

### Relevance for the Joint Fund evaluation

These complex debates – only cursorily summarised here – represent an important frame of reference for our evaluation of the Joint Fund, for at least three reasons.

First and foremost, as an ODA-funded scheme, the Joint Fund sees excellent research not (only) as a value in and of itself, but as instrumental to achieving its development impact. In other words, a scenario where ‘excellent research’ that never crosses the wall of academia, and remains within the realm of specialist journals, would not be considered a successful and worthwhile ODA investment.

The second aspect of relevance relates to the focus placed by the Joint Fund on North-South research partnership and Southern-led research ([Section 8.2](#)). Mainstream metrics have been developed in North American and Western European academia, warranting the question of how ‘good research’ may look different, and be measured differently, in other contexts – and whether Northern funders and researchers, through international partnerships, may be preventing the emergence of these more context-relevant notions and metrics (Kraemer-Mbula et al., 2020; Neylon, 2020; Tijssen & Kraemer-Mbula, 2018).

Finally, the Joint Fund actively promotes the involvement of non-academic actors in the research process, not merely as ‘informants’ or ‘users’ but as active participants ([Section 8.3](#)). Non-academic actors do not function within the same systems of performance, incentives, and rewards as their academic counterparts – and their views of what constitutes ‘strong evidence’ may depart significantly from accepted academic conventions. If their involvement is to be genuine, the question of ‘whose reality counts’ (Chambers, 1997) – and, by implication, whose ‘excellence’ counts - cannot be ignored.

## Approach to EQ1

Against this backdrop, we approach EQ1 as follows. We start by reviewing how research quality was conceptualised in the Phase 3 logframe, and how it was operationalised in the different funding calls. Then, using data science, we assess how Joint Fund projects have performed against standard metrics of academic success, intending to identify relevant trends and differences among funding calls as well as with relevance to other characteristics. We give particular attention to the differences that emerge between Northern and Southern institutions and researchers with regard to publications and citations. We also try to relate research quality with impact-orientation of projects, using available proxies.

### 4.1 Research quality in Joint Fund logframe

Output 1 of the Joint Fund logframe for Phase 3 refers specifically to production of research, in terms of both quantity and quality (*A portfolio of high quality, policy-relevant research on poverty reduction in low-income countries is delivered*). This output carries the highest ‘impact weight’ in the logframe, equivalent to 40% of the total.

Output 1 indicators relate to the number of research grants awarded through the Joint Fund, their compliance with contractual terms and conditions, and their successful completion (1.1, 1.2, 1.3), as well as the number of academic publications (1.4). As of April 2020, almost all targets had been exceeded, with a slight shortfall for indicator 1.2 explained by the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table 6 - Progress against the Joint Fund logframe (output 1)**

Indicator	Target	Progress (March 2020)
1.1 Number and quality of grants awarded funding	65	75
1.2 Number of research grants operating in line with contract terms and conditions	95%	91%
1.3 Number of research grants completed to approved timescales	90%	100%
1.4 Number of scheme-funded journal articles, books, or book chapters reported as published or accepted for publication.	225	380

Source: FCDO Joint Fund Review (April 2020)

### 4.2 Research quality in funding calls

While the logframe adopts a rather conventional idea of research quality, measured in terms of grants, publications, and citations, Phase 3 funding calls appear to take a more holistic approach, which closely aligns with the expanded notion of research quality in the RQ+ framework.

The assessment questions related to *Research Integrity* are formulated in similar terms in the three calls. They look at the appropriateness of the approach and method to address the problem, the articulation of the research question, and the clarity and coherence of the research design. In the Development Frontiers calls, this is complemented by the requirement of approaches and methods being ‘innovative’.

With regard to *Research Legitimacy*, all calls have an emphasis on equitable and fair partnerships and gender. The importance of understanding the local research context is also stressed, along with an acknowledgement of the risk of ‘doing harm’ by undermining local research capacity.

Specific criteria are set with regard to *Research Importance*, including the relevance of the proposed research to policymakers and other potential users, the potential to produce new insights, and (particularly in the case of Development Frontiers) push the boundaries of development research and radically change accepted thinking or practice.

Finally, all calls include an assessment of the *Positioning for use* of the research – in recognition that, while research uptake falls outside the sphere of control of researchers, grantees still have the responsibility of formulating well-thought and realistic plans for engagement with potential users, thus maximising the chances for research use and impact.

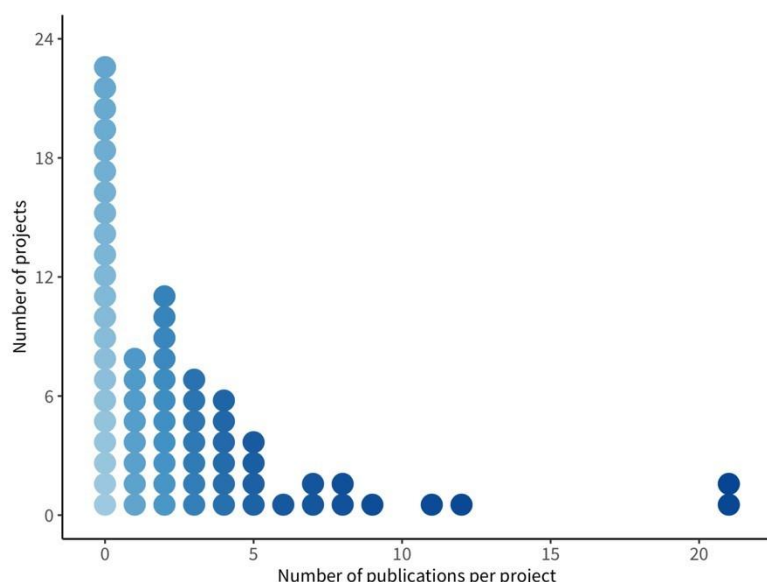
### 4.3 Project-level findings

Using data science, we looked at how Joint Fund projects have performed according to the standard metrics of academic excellence – publications and citations – using a database of 204 publications<sup>18</sup>.

#### Publications

There is significant variation concerning how much Joint Fund projects have published. Out of a total of 68 research projects in Phase 3,<sup>19</sup> we found that about 1/3 did not have any publications yet, and most of the others had between 1 and 9 publications. Two projects performed particularly well with regard to publications, with a total of 21 attributed publications each – namely, the *Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa* project, led by the University of Cape Town, and the *Poverty reduction and regional integration: a comparative analysis of SADC and UNASUR health policies* project, led by the Open University.

Figure 4 - Distribution of publications by project



Source: Dimensions

<sup>18</sup> The discordance with the number of 308 publications in the logframe review is explained by the fact that our database does not include items that have been accepted for publication but not yet published.

<sup>19</sup> This analysis does not include the Follow-on Funding given their different focus and recent start.



**Table 7 – Joint Fund (Phase 3) projects with the highest number of publications**

<i>Grant title</i>	Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa
<i>Funding period</i>	November 2014 – December 2018
<i>Funding call</i>	Programme Grants
<i>Grant value</i>	£2,006,236
<i>Lead institution</i>	University of Cape Town
<i>PI</i>	Vanessa Watson
<i>Main research theme</i>	Food security
<i>Publications</i>	21
<i>North-South co-authorship</i>	3
<i>Authors affiliated with Southern institutions</i>	20
<i>Grant title</i>	Poverty reduction and regional integration: a comparative analysis of SADC and UNASUR health policies
<i>Funding period</i>	March 2014 – December 2015
<i>Funding call</i>	Research Grants (P3C1)
<i>Grant value</i>	£463,233
<i>Lead institution</i>	Open University
<i>PI</i>	Nicola Yeates
<i>Main research theme</i>	Global health
<i>Publications</i>	21
<i>North-South co-authorship</i>	3
<i>Authors affiliated with Southern institutions</i>	12

In the first case (*Governing Food Systems*), most of the publications were uniquely authored by authors affiliated with the lead institutions (University of Cape Town). In the second case (*Poverty reduction and regional integration*), more than half of the publications included Southern authors. However, in both cases, most Southern authors are based in Upper Middle-Income Countries (Argentina, Brazil, Botswana, South Africa), two in Lower Middle-Income Countries (Kenya, Philippines), and none in a Lower-Income Country.

Apart from the *Governing Food Systems* project, only one other Southern-led project has produced academic publications to date. This is the *Shifting In/equality Dynamics in Ethiopia: from Research to Application (SIDERA)* project, led by the Institute for Peace and Security Studies in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). The project has produced two academic articles - only one of which, however, has Southern authors.

This discrepancy between Northern and Southern authorship<sup>20</sup> is confirmed by a wider analysis of co-authored publications across all projects of the Joint Fund portfolio. Out of 173 Phase 3 publications for which authorship affiliation could be determined, 100 were authored uniquely by

<sup>20</sup> Throughout the report, we use the expression *Northern authors/researchers* and *Southern authors/researchers* to refer to individuals affiliated with Universities in the Global North and the Global South respectively, at the time of the project and/or the publication. In case of multiple affiliations, the primary affiliation is considered. We recognise that this categorisation may not necessarily coincide with the researchers' nationality or identity.



researchers from institutions in the Global North; 28 were authored uniquely by researchers from institutions in the Global South, and 45 were co-authored by Northern and Southern researchers.

**Table 8 – Joint Fund Phase 3 publications, by geographical affiliation of authors.**

Funding Call	Global only	North only	Global South	Global North & South co-authorship	All publications
P3C1	26	9	17	52	
P3C2	16	2	10	28	
P3C3	11	0	6	17	
Frontiers C1S1	15	0	2	17	
Frontiers C1S2	14	0	0	14	
Frontiers C2	16	0	5	21	
Programmes	2	17	5	24	
Total	100	28	45	173	

Publication statistics show a predominance of Middle-Income Countries by any measure used (number of publications, authors, or institutional affiliations). South Africa leads in terms of both number of authors and number of publications, although only four institutions are involved (i.e. University of Cape Town; Cape Peninsula University of Technology; Stellenbosch University; and the University of the Western Cape).

**Figure 5 - Countries with the highest number of Joint Fund publications, authors, and institutional affiliations**



While half of the project partnerships in Phase 3 of the Joint Fund are in LICs, these account for less than one-quarter of Southern authorship. Conversely, while only 20% of project partnerships are in Upper Middle-Income Countries, these account for over half of Southern authorships.

## Citations

The Joint Fund logframe uses the number of academic citations as an indicator to measure Outcome 1 (*Evidence generated through the programme adds to and informs the body of research knowledge relevant to poverty reduction in low-income countries*). Through data science, we used the Field Citation Ratio (FCR) measure to assess how successful Joint Fund projects in Phase 3 have been in relation to this indicator.

### Box 4 - Use of Field Citation Rate to assess the academic influence of Joint Fund publications

**Field Citation Rate (FCR)** is a citation-based measure of scientific influence. It is calculated by dividing the number of citations a paper has received by the average number received by documents published in the same year and in the same Fields of Research category.

The FCR is calculated for all publications in Dimensions<sup>21</sup> that are at least 2 years old and were published in 2000 or later. Values are centred around 1.0. Therefore, a publication with a FCR of 1.0 has received exactly the same number of citations as the average, while a paper with an FCR of 2.0 has received twice as many citations as the average for its Fields of Research.

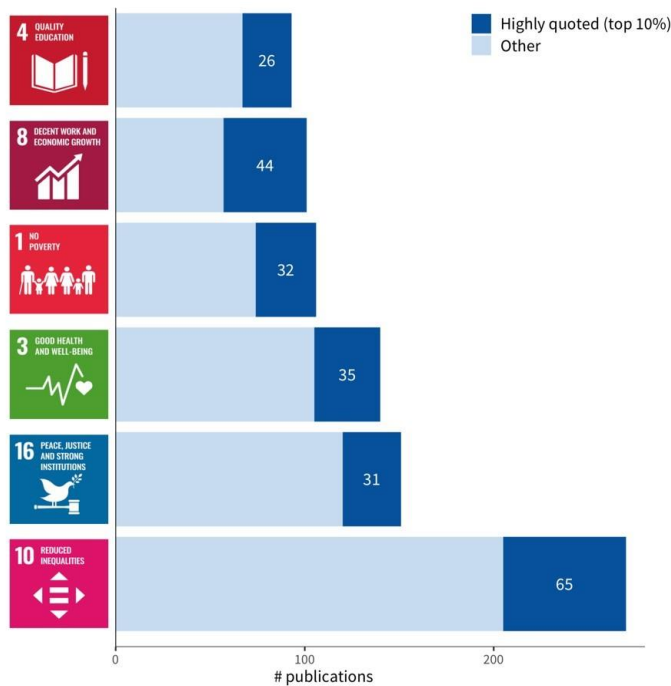
Fields of Research is a classification system covering all areas of research from Arts and Humanities to Science and Engineering. Assigning FoR codes to publications in Dimensions is done automatically using machine learning emulations of the categorisation processes.

Where publications did not directly have a classification in Dimensions, the classification most commonly assigned to other publications linked to the same grant was used. In addition, publications from 2019 and 2020 and not included as there has not been enough time for citations to be accrued.

Publications across the three phases of the program were classified by SDGs (Figure 6). The wide range of SDGs indicates the breadth of research undertaken. The majority of publications are associated with SDG10 (*Reduce inequalities within and among countries*). The same figure also looks at how influential these publications have been from an academic perspective, by identifying – within each SDG theme – the ‘top-quoted’ publications, i.e. the number of publications with a FCR in the top 10%. It appears that Joint Fund publications have been influential across the board, with several articles in the ‘highly quoted’ category for all associated SDGs (more than 20% for each category). In absolute terms, SDG10 shows the highest number of highly influential publications, while SDG8 has the highest share of publications in that category.

<sup>21</sup> Dimensions is the most comprehensive research grants database which links grants to millions of resulting publications, clinical trials and patents (<https://www.dimensions.ai/>).

**Figure 6 - Classification of Joint Fund publications by SDG**

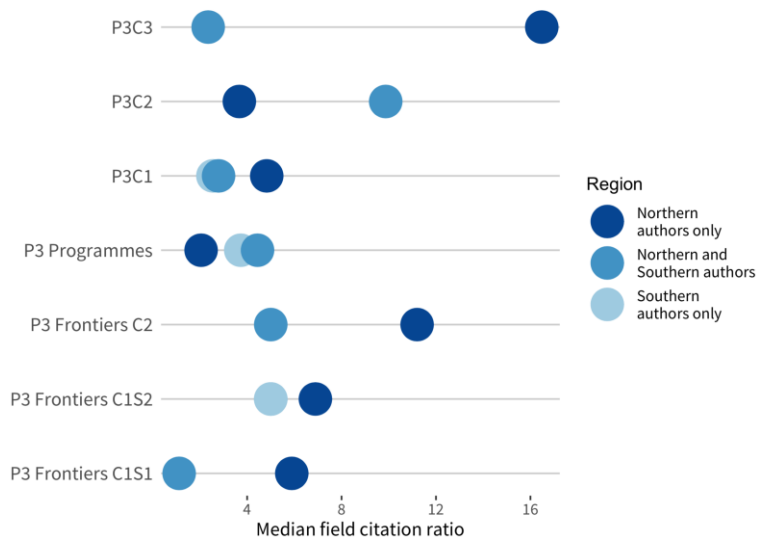


There are a few projects that performed extremely well in terms of citations. 10 publications, produced by 6 projects, have an FCR above 20 (i.e. they received over twenty times more citations than the average in their field). The project *Turning Livelihoods into Rubbish* has the article with the highest FCR (65.87), as well as two additional articles in the top 10 FCR. The project *Governing Food Systems*, in addition to having the highest number of publications in Phase 3, also has two articles in the top 10 FCR. Most of the projects who scored highly with relation to FCR are Research Grants, with a roughly even distribution between calls.

Publications with high FCR are predominantly authored by researchers based in Northern institutions. Southern-based authors are all in Upper-Middle Income Countries (mostly Argentina and South Africa) with the exception of one author affiliated with Makerere University (Uganda).

The overall findings from the data science confirm that publications authored or co-authored by Southern authors are less likely to have high FCR (see figure 7).

**Figure 7 - Median field citation rate by geographical location of author(s)**



**Table 9 – Joint Fund publications with the highest FCR**

FCR	Article title (year)	Project	Funding call	# author s	# Southern authors
65.87	Interrupting the Anthro-po-obScene: Immuno-biopolitics and Depoliticizing Ontologies in the Anthropocene (2018)	Turning livelihoods to rubbish? Assessing the impacts of formalization and technologization of waste management on the urban poor	P3C2	2	0
61.17	Defining a Global Urban Development Agenda (2016)	Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa	Programme	1	1 <sup>22</sup>
59.5	Thinking through heterogeneous infrastructure configurations (2018)	Turning livelihoods to rubbish? Assessing the impacts of formalization and technologization of waste management on the urban poor	P3C3	5	1
38.76	Labor Markets and Poverty in Village Economies (2017)	Basic Entrepreneurship: a means for transforming the economic lives of the poor?	P3C1	5	1
34.75	A Multidimensional Poverty Index for Latin America (2018)	Integrated policies to Reduce Poverty in its Many dimensions	P3C3	4	4
27.69	Changes Over Time in Multidimensional Poverty: Methodology and Results for 34 Countries (2017)	Integrated policies to Reduce Poverty in its Many Dimensions	P3C3	2	0
25.42	Unlocking the mind-trap: Politicising urban theory and practice (2017)	Turning livelihoods to rubbish? Assessing the impacts of formalization and technologization of waste management on the urban poor	P3C2	1	0
21.47	Economic Pathways to Women's Empowerment and Active Citizenship: What Does The Evidence From Bangladesh Tell Us?	Choice, constraints and the gender dynamics of labour markets in Bangladesh	P3C1	1	0
21.12	Pump-Priming Payments for Sustainable Water Services in Rural Africa	Insuring against rural water risk in Africa	Frontiers C1S1	3	0
20.84	Ideas, implementation, and indicators: epistemologies of the post-2015 urban agenda	Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities in Africa	Programme	2	1

<sup>22</sup> While the author of the paper, Susan Parnell, is currently at the University of Bristol, she is Emeritus Professor at the University of Cape Town, where she was the co-founder of the African Centre for Cities. The University of Cape Town is given as the first affiliation in the article.

## Relation between publications, citations, and impact

A fundamental question for this evaluation – and R4D more in general – is whether research excellence, as conventionally measured in academia, can be considered as a predictor of impact. In other words, are projects with high levels of publications and citations more likely to achieve development impact?

Answering this question is methodologically complicated, given the elusive nature of impact. For the purposes of our analysis, we considered the ‘impact-orientation’ of Joint Fund projects using two proxies: successful pitches in the Dragon’s Den event held by the Impact Initiative during the “Power of Partnership” conference in New Delhi, India (December 2018); and projects receiving Follow-on Funding for Impact Enhancement. While the resulting list is not inclusive of all impactful projects in the Joint Fund, it can be reasonably assumed to constitute a sub-set of Joint Fund projects that have, at least, given considerable thought to their impact pathways (although not necessarily achieved impact in practice).

Using data provided by Digital Science, we looked at the number of publications for these projects, as well as their highest FCR where applicable. We found no clear correlation between impact-focus and number of publications and FCR. The outlier is the *Governing Food System* project, which, in addition to having the highest number of publications and the second-highest FCR, also features both of our impact proxies – having received Follow-on Funding and successfully pitched in the Dragon Den’s event.

### Box 5 - Dragon's Den event at the Power of Partnership Conference in New Delhi (December 2018)

#### Dragon’s Den event: fostering collaboration and impact

The Conference “Power of Partnership”, organised by the Impact Initiative, took place in New Delhi in December 2018. During the conference, the Impact Initiative experimented with a new innovative participatory session titled ‘The Dragon’s Den’ (after the BBC TV reality show). Through the Dragon’s Den, grant holders were encouraged and supported to collaborate around joint research uptake activities. The ultimate aim was to form partnerships and present policy actors with relevant knowledge, rather than simply the result of a single study (Shephard, 2020). Researchers were explicitly asked to pitch for support to a policy engagement activity rather than more research.

*“Unlike the TV show our Dragons did not have a pile of cash next to them to directly fund the projects they liked. Instead, the prize on offer was bespoke support from the Impact Initiative to take ideas forward - including resources for events and publications. Our pitchers had just 5 minutes with a bag of optional props and absolutely no PowerPoint.”* (James Georgalakis<sup>16</sup>).

12 groups of researchers presented, involving almost 30 projects from the Joint Fund portfolio. Ideas brought together geographically and thematically diverse research studies around topical policy issues. In all, seven pitches were met with the Dragons’ approval and were supported to develop and deliver their plans.

The feedback and discussion this session produced were just as significant as the individual pitches themselves. The Den format provided a space for reflection on the challenges and opportunities of building coherence and synthesis among projects, and of providing aggregate evidence to shape policy and practice (Georgalakis, 2018).

This method catalysed four ‘research into use’ activities on four topics: youth with disabilities in Ethiopia, motorcycle taxis, urban community resilience, and the future of cities.

**Table 10 – Publications and citations for projects that received additional impact-related funding and support**

Project	Follow On Funding	Dragon's Den Successful pitch	# academic publications	Highest FCR <sup>23</sup>
Rethinking Environment and Development in an Era of Global Norms: Exploring international politics of justice on carbon forestry and hydropower	Y		9	15.8
Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities	Y	Y	22	61.17
At the end of the feeder road: assessing the impact of track construction for motorbike taxis on agrarian development in Liberia	Y	Y	3	1.43
Resilience policymaking in Nepal: giving voice to communities	Y		0	N/A
Negotiating conflict: Environmental violence, economy development and the everyday practices of islanders	Y		3	N/A
Insecurity and uncertainty: marginalised young people's living rights in fragile and conflict-affected situations in Nepal and Ethiopia		Y	1	N/A
Bridging the Gap: Examining Disability and Development in Four African Countries		Y	4	N/A
Understanding the political and institutional conditions for effective poverty reduction for persons with disabilities in Liberia		Y	2	N/A
Energy on the Move: longitudinal perspectives on energy transitions among marginal populations		Y	0	N/A
Development frontiers in crime, livelihoods, and urban poverty in Nigeria (FCLP)		Y	2	N/A
New development frontiers? The role of youth, sport, and cultural interventions		Y	0	N/A
Safe and sustainable cities: human security, migration, and well-being		Y	4	N/A
Supporting the social mobility of trapped populations in very poor urban areas		Y	2	N/A
Security on the Move: Everyday security of IDPs in rapidly growing Somali Cities		Y	2	N/A

<sup>23</sup> FCR is indicated as N/A when there are no corresponding publications, or when the publications are too recent to have accrued citations.

### 3.4 Conclusions

Our analysis concludes that the Joint Fund, as a whole, has produced academic research that is significant both in quantity (as measured by the number of academic publications) and in quality (as measured by rate of citations). As both publications and citations are still accruing, we can expect even more significant results in the years to come. In this sense, we can conclude that the Joint Fund research measured well against the first dimension of the RQ+ framework, i.e. *research integrity* (EQ1.1). However, beyond aggregate figures, we found that there is a significant variation in academic production across Joint Fund projects.

The other dimensions of research quality in the RQ+ framework (*legitimacy* and *importance*) are less easily captured by quantitative indicators. At a macro level, Joint Fund research can be easily mapped against the SDGs, and, in this sense, contributes to global level development debates. However, beyond these macro-level considerations, assessments of legitimacy and importance are reliant on context-specific analysis. From our analysis, it emerges that the extent to which research results have been produced by taking into account the concerns and insights of relevant stakeholders (*legitimacy*) and have been tailored to the needs and priorities of potential users (*importance*) varies significantly across the portfolio.

Joint Fund researchers affiliated with institutions in the Global North have published significantly more compared to their counterparts in the Global South. Only about a quarter of Joint Fund publications are co-authored by researchers in the North and the South. Furthermore, within the generic label of “Global South authorship”, we found that most publications were authored by researchers affiliated with institutions in Middle-Income Countries.

Citation rates also appear significantly higher for Northern academics. This is likely to reflect a geographical bias in citation counts that is increasingly recognised in academia (MacGregor-Fors et al., 2020; Skopec et al., 2020). It points to a possible (albeit not inevitable) trade-off between an emphasis on North-South partnership and Southern-led research, on the one hand, and conventional measures of academic excellence, on the other.

Finally, we found no clear correlation between research quality in a narrow sense (measured through publications and citations) and impact-orientation of projects. This does not mean that projects focused on impact have produced ‘worse’ research, but simply that, within the limited timeframe of any one award, project teams may prioritise prioritised policy- or practice-oriented publications, or other types of engagement and impact-oriented activities, over academic publications.



## 5 Research Uptake (EQ2)

The second evaluation questions (EQ2) asks *to what extent the outputs from the Joint Fund have led to research uptake and the use of findings and recommendations by policymakers and practitioners*. Research uptake includes all the activities that facilitate and contribute to the use of research evidence by policymakers, practitioners, and other development actors. Research uptake activities aim to:

- Support the supply of research by ensuring research questions are relevant through engaging with potential users, communicating research effectively, synthesising and repackaging research for different audiences, etc. Activities in this area typically start with a focus on a particular research project or body of research and consider how it can be communicated.
- Support the demand for research by building the capacity and commitment of research users to access, evaluate, synthesise and use research evidence. Activities in this area typically start with a focus on a particular decision or decision-making process and consider how it can be informed by a range of research evidence (DFID, 2016).

This section of the evaluation report seeks to respond to EQ2 around the extent outputs from Joint Fund Phase 3 led to research uptake and the use of findings and recommendations by policymakers and practitioners.

### 5.1 Research uptake in Joint Fund logframe

The log frame for Phase 3 of the Joint Fund includes one output for research uptake: *“Research findings are accessibly communicated and synthesises for broad audiences including potential policy and practice research users working to address international development goals and reduce poverty.”* The impact weight of this output is 25%.

The four associated indicators are illustrated in the table below and relate to research outputs (e.g. publications, papers, and presentations). Progress to date significantly exceeds targets around this output.

**Table 11 – Logframe indicators related to research uptake**

Indicator(s)	Progress
4.1 Number of conference/working papers produced and workshops/lectures conducted by scheme-funded research grants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 192 working/conference papers have been reported as of March 2019</li> <li>• Significantly exceeds target</li> </ul>
4.2 Number of outputs targeting non-academic audiences reported by research grants, by type.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 131 non-academic publications reported by grant-holding researchers</li> <li>• Over 370 additional non-academic outputs</li> <li>• Significantly exceeds target</li> </ul>
4.3 Number of outputs produced at programme level which make learning from more than one Joint Fund grant accessible to potential research users, by type.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 outputs produced in total</li> <li>• Significantly exceeds target</li> </ul>
4.4 Number of research grants taking part in events and activities organised at a programme level which are designed to facilitate knowledge exchange with potential research users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers from 69 Phase 3 grants have participated in activities designed to foster knowledge exchange</li> <li>• Achieved target</li> </ul>

Source: Annual Review 2020



The underlying assumption is that research outputs are ‘picked up’ by non-researchers, ideally people who can use the findings to improve policies, practices, or investment decisions in the real world. As a result, it is important to note that the above output indicators only tell part of the story of research uptake. Consultation with Joint Fund holders suggests that in addition to creating research outputs, additional steps need to be taken to maximise the likelihood of impact.

## 5.2 Project-level findings

All Joint Fund projects were required to submit a ‘Pathway to Impact’ document. A review of these documents across the Joint Fund Phase 3 portfolio shows a great diversity in terms of depth and granularity of the envisaged impact pathways.

Joint Fund grant holders report numerous mechanisms for encouraging research uptake, as summarised in Table 12.

**Table 12 - Mechanisms for impact notes in Pathways to Impact statements in 2020 Progress reports**

Type of output	Number of references in Pathways to Impact updates
Journal article	35
Policy brief	27
Conference or symposium (includes attending, giving a paper, or hosting)	20
Workshop or workshop series	12
Blog or article	9
Seminar, Roundtable, or webinar	9
Invitation to advise or act as an expert	6
Website	5
Film	4
How-to guide or toolkit	4

Source: Joint Fund 2020 Phase 3 Progress reports. Note: terminology has been inconsistent so judgement has been used to identify the most appropriate typology of output

Textual analysis of these Pathways to Impact data triangulated with our qualitative evaluation activities suggests that peer-reviewed **journal articles** remain the main anticipated output for Joint Funded projects with an expectation they contribute to research uptake. PIs and Co-Is suggest that the primary audience for peer-reviewed journal articles is other academics and there is some recognition that published articles do little on their own to support research uptake in isolation. Nevertheless, they remain the most frequently mentioned output in Pathways to Impact and reports. Some PIs, COIs, and partners note that Journal Articles require other complementary mechanisms (outputs and actions) employed to encourage uptake. In the online qualitative discussion, one PI noted that, while journal articles are primarily aimed at the academic community, other actors (e.g. United Nations agencies) also give significant weight to them.

The review of 2020 progress updates indicates that **policy briefs** are most commonly cited as a pathway to impact. There is a mixed level of detail in the progress reports about the exact audience of these policy briefs, who they were accessed by, and how they were disseminated. An average of 2.2 policy briefs per project were noted in the 2020 project updates. Our consultation with PIs and Co-Is suggests that research teams view policy briefs as an output as a valid pathway to impact although little detail has been given about how these briefs have been disseminated or how they have been received.

Frequently-used channels of dissemination are **conferences, workshops, seminars**, and other events aimed at bringing stakeholders together. The purpose of these events ranges from dissemination of research findings to facilitating networks and connections among different stakeholders. Pathways to Impact update reports do not consistently specify whether the audience for an event was academic, policy-focused, or some other category. Neither do they specify the numbers of people in attendance at these events. However, the number of conferences, workshops and seminar events attended is significant, which would suggest that PIs recognise and value the role that these fora play in maximising research uptake.

Workshops and similar events are held at different points in the research cycle and can serve more than one purpose. They can serve as an opportunity for non-academic stakeholders to both “adopt” the research process, “inform” the research process, and/or “equip” them with data that can inform future thinking. In our review, we particularly found examples of workshops and events being used as an opportunity to sensitise stakeholders (at various stages of the research process); as a dissemination channel and findings validator (in the final stages of research), and/or as a training space to introduce partners and other stakeholders to new methods and tools to be used during the research process. This indicates that research uptake is not any “one thing”, and highlights the importance of spaces to bring together academics and non-academics to contribute to a shared language.

Some Joint Fund projects used **creative tools** (e.g. visual arts, multimedia) to engage their audiences and encourage research uptake. Consulted PIs and Co-Is report that multi-media outputs are especially impactful for sensitising audiences and encouraging them to find out more. Several projects make use of video and photography as more creative avenues to enhance their pathways to impact.

#### Box 6 – Use of visual art to enhance research uptake and impact

##### A creative turn - using visual arts for research dissemination and uptake

The Joint Fund project “Blood Bricks”, led by Royal Holloway (University of London), organised a workshop in 2018 to reflect on the ‘creative turn’ in social sciences to establish a different relation between research and creative practices, e.g. art, creative writing, theatre, photography, and filmmaking. These include the incorporation of creative practitioners as part of the research team and process, and the use of creative practices (video, street theatre, photography) to conduct participatory research.

The Blood Bricks project itself represented an example of this creative turn. The project focused on the inter-linkages between climate changes, structural inequalities, and vulnerability to trafficking in modern slavery. The research is based in Cambodia, a country particularly vulnerable to climate change which also has one of the highest incidences of modern slavery in the world. The research team included photographer Thomas Cristoforetti, co-founder of RUOM, a collective of journalists specializing in social reportage throughout Asia.

Among the project’s outputs is a photo exhibition “Blood Bricks: Untold Stories of Modern Slavery and Climate Change from Cambodia”, accompanied by an online video album. The exhibition was launched in October 2018 in London, in concomitance with the Anti-slavery Day, to raise awareness on modern slavery, and address the knowledge gap of its links to climate change.

With participants’ permission, the exhibit told the life stories of debt-bonded brick workers in Phnom Penh. The exhibition and report launch gained widespread media coverage, in the UK and Cambodia, as well as internationally. Photographs provided to media outlets were stripped of all the meta-data so that the locations could not be identified from the GPS coordinates of the files.

Many projects engaged directly with communities and have community-based pathways to impact. In some cases, the project is specifically aimed at bridging the gap between communities' experiences and perspective and national-level decision-making. Community engagement as an impact enabler is discussed in greater detail in [Section 8.3](#).

Looking across the 2020 update reports, it is clear that the Joint Fund is typically producing forms of research uptake that sit upstream in the outcome-oriented section of the Theory of Change (as per our Theory of Change illustrated below). This mirrors the activities and results typically seen for similar R4D programmes, such as ESPA, CARIAA, and more recently GCRF.

The data gathered as part of this evaluation also confirm what the R4D community has known for some time: that 'research uptake' is not a linear process whereby research is published and separately, later picked up and "used" by a non-academic actor such as a decision-maker or policymaker. Rather, Joint Fund research is achieving influence via non-linear and iterative pathways as part of a more of a synergistic process – within which relationships between people and institutions become the medium for "uptake" rather than more traditional research outputs.

### Box 7 - Project case-study

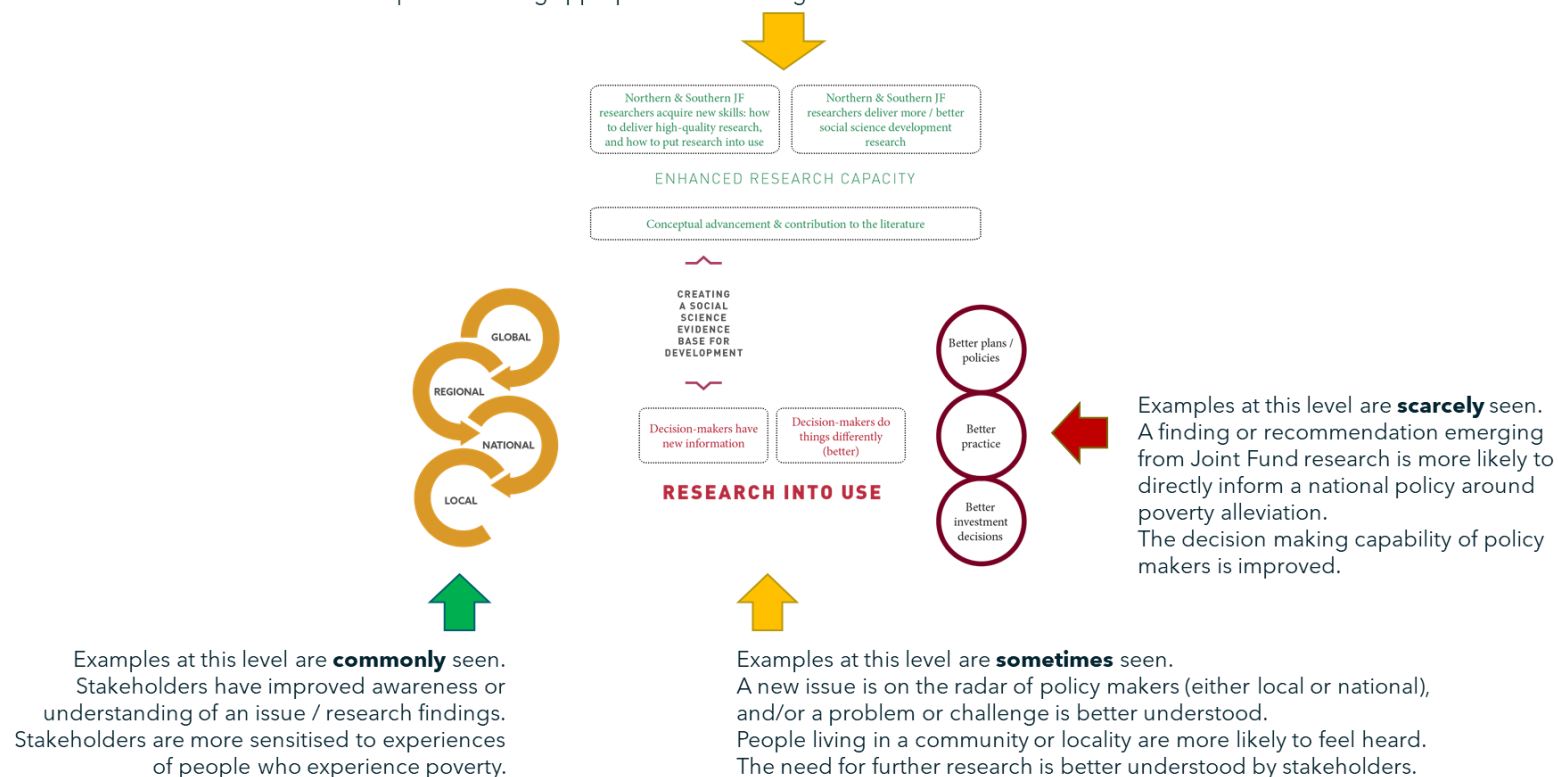
#### **Building public engagement for parliamentary effectiveness**

The project *Parliamentary effectiveness: public engagement for poverty reduction in Bangladesh and Ethiopia* demonstrates the complexity of assessing research uptake in linear terms. The project built on previous projects that had made recommendations for Parliaments – both national and sub-national – about a range of issues, such as improving the representation and experience of women in parliaments and enhancing public engagement in political institutions. Taking a 'big picture' view, the project saw its role as building the networks and capacity of 'change agents' - such as researchers, civil society, artists and politicians.

To some extent, the Joint Fund reporting formats may create the impression that "more is more", i.e. the higher the number of outputs, the more uptake is likely. Our analysis, however, suggests a much more fluid approach to successful uptake, with a blend of research outputs together with targeted activities.

**Figure 8 - The prevalence of outcomes related to research uptake in relation to the Theory of Change**

Examples at this level are **sometimes** seen.  
Research communities are more likely to learn new ways of approaching a research project.  
The research community are more likely to develop projects with targeted research questions using appropriate methodologies.



## Preconditions for research uptake

Consultation suggests that for policy influence to be successful, certain preconditions or contexts should not be taken for granted. The most commonly cited precondition mentioned by Phase 3 grant holders was **timing**. For example, if local elections are taking place, politicians are potentially more open to engaging with work that engages with communities.

Several grant holders also noted the potential power of people, networks and collective influence in maximising uptake. It was noted that so much of what is ‘used’ depends on factors beyond the direct control of the research team (“right place, right time”). Much of the uptake process happens ‘behind the scenes, through less formalised networks.

**“Policy influencing is an art that researchers aren’t necessarily always the best placed to address”**  
(Online discussion participant)

A key barrier to uptake noted amongst Phase 3 grant holders is ‘unpopular’ or ‘critical’ research findings, which are unpalatable for some stakeholders and limits the extent to which research is taken up.

For all these reasons, authoritarian and fragile contexts pose particular challenges to research uptake. Grantholders working in such contexts have noted the particular challenges of research uptake. The mainstream prescriptions do not easily apply, and can even backfire: researchers need to stay, to a certain extent, ‘under the radar’ of the government if it wants to engage with the people and organisations who would activate change.

**“I would like to see more guidance about impact in authoritarian contexts. I don’t think there’s enough acknowledgement of the challenges that researchers face in these contexts”** (Katherine Brickell, PI).

## Beyond policy influencing

Policy uptake is the prevalent pathway to impact envisaged by Joint Fund projects. For many of the PIs and Co-Is we consulted, there is an aspiration for their research to reach and influence “policymakers”. However, both our desk-based research (proposals, progress reports, etc) and fieldwork (survey, interviews, case studies, online qual) suggest that the term “policymakers” is used liberally with little specificity of which institution (e.g. local, regional or national government) or which policy they seek to influence. The aspiration to influence policymakers is somewhat elusive. Several PIs and Co-Is recognise that for their work to be impactful, there are agents for change who are not necessarily policymakers. These may include NGOs, CSOs, media, communities, and practitioners.

In several cases, the research teams recognised the importance of equipping NGOs and other influential groups so that they can “own” the research and align it with their agenda. Consultation also suggests that research teams often perceive influence and change processes to be more meaningful at the local, community, or personal levels.

Given the ubiquitous focus on the term “policymaker” in the Joint Fund application forms with little specificity, there appears to be an artificial hierarchy of impact where “policy impact” is at the top, being the most aspirational version of uptake. Yet few application forms are specific about which policy they specifically wish to influence; which decisionmakers they aim to reach; and whether their goal is to influence at community, local, regional, national, or internationally.

This lack of specificity suggests that policy influence in its broadest sense is the goal. However, our evaluation findings suggest that some of the most profound impacts have taken place at community level, through capacity building of NGOs, shifts in approaches of civil society organisations, and equipping local actors to “tell their story, their way”.

## 5.3 Conclusions

Whilst the Joint Fund exceeded all logframe targets in relation to research uptake, our analysis finds that projects typically cite the production of policy briefs and participation in events when asked to describe uptake activities – with a mixed (often low) levels of detail on the intended audience of these products/activities and how they have been received. It also confirms what the R4D community has known for some time: that effective research uptake is not a linear process whereby research is published and separately, later picked up and used by a non-academic actor such as a decision-maker or policymaker. Rather, Joint Fund research is achieving influence via non-linear and iterative pathways as part of a more of a synergistic process – within which relationships between people and institutions become the medium for “uptake” rather than more traditional research outputs.

The current Joint Fund progress reporting format assumes that research outputs (including non-academic outputs) have a chance of being picked up by potential research users. This can lead to the impression that “more is more” i.e. the higher the number of outputs, the more uptake is likely. Our analysis, however, suggests a variety of output types contribute to more successful uptake, whereby a blend of research outputs are produced with the end-user in mind. For similar initiatives moving forward, ESRC and FCDO might helpfully adapt progress reporting to encourage grant holders to place value in building relationships with research users.

Linked to this point, where intended audiences are identified, we observe a strong focus on policy-makers as the main intended audience for research uptake amongst researchers. Yet it is often not clear who such policy-makers are, how they will be identified, and their preferred mechanism for engaging with research. Our evaluation suggests that some of the best examples of research uptake occur when the audience(s) have been very carefully identified. ESRC and FCDO should beware an overfocus on policymakers and policy-oriented pathways in messaging around research uptake for similar initiatives in the future to avoid unintentionally constraining the ‘research into use’ ambitions amongst research teams.



## 6 Development Impact (EQ3)

The Joint Fund logframe for Phase 3 expressed the impact of the programme as “Evidence generated through the programme adding to and informing the body of research knowledge relevant to poverty reduction in low-income countries.

The third evaluation question (EQ3) focuses on the impact achieved by Joint Fund research: *“Is there evidence that the Joint Fund has achieved the intended impact, namely that ‘Policy and practice to reduce poverty in low-income countries are demonstrably informed by the programme-generated evidence base’? If so, how significant has this been?”*

Assessing the development impact of research is notoriously difficult, for a number of reasons. The very notion of impact is elusive and polysemantic. A widely used term both in international development and in academia, the term has very different meanings in these two communities. Like previous collaborations between DFID and ESRC (see for example ESPA, 2018), the Joint Fund found itself at the crossroads of these different meanings and implications.

It is now generally recognised that research achieves impact – when it does at all – through complex and iterative pathways, which depend on several conditions and variables that are outside the sphere of control of research teams and funders, and with timelines that are typically longer than the average research project.

Acknowledging these challenges, we address EQ3 as follows. First, we look at how impact was envisaged and planned for at the programme level, and in particular in the Phase 3 funding calls. Second, we look at how impact was conceptualised and planned for by individual projects, through a portfolio-wide review of ‘Pathways to Impact’ documents. Third, we look at examples of project-level impact, drawing on insights gained through our engagement with Joint Fund researchers (interviews, online survey, and online qualitative discussion), our review of project reports, as well as materials produced by the Impact Initiative, e.g. Impact Stories. Finally, in line with the learning focus of the evaluation, we highlight key lessons emerging from the Joint Fund with reference to the development impact of research.

**“The understanding of impact in academia has evolved significantly over the last few years. Impact used to be seen as little more than glorified comms” (James Georgalakis, Director of Communication and Impact, Institute for Development Studies / The Impact Initiative)**

### 6.1 Impact in Phase 3 funding calls

All the Phase 3 funding calls state, in similar terms, the expectation that researchers will have identified the potential impacts of their research on policy and practice and will actively consider how these can be maximised and developed. Applicants are reminded that “outreach and engagement activities in themselves do not constitute impact.”

The degree to which research is expected to directly lead to impact varies depending on the call. For example, in the case of Development Frontiers, it is recognised “that innovative research that pushes the boundaries of current research and practice may encounter specific challenges in achieving impact”. This points to the fact that there may be trade-offs (at least in the short term) between pioneering methodological and theoretical innovation and achieving concrete and demonstrable impact. The fact that the Development Frontiers research is recognised as ‘high risk’ includes the risk of it not actually leading to demonstrable impact. This, however, does not exempt applicants from thinking about possible impact and having a plan to maximise it, within the limits of the specific project.

A key learning of R4D is that impact requires dedicated resources. All the funding calls recommend that at least 10 per cent of the total budget is dedicated to impact activities.

## Follow-on Funding for Impact Enhancement

In the last stage of Phase 3, a dedicated call was launched to provide previously funded Joint Fund projects with follow-on funding for impact enhancement. This model of follow-on funding to support the uptake and ‘positioning for use’ of previous research had been used in other ESRC-DFID collaborations such as the Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme.

Application to the call was open to PIs and CoIs from previous Joint Fund projects. Examples of fundable activities “to develop policy relevance and research user uptake” included “tailoring communication to a non-academic audience through the production of short documents or media products; organising an event in-country which involves a wide range of stakeholders including policy-makers and practitioners; coordinating activities to establish networks and relationships with research users; developing activities to influence policy”.

Selection criteria included quality and appropriateness of the proposed activities; link with original research; analysis of stakeholders and potential research users; and impact pathways and plans for tracking impact. From a review of the minutes of the panel, it emerges that key considerations for funding have been the innovative nature of projects; the natural progression from the original research; clearly articulated pathways to impact; and strong buy-in from local stakeholders. Five Impact Enhancement projects were funded, three of them as a follow-up from Development Frontiers projects.

**Table 13 - Follow-on Funding ‘Impact Enhancement’ awards**

Impact Enhancement Follow-on Funding	Original grant	Funding call for original grant	Lead institution
Redefining Development and the Environment in an Era of Global Norms III: Putting norms to work in Sudan	Rethinking Environment and Development in an Era of Global Norms: Exploring international politics of justice on carbon forestry and hydropower	Frontiers C1S2	University of East Anglia
Consuming Urban Poverty Impact Enhancement Project	Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities	Programmes	University of Cape Town
Finding traction: using an 'upgrading footpaths to motorcycle taxi accessible tracks' construction and maintenance manual to increase impact and reach	At the end of the feeder road: assessing the impact of track construction for motorbike taxis on agrarian development in Liberia	P3C2	Swansea University
The Next Frontier of Climate Policy: Joining the Dots of Bricks, Trade and Embodied Emissions from Cambodia and Bangladesh to the UK	Blood Bricks: Examining the Climate Change-Modern Slavery Nexus in the Cambodian Construction Industry	Frontiers C2	Royal Holloway (University of London)
Earthquake resilience in Nepal: Impact enhancement through inter-community learning and a TV documentary <i>[project could not proceed due to Covid-19]</i>	Resilience policymaking in Nepal: giving voice to communities	Frontiers C2	University of Sheffield

A requirement was that all the Follow-on Funding projects had to be completed by March 31st, 2021 (date on which the Joint Fund would come to an end), with no exception allowed. As the lifetime of the projects nearly completely overlapped with the Covid-19 pandemic, this has created problems, as recognised in the 2020 DFID Review. ESRC kept close communication with Follow-On Funding grant holders throughout the year to establish the effect that Covid-19 and related restrictions on their projects. While many projects reported issues related to their inability to travel, most were able to adapt their methodology to working remotely. One project (*Earthquake resilience in Nepal*) was unable to proceed given the travel restrictions and the decision was therefore taken to terminate the grant.

## 6.2 To what extent have Joint Fund projects achieved impact?

The 2020 DFID review recognises the difficulty of assessing the impact of Joint Fund projects for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Joint Fund supports fundamental (as well as applied) research, where impact is less direct and can be seen only over long timelines. The portfolio is also very wide and “the diversity of sectors and topics addressed by the Joint Fund research portfolio makes it difficult to provide an overview of impact.” The evaluation team would add that the reporting and oversight processes for the Joint Fund were relatively light-touch and there is no ongoing independent challenge or corroboration in relation to the self-reported results. This constrains the portfolio-wide dataset on which this evaluation has been able to draw and limits the evaluation team’s understanding to the relatively small number of project examples where there has been direct engagement and a degree of verification.

For the evaluation, these challenges were compounded by the inability (largely due to the COvid-19 pandemic) to engage with a representative sample of projects, having to rely, instead, on a largely self-selected cross-sections of projects. We recognise that this is likely to have brought to our attention projects that were more impact-orientated, and/or further ahead in their impact pathway, compared to the average across the portfolio. These challenges notwithstanding, we could several promising examples of impact in the Joint Fund portfolio – several of which are highlighted in case-study boxes, as well as in the Learning Stories at the end of the report.

### Box 8 – Findings from the online survey

#### How has your project achieved impact? Findings from the online survey

The online survey asked respondents to state how their projects intended to achieve impact. The main ways in which research sought to achieve impact were influencing policies (86%), influencing attitudes, mindsets, and behaviours (78%), and influencing development practice (69%).

In terms of impact achievement, half of respondents stated that their project had achieved or exceeded their intended development impact, while an additional 30% claimed that some initial signs of impact could be seen, with more expected in the future. Only 6% stated that it is too soon to see impact.

This is an important finding, particularly in light of the common refrain that ‘impact takes time’ and can rarely be seen within the timeframe of any one research project. Albeit with important caveats (i.e. self-reported impact, very small sample of respondents), these responses go to show that when realistic impact pathways are identified from the outset, some signs of development impact can be seen in a relatively short timeframe.

When asked about the main barriers to achieving impact, respondents mentioned the political situation in the country as the main barrier (58%), followed by insufficient time (39%) and insufficient funding for impact activities (33%).

## Box 9 – Project case-study

### Joint Fund projects working together to influence a new National Youth Policy in Ethiopia

Joint Fund researchers from two projects have engaged with the Government of Ethiopia to take into account the experience of marginalised young people in their new National Youth Policy. The collaboration between the two projects was one of the results of the Dragon's Den event at the "Power of Partnership" Conference organised by the Impact Initiative in New Delhi in December 2018. On this basis, and with support from the Impact Initiative, the Joint Fund researchers organised a National Youth Seminar in Addis Ababa in March 2019. This was particularly timely, as the newly elected Ethiopian Government was on the verge of revising their National Youth Policy, which had been in effect for 15 years.

The event provided an opportunity for marginalised youth to be listened to as part of this process. Ahead of the event, the Impact Initiative prepared stories describing barriers to education for disabled youth, and the experience of being youth and disabled in Addis, to hand out to participants on arrival. A total of 46 youth and more than 50 adults participated in the event. Youth seminar participants were composed of street-connected youth, youth with disabilities, and youth in conflict with the law. Adult participants included ministry officials, NGO representatives, and local researchers.

The ESRC-DFID grant holders subsequently prepared policy recommendations arising from the event and submitted these to the Ministry.

#### Participating projects

Insecurity and uncertainty: marginalised youth living rights in fragile and conflict-affected situations in Nepal and Ethiopia (also known as Youth Uncertainty Rights World Research)

PI: Vicky Johnson

Lead Institution: University of Brighton

Bridging the Gap: Examining Disability and Development in Four African Countries

PI: Nora Groce

Lead Institution: Leonard Cheshire Disability

## Engaging with DFID / FCDO as a research user

A number of grant holders said they were hoping to engage with FCDO to promote the uptake of their research findings, but had found this to be very difficult or impossible – particularly at headquarters' level. This was noted as a source of real frustration in several cases. This is addressed by the DFID 2020 Review – which identifies the twin challenges of a very wide geographic and thematic portfolio as limitations in FCDO being engaged with research uptake:

*"the geography of research does not map exclusively to DFID's bilateral interests. While grant holders have presented findings to DFID or FCO staff (in the UK and in-country offices), the JF is conceived as a global public good, aimed at a diverse range of national and international audiences. Most JF projects are in countries in DFID's bilateral programme (and all countries with five+ JF projects have a DFID country office) and grant holders have engaged with DFID Country Offices or UK Embassies in Nepal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda and Cambodia: but a number of projects, covering both applied and fundamental research, focus on regions (Latin America, East Asia or Francophone west Africa) where DFID has limited presence, making it harder to identify influence on policy. Finally, for DFID research programmes with a particular sectoral focus, staff of DFID's Research and Evidence Division (RED) would engage directly with DFID counterparts in policy or country teams working on that sector. This is not possible with the JF, which involves 75 projects working in 35 countries, many with no DFID country office, and covering a diverse range of specialisms from education through health, livelihoods, social protection, gender, water and sanitation, torture, and so on" (DFID 2020 review).*

It appears that there is an implicit assumption on the part of applicants that they will have ‘access’ to in-country FCDO staff as a route to potential impact and if this is not the case for specific, immovable reasons, it might be helpful for FCDO staff to communicate with grant holders openly on these issues when welcoming new investments into the portfolio.

### Box 10 – Project case-study

#### Using Follow-on Funding to influence policy on urban food systems

The Joint Fund project “Governing Food Systems to Alleviate Poverty in Secondary Cities” (a.k.a. “Consuming Urban Poverty”), led by the University of Cape Town, sought to alleviate poverty through the governance of food systems in secondary cities in Africa. While the project was able to demonstrate some impact on local government officials’ attitudes towards urban food systems, and engage in the shaping of global urban food policies and programmes, the project team realised that to increase commitment to addressing urban food issues in the interest of poverty alleviation it was essential to target external actors who play a pivotal role in shaping local government policy and planning.

Follow-on funding from the Joint Fund was used to address three key limitations to research, uptake, and policy influence. The work packages of the Follow-on Funding were specifically designed to address three key limitations that emerged from the main grant’s research.

Limitations emerged during main grant	Work packages in Follow-On Funding
1. <i>Deeply entrenched thinking from planners which hindered pro-poor food planning</i> : Planners had no sense of how to act differently and had limited formal training opportunities.	1. <i>Capacity enhancement of urban planners and professionals</i> (through podcast, website, teaching guide)
2. <i>Limited engagement in food issues by powerful informal economy advocacy groups</i> .	2. <i>Getting food on the informal sector advocacy agenda</i> , through production and dissemination of four policy briefs on the role of food in the informal sector and possible points for advocacy.
3. <i>Strong bias against informality amongst policymakers</i> – also reflected in the global discourses on urban food governance as found in the SDGs, New Urban Agenda and documents from various UN Agencies.	3. <i>Shifting the global discourse to recognise the importance of informality</i> , through strategic engagement with key actors shaping discourse and policy direction.

### Levels of impact

An overview of the Pathways to Impact envisaged by research teams at the design stage show that most projects envisage their impact at multiple, varying levels (local, national, regional, global), but it is often difficult to determine which level is prioritised. Our qualitative analysis (reflected in the Impact Stories) found mostly (albeit not exclusively) examples of local level impact, though these varied in form and often connected to or facilitated impact at other levels:

- *Direct change in communities*. For example, the project *At the end of the feeder road* in Liberia (Learning Story 3) empowered communities to take on track construction and maintenance, in turn leading to several spin-off local businesses related to track and motorcycle maintenance. In Burkina Faso, the project *Pathways out of poverty* (Learning Story 5) supported stakeholders to come together to support the effective management of natural resources. In some cases, these interventions can be seen as pilots or ‘proofs of concept’ to be replicated and scaled up.



- *Providing evidence that can inform national-level policies.* For example, the project *At the end of the feeder road*, through its local-level work with local communities in Liberia, provided evidence for international donor agencies that investments in track development can make a difference in supporting motorcycle taxi business, strengthening the case for further track developments in Liberia as well as other parts of Africa.
- *Connecting local communities with national-level decision-making.* For example, in the project *Participatory video project in Nepal* (Learning Story 4), communities were empowered to present their perspectives to national level decision-makers, many of whom had never been to remote rural villages and were not aware of how they had been affected by the earthquake.

While local level impact is, in many ways, the easiest to observe and to document, it can also raise questions in terms of Value for Money for R4D investments. This is an important question for future R4D programmes to pose in the design stage: how important is the scalability and replicability of findings? If this is a priority, it should be reflected in the commissioning process (as it may well exclude projects that may otherwise be eligible), as well as guidance and impact support given to projects.

Relatedly, the experience of the Joint Fund also shows that wider impact (which goes beyond the local level) is far more likely to occur when different projects and research streams come together. Ultimately, addressing the great development challenges of our time – and thus justifying the use of Official Development Assistance (ODA) funds for research – requires aggregation of research findings around a ‘minimum common denominator’ that can in turn be used to inform policy and practice. As discussed in [Section 9](#), a ‘programme approach’ can help overcome some of the tensions and trade-offs that emerge at the project level, by providing a long-term vision for impact, the possibility of testing out and scaling up approaches, as well as a context for synthesising findings.

## 6.3 Project-level learning

Several key reflections and lessons emerge consistently from our qualitative engagement with Joint Fund researchers via the online survey, online qualitative discussion, and interviews. These reflections align with learning emerging from other R4D investments.

- **Projects are most impactful when impact is fully integrated into the project from the outset** – as opposed to seeing impact as something that follows (logically and chronologically) the research. Related to this, impact requires **dedicated time, skills and resources**, and can fundamentally alter the way in which research is conducted, in terms of priorities, timeline, and methods.
- **Impact is not linear.** While researchers agreed on the importance of planning for impact early on, it was also noted that impact is unpredictable and can go in unexpected directions, defying even the best thought-through plan. Consequently, keeping an open mind, scanning the context for emerging impact opportunities, and having the flexibility from funders to adapt implementation, are all crucial factors for impactful research.
- **Timing is key.** Being ‘in the right place at the right time’ has been mentioned by several grant holders as an important (and at times serendipitous) condition of impact. For example, for several projects, a recent change of government opened the way for research evidence to be used in policy and planning processes.



- **Impact takes time to accrue**, typically longer than the timeline of any one research project. It was suggested that funding bodies should earmark specific funds for longitudinal evaluations - evaluating impact 5 or 10 years after the end of a research project. Relatedly, **impact may accrue through multiple subsequent grants and/or be the result of concurrent sources of funding** and may therefore be difficult to trace it back to any one Joint Fund grant. In some cases, researchers said that the main value of their Joint Fund was to provide ‘seed funding’ or to prepare the ground for future grants. One interviewee described the key impact of their Joint Fund experience as being able to inform future grant applications and making those more impactful.
- **Local knowledge and networks are key to achieving impact** – hence the crucial role played by project partners. Deep and extensive networks of contacts and connections are frequently quoted as enablers of impact. We examine this impact enabler in [Section 7.2](#).

## 6.4 Conclusions

In spite of the conceptual and practical challenges in assessing impact of R4D investments, we found several interesting examples of impact among Joint Fund projects, as well as indications of further impact in the process of accruing. Lessons emerging from the Joint Fund confirms wider R4D learning around the importance of planning ahead, seeing impact as an integral part of the research rather than an ‘add on’, as well as being adaptable and seizing impact opportunities as they emerge. In this respect, many grant holders have expressed appreciation for the flexibility accorded by the funders when facing contextual challenges or responding to unforeseen opportunities.

It was frequently remarked that impact takes dedicated time, resources, and skills. More opportunities for impact enhancement funding throughout the lifetime of the Joint Fund (rather than just at the end) would have been greatly welcomed by grant holders.

## 7 Enablers of Impact

It is now widely recognised that, in order to be impactful, R4D needs to be generated through collaborative processes, which cut through the disciplinary and geographical divide and transcend the borders of academia to engage a variety of stakeholders, research users, and ultimate beneficiaries of research.

Based on the literature review conducted in the inception phase, we identified three ‘impact enablers’, all related to collaborative research processes – namely, *interdisciplinarity*, *North-South research partnerships*, and *co-production* of knowledge with non-academic partners. In our evaluation approach, we aimed to test the extent to which there has been a correlation between these dimensions and positive outcomes of the Joint Fund with regard to knowledge production and research quality (EQ1); research uptake and use (EQ2) and development impact (EQ3). From a learning perspective, we were interested to explore not only whether Joint Fund projects have been successful according to the three dimensions outlined in the evaluation questions, but also what made the difference for successful projects, and what lessons can be drawn and applied to similar R4D investments.

### 7.1 Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity has emerged as an integral dimension of the ‘research for development impact’ agenda and is often presented as a research mode that can facilitate relevance and usability of knowledge. The rationale is that the grand challenges facing society today – such as food security, climate change, or global health – are inherently multidimensional, and as such cannot be suitably tackled within the confines of any one discipline. As the demands for ‘impact’ grow, the limits of single-discipline investigation become apparent.

While there is reason to believe that social science plays an important role in this regard, social scientists often lament the continued prevalence of ‘hard sciences’ in interdisciplinary collaboration and express their frustration at being largely relegated to a subordinate ‘service’ role. Because of its specific focus on social science, the Joint Fund represents an ideal testing ground for hypothesis about interdisciplinarity in general and the role of social sciences in particular.

Interdisciplinarity is defined here loosely as a process where researchers from different disciplines work together to integrate knowledge and methods, to create something greater than the sum of its parts (ESPA, 2018c). The term is often used loosely and interchangeably with similar concepts, such as multi-disciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity. *Multi-disciplinarity* is mostly used to indicate different disciplines working towards a common objective, interacting with each other but without the synergy of approaches that characterises interdisciplinarity. *Trans-disciplinarity* generally refers to the inclusion of stakeholders’ perspectives, in addition to disciplinary ones. In practice, however, the distinction between these different types of collaborations is not always clear-cut.

While it is often argued that progress towards the SDGs requires evidence that crosses disciplinary boundaries, there is still a need for a better understanding of enabling conditions, challenges, lessons, and tools for interdisciplinary sustainable development research (Brown et al., 2019). Interdisciplinarity poses many conceptual and practical challenges. There is a strong time penalty for interdisciplinary research: it takes longer to define questions that are both cogent and feasible for all disciplines, i.e., a question that is exciting for one discipline can be boring and mundane for another. Agreeing on methodologies, sample sizes, and data collection is also challenging. Trying to ‘fit everything in’ can lead to overly time-consuming fieldwork and research fatigue on the part of local participants. On the other hand, compromising on disciplinary academic standards can lead to a no-win situation, where results may be seen as not rigorous enough for any field. ‘Running out of time’ just when things are getting exciting is a common complaint by researchers in interdisciplinary projects.

## Interdisciplinarity in the Joint Fund logframe

The Joint Fund logframe for Phase 3 includes one indicator directly related to interdisciplinarity: Indicator 2.1 that measures the ‘number of research grants which involve more than one academic discipline, as defined by RCUK’. One other - Indicator 2.2 - measuring the ‘number of research grants that include a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodological research designs and/or methods’ is aimed at capturing the intended benefits of interdisciplinarity, i.e., the application of mixed methods. As of March 2020, both indicators were on track.

**Table 14 – Progress against logframe indicators of interdisciplinarity**

Indicator(s)	Milestone – March 2020	Progress - March 2020
2.1 Number of grants which involve more than one academic discipline at proposal stage, as defined by RCUK.	At least 75%	<b>Target achieved.</b> 69 out of 75 (92%) grants were classified to more than one academic discipline at proposal stage.
2.2 Number of research grants that include a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodological research designs and/or methods.	At least 75%	<b>Target achieved.</b> 51 of 68 grants (75%) were classified as mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches at proposal stage.

Source: DFID Review –2020

## Interdisciplinarity in Phase 3 funding calls

All funding calls included the requirement for applications to be at least 50 percent social science in disciplinary focus.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, an interdisciplinary approach is encouraged, but not a prerequisite for funding. Similarly, proposals are encouraged, but not required, to take a mixed methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to address a research question that will strengthen their case for funding.

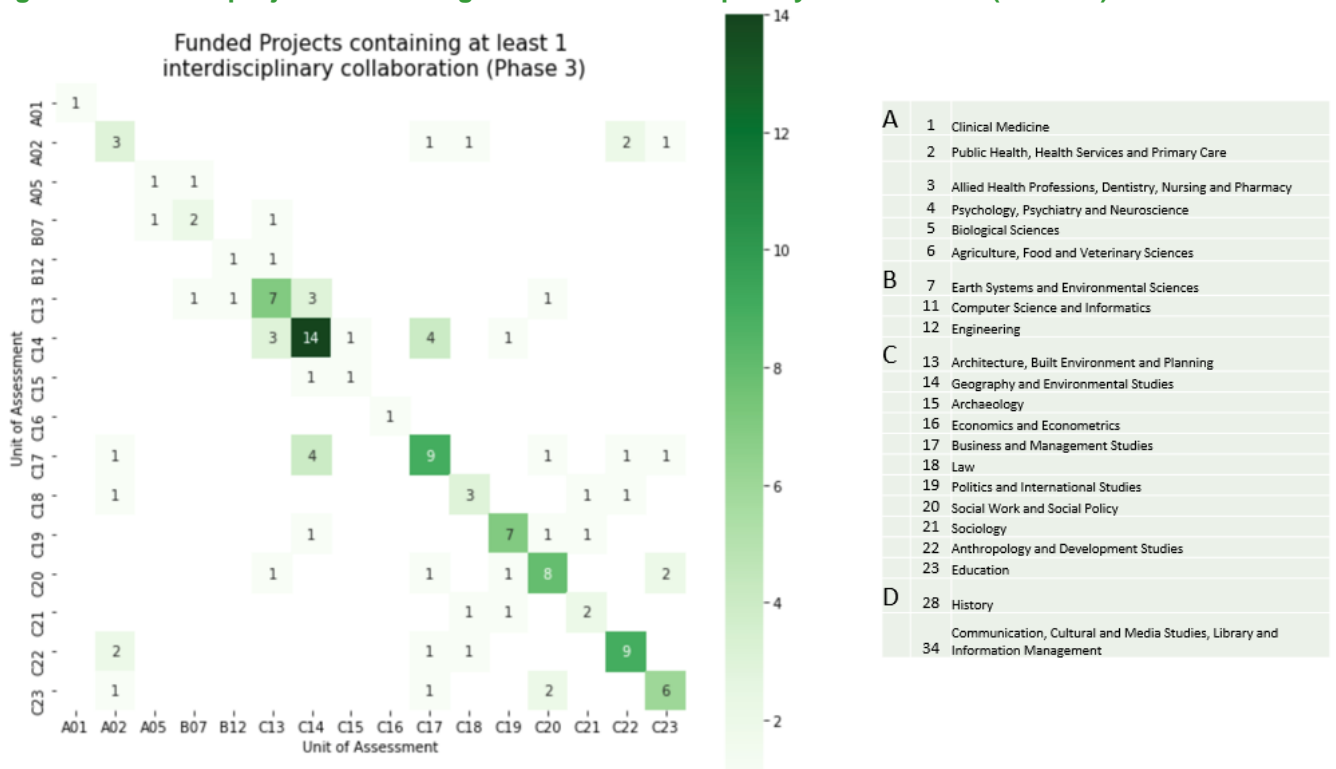
## Project-level findings

Researchers gave positive feedback to the fact that the Joint Fund did not “push” interdisciplinarity too hard, leaving individual teams the freedom and flexibility to decide to what degree collaboration across disciplines made sense for their particular theme and research questions. This avoided having to resort to tokenistic statements; as one PI put it, “we didn’t feel that we had to jump through hoops” to prove interdisciplinarity.

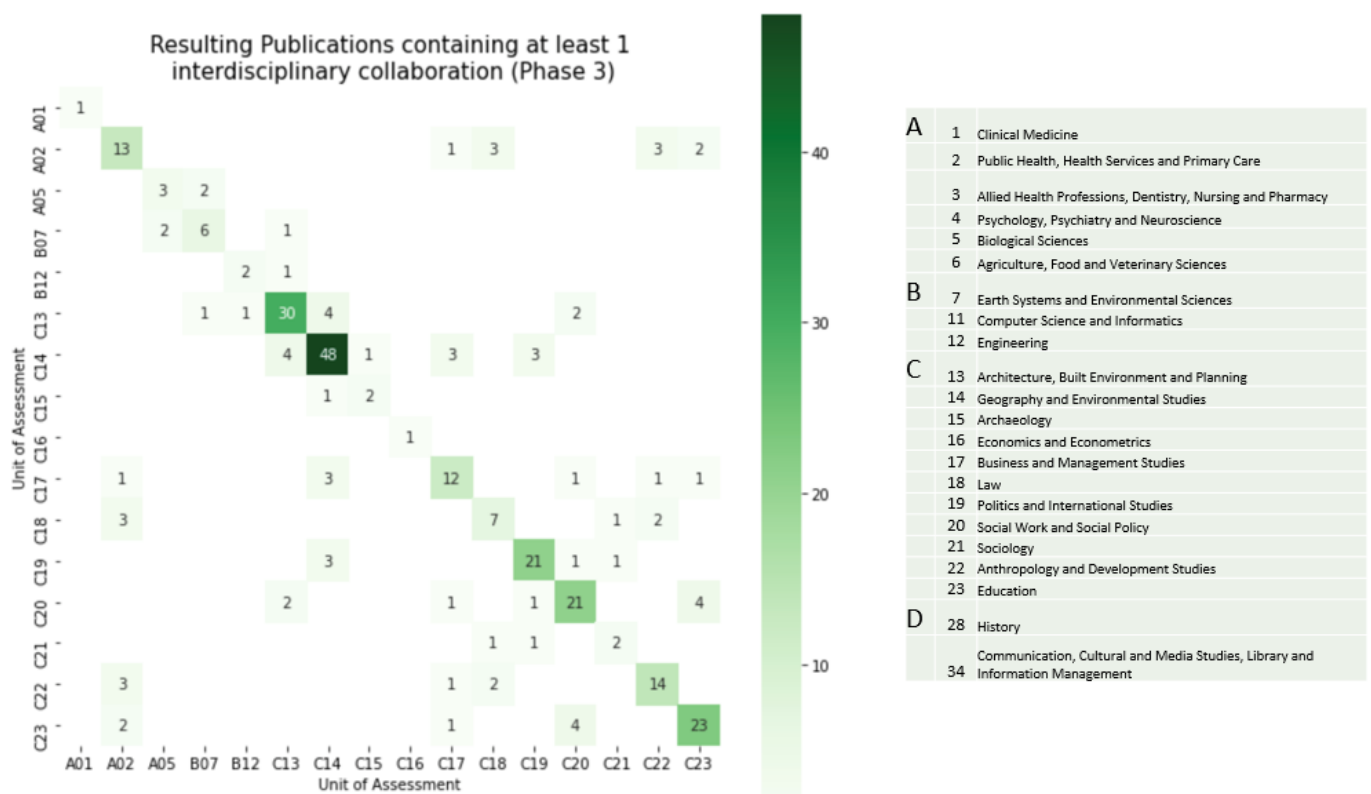
The majority of Joint Fund PIs considered their projects to be interdisciplinarity, and most projects used mixed methods.<sup>2</sup> Researchers confirmed the value of interdisciplinary collaboration in producing relevant and impactful research: it was noted, for example, that a mixed-method approach can help to identify nuances of power relations in complex settings.

While interdisciplinarity does certainly come with challenges, it seems that the Joint Fund teams have been able to manage these collaborations without particular problems. For example, one PI noted that the project resulted in several interdisciplinary publications, but also in a massive dataset that different team members will be able to tap into in order to produce discipline-specific publications. At least in part, however, this lack of major challenges is a reflection of the fact that interdisciplinarity in the Joint Fund manifested itself mostly as a collaboration between close or adjacent disciplines rather than building bridges between disciplines with very different methods, values, and epistemological views. This finding emerges consistently from an analysis of project disciplines (figure 9) and of resulting publications (figure 10 and 11).

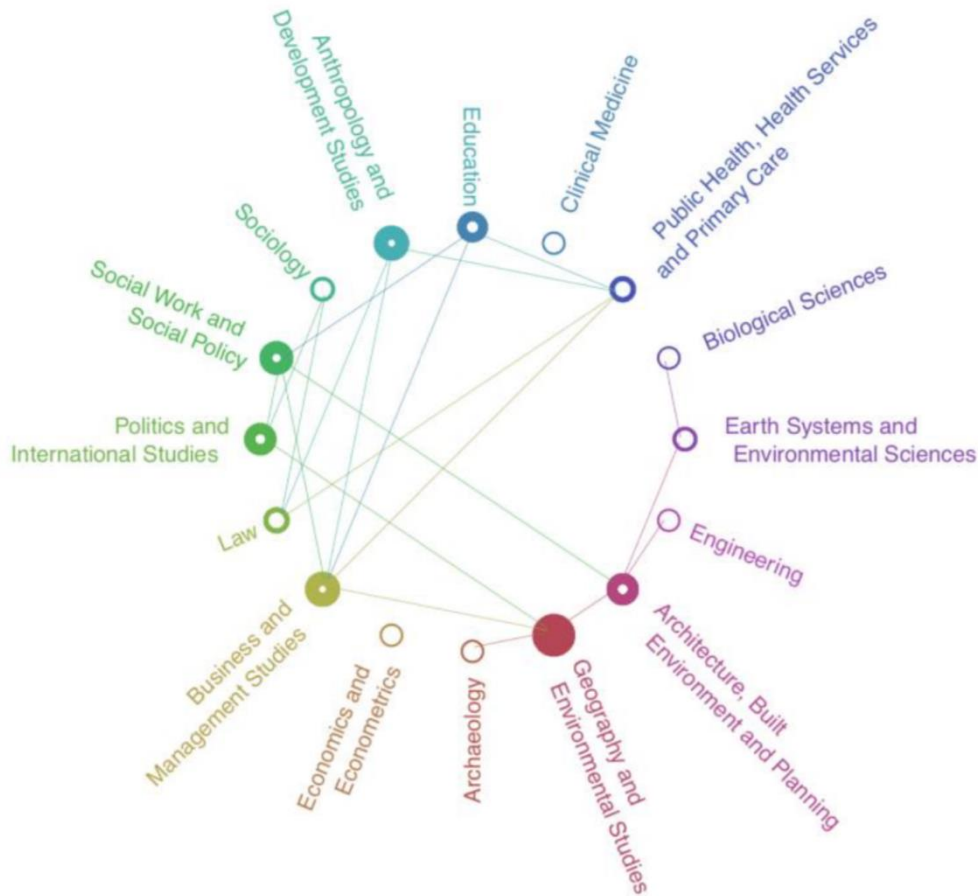
**Figure 9 – Funded projects containing at least 1 interdisciplinary collaboration (Phase 3)**



**Figure 10 – Resulting publications containing at least 1 interdisciplinary collaboration (Phase 3)**



**Figure 11 – Interdisciplinary collaborations in Joint Fund publications**



## 7.2 North-South Partnerships

Collaboration between research institutions in the Global North and Global South is widely regarded as critical in R4D. These partnerships are seen as both desirable in themselves (the ‘normative argument’) and as a means to achieve development impact (the ‘functional argument’). Yet despite widespread calls and commitments for partnerships to be ‘equitable’, the exact meaning of this term often remains unclear. Operational conditions posed by academic institutions and funding bodies can run counter to these stated aims and work against true equity (ESPA, 2018a; Lavery & IJsselmuiden, 2018; Musolino et al., 2015). Many argue that, to date, partners in Southern countries have lagged behind “in their ability to sufficiently reap the benefits from research and innovation partnerships for systems building, capacity strengthening, and economic growth” (Musolino et al. 2015).

Having truly equitable partnership goes beyond good intentions – it involves recognising and addressing structural power asymmetries, unconscious biases and divergent incentive structures. Risks of unequal partnerships include “the appropriation of local data, the relegation of Southern scientists to the category of ‘field experts’ [...] and the tokenisation of [Southern] partners and institutions to obtain competitive funding” (Carvalho et al., 2018).

While there are no commonly agreed criteria of what makes a partnership ‘equitable’, various principles and lenses have been developed over recent years to highlight what makes a fair or equitable partnership (see Table 15).

**Table 15 – Recent approaches to equitable partnerships**

<b>Rethinking Research Collaborative: Promoting fair and equitable research partnerships to respond to global challenges (2018)</b>	<p>The paper identifies eight principles for different stakeholder groups to apply to engage with the politics of partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put poverty first;</li> <li>• Critically engage with context(s);</li> <li>• Redress evidence hierarchies;</li> <li>• Adapt and respond;</li> <li>• Respect diversity of knowledge and skills;</li> <li>• Commit to transparency;</li> <li>• Invest in relationships;</li> <li>• Keep learning.</li> </ul>
<b>The Research Fairness Initiative (RFI) (Lavery &amp; IJsselmuiden, 2018)</b>	<p>The RFI was designed as a tool for promoting self-reflection on, and public reporting of, institutional practices and policies related to research partnerships. It aims to create a continuous improvement process for research collaborations. The RFI details 17 areas, grouped in three categories: measures and conditions that promote fairness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>before</b> research happens – ‘Fairness of Opportunity’</li> <li>• <b>during research</b> – ‘Fair Process’</li> <li>• <b>after research</b> – ‘Fair Benefit Sharing’.</li> </ul>
<b>Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation, Research for Development Impact: The Role of Equitable Partnerships (2018)</b>	<p>The briefing note identifies three core dimensions as constituent factors of equity: <b>Recognition</b>, <b>Procedure</b>, and <b>Distribution</b>.</p>

**Table 16 – Framework to assess fairness and equity in partnerships (derived from the combination of the Research Fairness Initiative and the ESPA Equity framework)**

Stage	Fairness dimensions (RFI)	Equity dimensions (ESPA)	Key factors to consider in a research partnership
Before research	Fairness of opportunity	Recognition	Who has a say in designing, planning and implementing the research project? How are the various partner priorities, incentives and practical constraints factored into this?
During research	Fair process	Procedure	Are there clear and transparent procedures for accountability and for everyone to have a voice?
After research	Fair benefit-sharing	Distribution	Is there agreement on responsibilities and cost? Is there agreement on how the expected benefits of the partnership will be distributed?



This section deals specifically with North-South research partnerships, i.e., partnerships that are focused on the research production process (as opposed to being exclusively focused on research dissemination, uptake, or impact-related activities) and where at least one person affiliated with the partner institution is explicitly named as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator in the process. Collaborations that are more informal in nature are discussed in [Section 8.3](#).

### ***Equitable research partnerships in the Joint Fund***

The idea of a North-South research partnership is at the core of the Joint Fund. From the outset, application to the Fund was open to non-academic partners (an innovative feature, particularly at the time when the Fund was started). The DFID Business case for Phase 3 states that:

“DFID recognises the multi-dimensional, complex and dynamic nature of poverty. It has a commitment to support actions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and support poverty reduction beyond 2015. Research into the nature of poverty and interventions that reduce it are central to this commitment and this scheme provides a way to fund relevant research by the highest quality academics, ***working in multi-country partnerships*** and responding to local policy needs” (DFID Business case, 1, emphasis added).

### ***Findings from previous evaluations***

Previous evaluations have looked at North-South partnerships in the Joint Fund and the degree to which they have enabled fair, equitable and mutually beneficial collaborations. The **2009 review** welcomed the fact that the Joint Fund was open to non-UK participants, not only as cooperating partners but also as Principal Investigators. However, the review found that relations had, in practice, often proved unequal, with UK participants dominating both in numerical terms (with the majority of Principal Investigators being from the UK) and with regard to project leadership, and Southern partners mostly active as ‘junior partners’ and relegated to data collection (Arnold & Jávorka, 2009: 11). The review also pointed to the complexity of the application process as a problematic factor for non-UK-based applicants, particularly for those from smaller and less established academic institutions. It also advanced suggestions for incentivising the inclusion of named Southern-based Co-Is, as well as encouraging Southern feedback on the programme.

The **2012 evaluation** noted several positive developments, highlighting the increase in North-South partnerships (many of which built on existing relations). In terms of division of labour, the evaluation noted that partner roles included involvement in proposal writing and research design, fieldwork, and data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Fewer partners were involved during the writing up process (INTRAC, 2012).

The most recent **2016 evaluation** stressed the importance of Southern partnership as an enabler of impact, with “the majority of grants [...] achieving impact while involving in-country partners” (France et al., 2016: 102). Benefits for impact include “increased understanding of local policy, practice and cultural contexts; access to established stakeholder networks; prior experience and involvement in the policy field; and an understanding of how to communicate research to target users” (France et al., 2016: 6).

### **North-South Partnerships in the Joint Fund logframe**

The Joint Fund logframe includes a specific output on North-South Partnership (*Programme funding is accessible to Southern researchers, and supports individual and institutional capacity to design, conduct and disseminate high-quality social science research on poverty reduction in low-income countries*). The impact weight for this output is 15%.

The logframe indicators for partnership working are illustrated in the table below and include proportion of awards which include PIs or Co-Is at Southern institutions, proportion of research funding allocated to Southern institutions, and a number of grants reporting capacity building activities. These capacity building activities are further monitored in the logframe and are discussed in the capacity building section below. There is no specific output or indicator measuring the nature of partnerships and the degree to which these are equitable.

The three indicators for this output have been exceeded as of March 2020 as summarised in the table below.

**Table 17 – Progress against logframe’s partnership indicators**

Indicator(s)	Target	Progress
3.1 Proportion of proposals and awards funded which include PIs or Co-Is based at Southern Institutions	<b>Target</b> 45% of proposals and 60% grants	<b>Target exceeded:</b> 59% of proposals (228 of 385) and 72% of grants awarded (54 of 75) involved Southern PIs and/or Co-Is.
3.2. Proportion of research funding that is allocated to Southern institutions	<b>Target</b> At least 35%	<b>Target exceeded:</b> 43% of ESRC funding under Phase 3 has been allocated to Southern institutions.
3.3 Number of grants reporting undertaking capacity building activities benefiting Southern researchers, by type of activity.	<b>Milestone March 2019:</b> At least 50% of research grants reporting to date report undertaking capacity building activities benefiting Southern researchers.	<b>Milestone significantly exceeded:</b> 71% grants which completed progress reports this year reported undertaking capacity building activities benefitting Southern researchers.

Source: DFID Annual Review April 2020

## North-South partnership in Phase 3 funding calls

Building on learning from previous Joint Fund phases, the commissioning process for Phase 3 of the Joint Fund encouraged Southern-led projects and Southern collaborations. For all calls, applications were open to Southern institutions. Principal Investigators could be based anywhere in the world, and funding was not dependent on the involvement of a UK-based organisation. To enable participation of Southern institutions, the programme covers the full costs of the project for non-UK partners (while only 80% for UK partners).

As a general rule, there was no mandatory requirement for UK institutions to have in-country partners. All the schemes allowed academics from developing and developed countries to work together in any configuration of their choosing. The call documentation warned against tokenistic partnerships that are set up primarily to ‘look good’ in an application (“we strongly encourage partnerships and collaborative relationships where these are substantive and meaningful” P3C2). The calls adopt the principle of ‘form follows function’: the intellectual challenge should be the determining factor of the partnership’s composition and modalities. The commissioning panels were to assess the proportionality and balance of the roles and responsibilities of the different partners.

There is further emphasis within the calls (P3C2 and P3C3 in particular) for clarity of roles and responsibilities of partners. P3C3 also points to the importance of partners being “fully involved in the design of the research” and that the commissioning panels will take account of such plans.

The last research call of Phase 3 (Development Frontiers, Call 2), was particularly strong on North-South research partnerships and represents an exception to the general rule of no mandatory

partnerships. A requirement of the call was the at least one Southern researcher and at least one early career researcher had to be included in the call, as PI or Col.<sup>1</sup> In this call, the mode of the commissioning was adapted to ensure that Southern research teams were not disadvantaged. For example, the decision was taken to lift anonymity during the Pitch to Peers assessment workshop:

*“The rationale behind this was twofold: to ensure that the value of local and international partnerships were recognised and taken into consideration, and so that panel members could recognise where a research team may have had less experience in producing proposals and/or less support from a designated research office –frequently cited as a barrier for applicants from developing countries –and therefore judge the proposal more on the merit of the project itself than the paperwork”. (Annual Report, 2015-2016)*

## Project-level findings

As discussed in Section 3, the majority of Joint Fund projects in Phase 3 (like in the previous phase) are led by Northern institutions. Out of the 75 projects in this phase, only seven are Southern-led, and of those, three are based in Upper Middle-Income countries (two in South Africa and one in Colombia). The majority of Joint Fund projects have at least one Southern Col.

A specific focus of our evaluation was to assess how North-South partnerships in the Joint Fund have worked in practice, which function they have served in relation to research quality, to what extent they have been enablers of uptake and impact, and how ‘fair’ and ‘equitable’ they have been in terms of opportunities, process, and benefit-sharing. Our inability to travel to Southern countries and talk directly to partners – due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions – has strongly penalised our analysis in this regard. While we have proactively tried – and to a significant extent succeeded – to engage Southern researchers in various ways (remote interviews, online survey, and online discussion), we recognise that our sample of consultations is skewed towards researchers in the Global North, and this inevitably skews our narrative towards a Northern perspective. We acknowledge this as a limitation of our analysis. Where possible, we specify whether we are reporting views of Northern or Southern partners.

### **Rationale and value of North-South research partnerships**

**Local knowledge and local networks** were noted by Northern partners as key values of research partnerships, concerning both having access to knowledge during the research process and, crucially, for accessing audiences and avenues of research dissemination and ‘positioning for use’. In this sense, Southern partners can be understood as “uptake enablers” without whom research would have been difficult to share with users. There were a small number of examples of research partners being able to feed research findings back to local communities and/or research participants.

#### **Box 11 – Role of partners as ‘uptake enablers’**

**Sharing knowledge in relevant languages:** “In addition to undertaking a study in their city, they [partner] took the lead in producing a special issue of a Brazilian social science journal, reporting the findings of the research and drawing general conclusions. This enabled us to disseminate our findings to a Lusophone audience”

**Knowledge of dissemination opportunities:** “The in-country partners [...] well positioned in their respective contexts e.g. they knew about or were already participating in certain national events and then used the opportunity to organize a side panel to communicate study findings etc” (online discussion participant)

## Box 12 – Benefits of partnership: views from the online discussion

### Research partners enabled.....

.....strong contextual insights and nuanced analytic research to be developed, with strong links to local and national policymaking audiences.

.....all of the project success!

.....to touch the reality

.....collaboration and mentoring, sharing their own expertise in doing research as well as displaying the ability to listen to local expertise and knowledge.

.....us to do together what none of us would be able to do individually, i.e., to look at the specificity of a university response to a conflict context and to at the same time identify commonalities and shared learning.

.....everything. From the first ideas to the final report, they were crucial every step of the way.

.....were amazing

....hopefully allowed us to work in a more collaborative, egalitarian, mutually supportive way than some other projects that expect more vertical research relationships to be.

.....us to implement the research, gain new insights, ensure that the research was of high quality, and allowed us to have a constant feedback loop.

Among the crucial factors for an effective partnership, Joint Fund grant holders noted:

- **Existing relations.** Grantholders cite existing relations between partners as a critical success factor. Some partnerships emerged from previous formal collaborations, while in other cases from more informal awareness of each other.
- **Early engagement.** Partners being engaged in the research design from an early stage was noted as a key factor of success and was particularly appreciated by academic partners in the Global South.

A number of other factors relating to equitable partnerships remain unclear. For example, to understand the extent to which partnerships have been equitable, we are interested in the extent to which benefits of the partnerships have been sustained beyond the project funding period. Stakeholders have different interpretations of what constitutes a “benefit” of research. For some, it is peer-reviewed publication opportunities, while for others, it is associated with funds or raised profile. Our evaluation of Phase 3 has limited evidence of sustained benefits of participation for partners.

The most commonly cited **challenges** with partnerships are linked to **administrative and financial issues**. For example, documents may be required (e.g. around due diligence) that simply do not exist and have to be produced from scratch, and this uses up time in the process. It was also noted that universities in the South tend to be more bureaucratic than those in the North, so it takes longer to get things done as the process is often on hold waiting for ‘the right person’. For all these reasons, it was often difficult for partners to move at the same pace. In the projects we explored, challenges seem to have been resolved after the initial teething troubles – although we recognise that it is difficult to assess this given our limited exposure to Southern partners.

The **decrease of the value of the pound**, linked to Brexit, was noted as a challenge that has put projects in the situation of having to produce ‘the same with less’, and unduly affected Southern

partners and field researchers. In the next stage of the evaluation, we will examine more closely how various projects have dealt with the decrease in value of their award.

Researchers who work in **complex, fragile, or authoritarian contexts** have stressed the challenges related to the engagement of in-country partners. As one PI put it, in these contexts, “good projects are often controversial projects”: local academics may be interested in being part of the project but often do not want to be named or featured too prominently, due to concerns that this may affect them negatively in terms of their career or in terms of safety. Back in the UK, this may not be understood by funders and reviewers: for example, panel members, unaware of the safety issues, may frown on a project where fieldwork is conducted primarily by foreign researchers.

### ***Capacity-building in Joint Fund partnerships***

Capacity-building is widely regarded as one of the key benefits of North-South research collaborations. There is a widespread assumption that the main capacity-building benefits flow from Northern to Southern institutions – both at the individual level (e.g. Southern researchers improving their knowledge of research methodologies, their record of publications and presentations, or their ability to successfully apply for grants) and at the organisational level (e.g. Southern institutions becoming better able to manage research projects). To date, comparatively little reflection has gone on as to whether, and how, Northern researchers and institutions can benefit from research partnerships to strengthen their own capacities. This is broadly true of the approach taken by the Joint Fund, although several Northern researchers have remarked on the value of their project partnerships for mutual learning. As discussed above, Indicator 3.3 of the Joint Fund Phase 3 logframe refers to “Number of grants reporting undertaking capacity building activities benefiting Southern researchers, by type of activity” (emphasis added).

In Phase 3 funding calls, it was made clear that capacity-building is not a primary objective of the scheme (as both DFID/FCDO and ESRC fund other schemes with a specific capacity-building focus); rather, “[c]apacity-building elements should be set out in relation to the core intellectual agenda of the research proposal and not treated separately”. In other words, there was an expectation that capacity-building was to be integral to the research, rather than an add-on. Examples of capacity-building given in the funding calls are “opportunities for those with relevant skills to orient their research towards global issues; support and mentoring for more junior team members; staff exchanges, particularly between developing and developed country partners; and co-design of research and implementation with developing country partner staff”.

There was an important recognition that research funding may unintentionally “do harm” by undermining local capacity. As stated in standard terms in Phase 3 Funding Calls, “at a minimum we expect successful proposals to demonstrate a strong understanding of the local research context and ensure that the research project does not undermine local research capacity”.

The approach taken by Joint Fund projects in practice appears aligned with this notion of capacity-building as integral to the research projects. Co-authorship of publications, opportunities for presentation at academic conferences, and training were mentioned by the majority of PIs in progress reports.<sup>2</sup> In our qualitative engagement with Southern researchers, several remarked positively on the mentoring opportunities they benefitted from during the Joint Fund project.



### Box 13 – Capacity-building case study

**Informal beginnings:** PHASE is a large NGO in Nepal and receives funding from DFID (now FCDO). PHASE work in remote places where NGOs don't always reach – they are known for working in areas that are considered “inaccessible places”. Prior to the Joint Fund, PHASE had limited experience in conducting research. They had previously conducted valuation of their own projects, but the Joint Fund was the first project where they were a proper research partner. The University of Sheffield and PHASE delivered a participatory video project to raise awareness of the needs of remote, rural communities post-earthquake.

**Leveraged funding boosts impact:** This informal relationship was nurtured through seed funding from the University of Sheffield. In parallel to the Joint Fund project, the University of Sheffield and PHASE attracted funding from another source to hire 2 post-doctoral research assistants (PDRAs) to do research within PHASE. This complemented the Joint Fund project. At the same time, PHASE was writing funding applications to further enhance their research capacity.

**Appetite for NGO to boost research credentials:** As the PI reflects, building the research capacity of PHASE was an unexpected but welcome outcome of the Joint Fund project.

*“We did not anticipate the capacity building would happen at the beginning [of the Joint Fund project]. When we applied for the project, I didn't know that the NGO wanted this. I'm not sure they knew they wanted it! We wanted them to be a local partner - not a fixer, not a dogsbody. [...] Through the process of working with them they saw the benefits of doing research in post-earthquake implementation projects. They started to see how research could feed into their wider organisation” (PI, University of Sheffield)*

**The policy-influencing model used on Joint Fund is still used by NGO:** Furthermore, the process of informing policy through the Joint Fund project was of interest to PHASE and is a model they continue to use.

*“Historically we were focused on implementation but this project helped us to develop into research which is a new thing for us. We now have a research team in the office. This has helped us to develop the research wing here. Research is important for our organization. We normally [previously] focused on education and livelihoods. We didn't have very systematic review on our activities. When we started thinking about the research it gave us another dimension. It gave us another angle. We got a team so we could get higher skills so they could support us for proposal development. We have high skilled people in our team. People with PhDs and lots of experience. We get regular feedback and always improve our activities. We learned a lot of research tools for example, participatory video. Gradually we are improving our database system so we can use it to conduct research. Before the collab we didn't have these systems. We improved slightly with data management.” (Co-I, PHASE Nepal)*



## 7.3 Co-production and community engagement

As a generic term, co-production refers to the engagement of non-academic actors in the research process, not merely as recipients but as full-fledged participants in the generation of knowledge. Co-production takes different forms and can be motivated by different rationales: it is seen as leading to better, more relevant knowledge and greater research uptake, as well as being the ‘right thing to do’ from an ethical point of view, and a mode of knowledge generation that has societal benefits beyond the individual research process. Co-production appears strongly correlated to both “Research legitimacy” and “Research Importance” in the RQ+ framework.

Co-production can also take many forms and is best represented as a spectrum rather than as binary condition – ranging from purely ‘consultative’ approaches (where questions, methods, and outputs are defined beforehand, outside the co-produced space) to ‘immersive’ approaches, where the process is as important as the outcome (Carter et al., 2019). Projects may include a combination of different types and stages of co-production or may move on the co-production spectrum during their lifetime.

**Figure 12 - Spectrum of co-production approaches**



Source: Carter et al., 2019

The forms that co-production take are closely linked to ‘who’ is involved. For example, involving participants from large NGOs in a research consortium can be done without fundamentally altering how the process is designed and implemented. On the contrary, the involvement of local communities as full participants poses fundamental challenges to conventional academic ideas of what counts as ‘good’ research and what counts as legitimate knowledge.

### Co-production in the Joint Fund logframe

The Joint Fund logframe includes one co-production indicator (2.4: ‘Number of research grants involving non-academic organisations as Co-Is, project partners or advisory board members’). As of March 2020, this indicator was “somewhat short of target”, with 82% of grants against a milestone target of 90%.

**Table 18 – Progress against co-production indicators in the Joint Fund logframe**

Indicator	Milestone (March 2020)	Progress (March 2020)
2.4 Number of grants involving non-academic organisations as co-Is, project partners, or advisory board members.	At least 90%	<b>Somewhat short of target.</b> 82% of grants (56 of 68).

### Co-production in Phase 3 funding calls

All Funding Calls included an expectation of non-academic stakeholders, including potential research users and intermediary organisations with a mandate to communicate research and to be

included and involved in both the early design and ongoing conduct of research projects. This reflects the recognition that research uptake and use is not something that happens ‘after’ the research is complete – but should be embedded throughout the research project itself.

The Development Frontiers calls have been particularly explicit about the inclusion of non-academic actors. “Research that involves novel forms of partnerships with and between researchers in developing countries and with non-academic partners and potential research users” is considered one of the defining characteristics of Development Frontiers research. One of the selection questions looks at whether there is “evidence of genuine, appropriate and productive collaborations [...] with non-academic stakeholders”.

## Project-level findings

Most of the Joint Fund projects include some engagement with non-academic actors, in particular national/international NGOs and local community groups. In most cases, however, the engagement appears to be towards the ‘consultative’ end of the spectrum – with some examples of more immersive approaches also present, particularly at the community level, where there are a number of examples of participatory action research.

### Box 14 - Findings from the online survey

#### Engagement with non-academic actors and local communities

In our online survey, we asked which non-academic actors had been involved in the project. The most common non-academic partner was indicated as national and local NGOs. These were involved in various ways: at the design stage (20 out of 40 respondents); implementation stage, e.g. data collection (25/40), dissemination of research findings (28/40), impact activities (26/40). Only three respondents said that national and local NGOs were not involved at all in the project. Conversely, the private sector was the least involved at any stage. Overall, the involvement of non-academic actors was lowest at the design stage and highest at the level of dissemination of findings.

The most commonly cited reason that survey participants feel that non-academic engagement went well is that having “in field” knowledge, expertise, and trust amongst local communities with 25% (of 35 respondents) citing this as a critical success factor. Having the support of a partner based in the fieldwork location assisted with the logistics of getting research and workshops set up.

The biggest challenge for engaging non-academic partners was the lack of a shared vision for the research. 19% (of 31 survey participants) state that a lack of shared understanding between the core research team and non-academic partners (often NGOs) was the biggest challenge.

Almost all survey respondents (36 out of 41) said that their project involved direct engagement with local communities. Not surprisingly, the most common way in which communities were involved were as sources of information and views (through interviews, focus groups, and/or surveys). In most cases, research findings were then shared and validated with local communities. Less common, but still significant, was the involvement of communities in defining research questions and methods.

A number of issues have been highlighted by Joint Fund researchers concerning engagement of non-academic actors:

- **Local knowledge and facilitation skills.** Having a thorough understanding of the context dynamics, as well as the right facilitation skills in the team, to engage with non-academic partners, were noted as crucial – and often underestimated – factors.
- **Due diligence.** When engaging non-academic actors as formal partners, due diligence was also a challenge, particularly for small organisations (who are also potentially the most effective at producing impact). The practice of some Southern organisations to informally ‘top-up’ their low salaries with grant money was noted as particularly problematic in terms of due diligence.

- **Ensuring safety in fragile and complex contexts.** Issues of sensitivity and safety came up as well, particularly for complex contexts, such as contexts of high levels of violence and instability. At times, things such as fieldwork cannot happen as planned as the safety of staff and communities have to come first.

**Engaging local communities** as research participants (as opposed to seeing them simply as ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘informants’) holds great potential for impact, but also comes with challenges and risks. Key lessons highlighted by Joint Fund researchers include:

- **Taking the time to build trust.** This has important implications for the project timeline and budget, as it may not be possible for the team to ‘get straight to work’, and an initial period of getting to know the community may be necessary. Several researchers admitted having underestimated the amount of time it would take to build trust with local communities. This is particularly important in a complex and fragile context where there may be long-lasting distrust for outsiders. It was noted that apparently mundane things – like buying food locally – can go a long way to build trust.

*“Participatory [research] is useful, but it is also very difficult to achieve. You need to build trust. It can’t be touch and go. People value ongoing relationships and trust can be built over time if you keep going back to the same place” (Joint Fund researcher)*

- **Having members of the research team that are close to the community.** For example, the project Energy on the Move in Bangladesh trained students from communities to act as researchers as well as mediators/knowledge translators. This was also an important capacity development component for the young researchers.
- **Strive for a balance between insiders and outsiders.** The fact of having ‘insiders’ is important but not necessarily positive in all circumstances. ‘Outsiders’ can also play an important role in giving assurance of fairness in the process – avoiding that the process is (perceived as) hijacked by particular local interests. It was often remarked in the survey and interviews that the presence of outsiders can reassure some stakeholders of the fairness and independence of the project. In one interview it was noted that one of the strengths of South-South research cooperation is that Southern researchers working in other Southern countries ‘know what its like to be local’, are familiar with many of the issues, but at the same time have the necessary detachment from that particular context.
- **Be aware that communities are not monoliths and there are power dynamics that can be unintentionally affected by the project.** This also calls for a diverse and representative approach to fieldwork sampling – to avoid that marginalised minorities (e.g. migrants) are not represented in the sample. In some cases, this may mean over-representing particular categories.
- **Be creative in the way in which communities are engaged.** Projects experimented with creative ways to engage with local communities both in the research process and to share research findings – such as theatre, music, and photographic exhibition.
- **Clarify research purpose and manage expectations,** particularly expectations of immediate and direct benefits for local communities. In some cases, community members thought that participation in research would lead to immediate relief or support, or food in some cases. Researchers were in some cases ‘mistaken’ for relief workers, which created additional challenges. JF researchers stressed the need to clarify expectations from the outset, listen to the priorities of partners and communities, and encourage them to speak about what matters to them the most.

### Box 15 – Quotes from online qual discussion

*“There were many people who wanted to be chosen as informant or participant because they were really hungry and wanted the simple food and drinks for participants. Of course, we cannot involve and feed everyone”.*

*“Data gathering was also compounded by the fact that many people [...] wanted to be selected as participants, hoping to get simple tokens like food and drinks”.*

*“They [local communities] thought we were funding agencies who are going to give them funding to rebuild. It was sad to see the attitude changed when they realized we were just low-paid researchers”*

*“[Foreign] investigators were automatically assumed to be aid workers who would be delivering relief goods”*

### Box 16 – Project case-study

#### Participatory photography to tell communities’ stories in the Maldives

A Joint Fund project in the Maldives conducted research on three small islands located in the North Malé atoll to elicit the lived experiences of island people with regard to their environments. A range of participatory research methods was employed, including participant observation, use of the ‘go along’ technique, interviews, and participatory photography workshops held with community groups. The latter were instrumental in building people’s confidence and skills to depict their everyday lives and concerns.

The research findings highlighted three important changes occurring on a daily basis on small islands in the Maldives: the erosion of beaches and coastline due to wave action, tidal currents, and human intervention; the daily accumulation of washed-up waste and rubbish deposited by people; and the rapid expansion of the built environment to support guesthouse development and increasing numbers of tourists.

Forty of the photographs taken by island residents during the community photography workshops were displayed at the National Art Gallery. The exhibition launch brought together policymakers, including representatives of international organisations such as UNDP, national government departments, and NGOs, and students and island residents to discuss the impacts and management of environmental change taking place on the islands. During the event, the photographers explained the changes that they and their communities are facing.

The research team obtained Follow-on Funding for an Impact Enhancement project that brought together the various visual materials developed during the course of the main grant, to build ‘communities’ story maps’.

**Project title:** Negotiating conflict: Environmental violence, economic development and the everyday practices of islanders

**Lead institution:** University of Manchester

**Funding call:** Frontiers C2

## Box 17 – Project case-study

### Using participatory action research to hold local leaders and services to account

A Joint Fund project in Tanzania explored practical ways for citizens to hold their local leaders to account for their performance in delivering basic services. It sought to engage the staff of District Councils, local political leaders, civil society activists, and citizens in a conversation on the availability and quality of public service delivery at the local level. Through this participatory process, a Local Governance Performance Index (LGPI) was created as a tool to assess performance and promote accountability. Methodologically, the project employed an ethnographic approach, collecting data from multiple sources, on repeated occasions.

**Project title:** Holding local leaders and services to account: assessing the potential for a local governance performance index (LGPI) in Tanzania

**Lead Institution:** Mzumbe University (Tanzania)

**Funding call:** P3C1

## 7.4 Conclusions

In line with emerging R4D practice, Joint Fund projects have put in place various processes of collaboration – between disciplines, between Northern and Southern institutions and researchers, and between academic and non-academic actors. In all these respects, a defining characteristic of the Joint Fund has been a conscious effort to avoid tokenism, and to encourage forms and modalities of collaboration that were ‘fit for purpose’ for each specific project, rather than making them a normative requirement. Overall, the experience of the Joint Fund appears to confirm that collaborative research processes – when genuine and grounded in shared vision and purpose – are positively correlated with development impact.

While most Joint Fund projects have some measure of interdisciplinarity, this mostly takes the form of collaboration among social sciences disciplines that are relatively close to each other, rather than bridging disciplines with notably different epistemologies. In particular, we did not come across any notable example of collaboration between social and natural sciences. The narrow nature of interdisciplinarity probably explains, to a large extent, the fact that no major challenges were reported by grant holders in relation to working across disciplinary borders.

Partnerships between organisations in the Global North and Global South was greatly valued by Joint Fund researchers and regarded as critical to achieving successful high quality and impactful research. Partners in the Global South have a variety of roles on research projects - in some cases acting as “field experts” setting up and delivering fieldwork, and in other cases supporting with “research uptake.” The extent to which partnerships are equitable remains difficult to measure robustly – and our inability to conduct country visits (due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions) has certainly hindered our ability to draw firm conclusions. From our qualitative analysis, it emerges that the degree of attention given by project teams to fairness and equity considerations in partnerships varies significantly across projects.

While the Joint Fund was not meant to be a capacity-building programme, there was an explicit assumption that capacity-building of Southern partners would happen as part of the partnership, mostly through opportunities to co-present and co-publish. As discussed in [Section 4](#), however, only a minority of Joint Fund publications are co-authored by researchers in the Global North and Global South, and those predominantly involve researchers in large, well-established institutions in Middle-Income Countries (who presumably had access to such opportunities independently from the Joint Fund). While co-authoring opportunities are undoubtedly valued, our findings call for a more rounded conversation about what “counts” as capacity building for future programmes.

Finally, the majority of examined projects involved non-academic stakeholders in some form. Joint Fund projects position themselves at various points in the co-production spectrum, albeit we could find no clear examples of full-fledged ‘immersive’ co-production. Involvement of non-academic actors in the research process – as contributors rather than recipients – is widely regarded by Joint Fund researchers as a key enabler of impact. There are many examples of close engagement with local communities, and emerging lessons on how to ensure effectiveness and fairness.



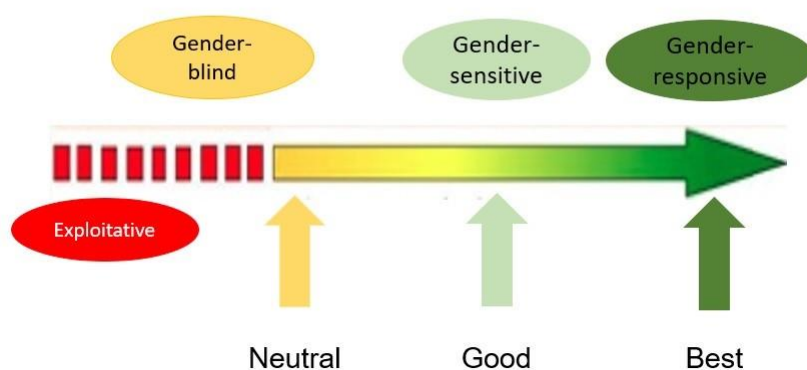
## 8 Gender

In recent years, growing attention has been paid to the inclusion of gender in R4D approach (a trend mirrored in research and international development respectively). Funders are increasingly committed to ensuring the inclusion of a ‘gender lens’ to the design, implementation, and communication of R4D – as shown, for example, by the requirement to include a gender equality statement in application to the Global Challenges Research Fund (BEIS, 2020).

There are different ways in which a gender lens can be applied in R4D (see Figure 13) and, to a certain extent, this reflects the different aims of research and development. Typically, when a concerted effort to consider gender is not made, approaches are *gender-blind*. This means that little consideration is given to gender differences. At worst, the outcomes may be exploitative and disadvantage one gender relative to the other, widening inequality. In patriarchal contexts, it is typically women who are disadvantaged relative to men, since being gender-blind typically preferences men. At best, gender-blind approaches merely reiterate the existing situation of gender inequality).

When a gender lens is applied, approaches may be *gender-sensitive* or *gender-responsive* (sometimes known as gender-transformative), depending on the nature of the approach. Gender-sensitive R4D recognises the existing situation of gender inequality, and the different roles, norms and behaviours of men and women, and works with them to ensure inclusion of both genders. However, they do not make any attempt to address the underlying causes of the inequality. Often pure research can be, at best, gender-sensitive, because the output of research is generating knowledge rather than generating change. Development approaches, on the other hand, have the express aim of changing outcomes, and thus have more potential to be gender-responsive, where they challenge the underlying causes of inequality.

**Figure 13 - Continuum of approaches to gender**



While gender had not been a focus of the previous two evaluations, a review of the consideration of gender in projects commissioned under Phase 2 of the Joint Fund highlighted a shift in general recognition of the importance of gender with the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals, which was reflected in the transition from “gender as a topic” (which predominated in Phase 1) to “gender as an approach” (which predominated in Phase 2) (Bradshaw et al., 2015).

## 8.1 Gender in the Joint Fund logframe

The logframe for Phase 3 of the Joint Fund includes one specific indicator on gender, as part of Output 2 (“Research draws on diverse disciplines and methodologies, appropriately addresses core cross-cutting issues, and actively involves non-academic stakeholders”). The indicator counts the number of research grants reporting gender analysis and/or data disaggregation. As such, this indicator aligns with the gender-sensitive category on the continuum, by committing to render visible the differences between men and women – improving on gender blindness as the typical status quo, and identifying such gender differences is a pre-requisite for transition to gender-responsiveness, where attempts are made to address the causes of inequality. In the 2020 DFID review, the target was reported as “missed”.

**Table 19 – Progress against gender indicators in the logframe**

Indicator	Milestone (2020)	Progress (2020)
2.3 Number of grants that report undertaking gender analysis or disaggregating data by gender or other structural inequalities.	At least 32 of 45 (70%)	Target missed (45%)

## 8.2 Gender in Phase 3 funding calls

The approach taken to gender in Phase 3 of the Joint Fund was more progressive and explicit than previous phases, in recognition of the fact that grant holders often needed ‘a nudge’ to think about the gender dimension of their project. The focus placed on gender in all Phase 3 call documentation and scoring criteria was explicit in giving consideration not only to gender as an approach but also to the need for gender transformation – ensuring that the cross-cutting concerns of *structural inequalities* and *measurements and metrics* contributed to the robust conceptual and empirical basis for development and to enhance the quality and impact of social science research on poverty reduction (although, as shown above, the indicator itself does not specify gender-responsiveness or transformation). Gender analysis and sex-disaggregation of data were a requirement for proposals funded under this phase. As noted in the call documentation:

“Throughout their proposals, applicants are advised not to refer to any category of persons without making it clear whether they are referring to both women and men, and whether/how they have taken into account possible gender difference in experience and circumstances. For example, do not refer to ‘farmers’ without indicating whether the reference is to male farmers, female farmers, or both. Data should also be disaggregated, where relevant, across a range of variables including ethnicity, age, disability, and spatial geography”. [insert source]

Call documentation highlights the need to unpack what happens within a household and the different ways in which “men and women may experience poverty differently and may face different obstacles in moving out of poverty”. Building on this, it also states that “Proposals should recognise that to promote gender equality and empower girls and women is not only a goal in its own right, but is also often a means to achieving other goal”. This marks a progression from earlier phases.

## 8.3 Project-level findings

In order to assess the extent to which a gender lens has been included in projects funded by the Joint Fund in Phase 3, we used a software-assisted textual analysis of project-level documentation, namely the Cases for Support (proposals), Pathways to Impact, and Annual Reports (to complement self-reporting in annual reports on whether or not gender analysis was undertaken) (see Annex 6 for

more on this methodology). The aim was to chart the extent of mention of a number of gender-related terms, including the use of one gender word and the sub-set that mentioned both men and women. Given that gender blindness predominates, the number and variety of gender words mentioned indicates the extent to which a gender lens was being applied to the research. Documents mentioning both men and women were more likely to be conducting gender analysis as foreseen in the call documentation. We also compared the findings with the previous two phases of the Joint Fund. This complements our qualitative findings from the interviews and online survey.

## Gender in proposal documents

Gender was very frequently mentioned at the proposal stage. In particular, the vast majority of Case for Support documents submitted under Phase 3 (91%) included at least one gender-related word in the document. This was similar to Phase 1 (89%), but there had been a decrease to 78% in Phase 2. (Table 20).

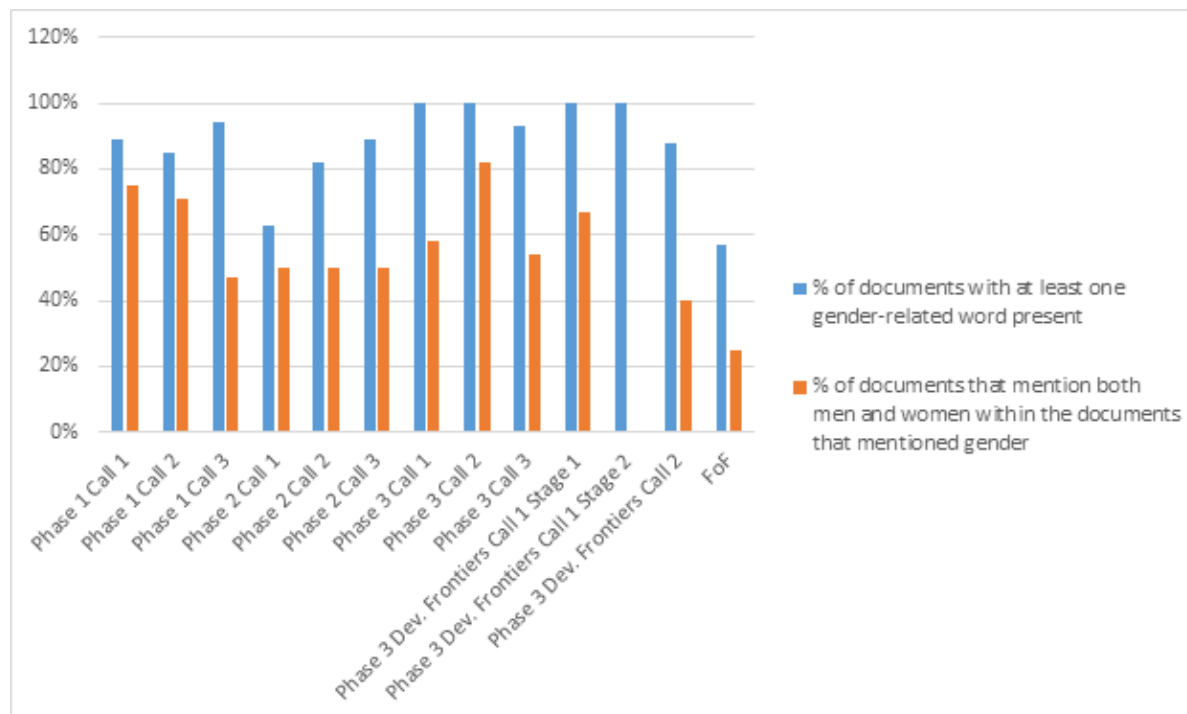
**Table 20 - Case for Support documents (a) with at least one gender-related word used and, of those (b) that mention both men and women by Phase**

	% of documents with at least one gender-related word present	% of documents that mention both men and women within the documents that mentioned gender at least once	Total number of documents assessed
Phase 1	89%	62%	45
Phase 2	78%	50%	54
Phase 3	91%	52%	68

Almost all the funding calls documents within Phase 3 included gender-related words, with the main gaps occurring within the Development Frontiers documents. In the majority of documents, the number of gender-related words is quite high (>90% of documents include 25 gender-related words or more). Gender is mentioned significantly more in the proposals of Phase 3 compared to the previous phase: the median number of mentions moved from 6 (Phase 1) to 4 (Phase 2) to 8.5 (Phase 3).<sup>1</sup>

The increase in mention of gender terms did not necessarily translate into an increase in sophistication of treatment of gender issues. A key recommendation of the previous gender evaluation was for Joint Fund researchers to include men and women in their gender analysis so that the reasons for the differences between women and men could be better understood (Bradshaw et al., 2015). However, where gender was mentioned in Phase 3 Case for Support documents, only half mentioned both men and women, similar to Phase 2 and a decrease of 10% from Phase 1 (Figure 14).

**Figure 14 - Case for Support documents (a) with at least one gender-related word used and, of those (b) that mention both men and women by Phase and Call**

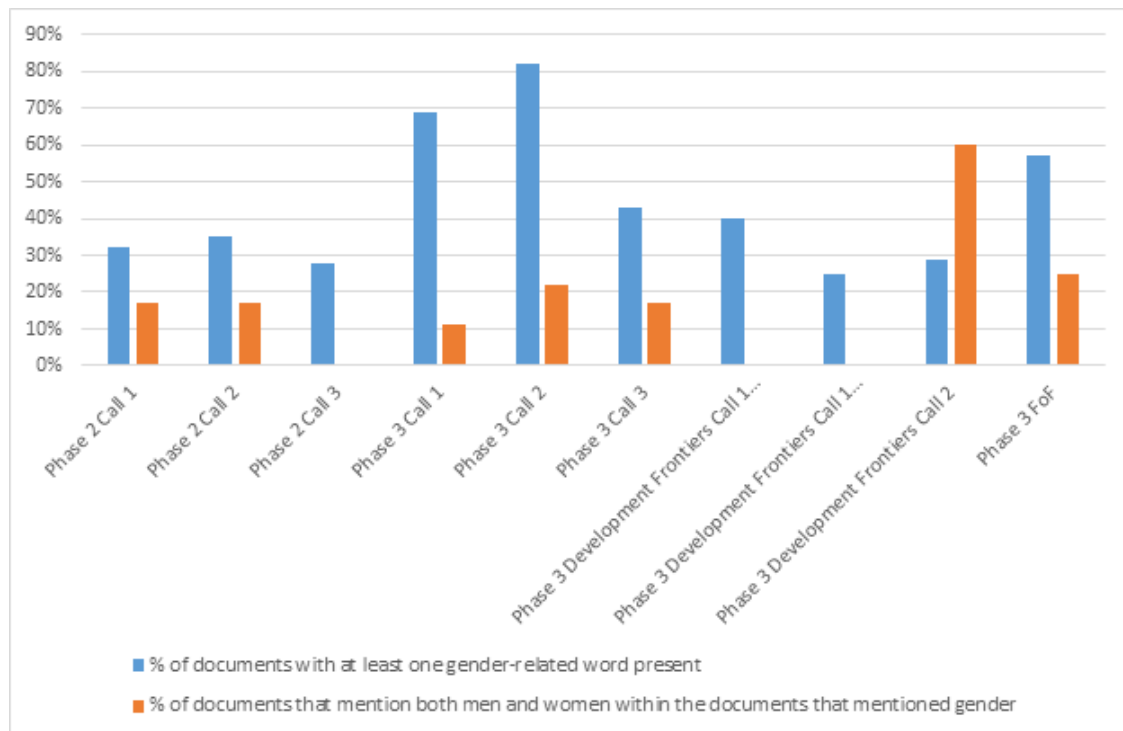


The increasing emphasis on gender in call documentation has also filtered through into the planned impact of Joint Fund projects, with increasing consideration of how the findings can be considered in the “positioning for use” and uptake strategies. The percentage of grant holders mentioning gender-related words within their Pathway to Impact documents increased by 20% from Phase 2 to the current Phase 3 (Table 21). However, this increase was from a low baseline level – in phase 2 the majority of projects did not mention gender words at all whilst in phase 3 a greater range of projects mentioned a wider range of gender-related words. Over 49% of Pathways to Impact documents did not mention gender within the Phase 3 documents, indicating that how women and men benefit from the grant holder research outputs was only being considered in approximately half of cases. As with the Cases for Support, in the Pathways to Impact that mentioned gender-related words, a small percentage mentioned both men and women, with the majority only mentioned women. There were considerable differences between the Calls within Phase 3.

**Table 21 - Percentage of Pathway to Impact documents, grouped by phase, with at least one gender-related word used and % documents that mention both men and women within the documents that mentioned gender**

	% of documents with at least one gender-related word present	% of documents that mention both men and women within the documents that mentioned gender at least once	Total number of documents assessed
Phase 2	31%	12%	54
Phase 3	51%	22%	71

**Figure 15 - Pathways to impact (a) with at least one gender-related word used and, of those (b) that mention both men and women by Phase and Call**

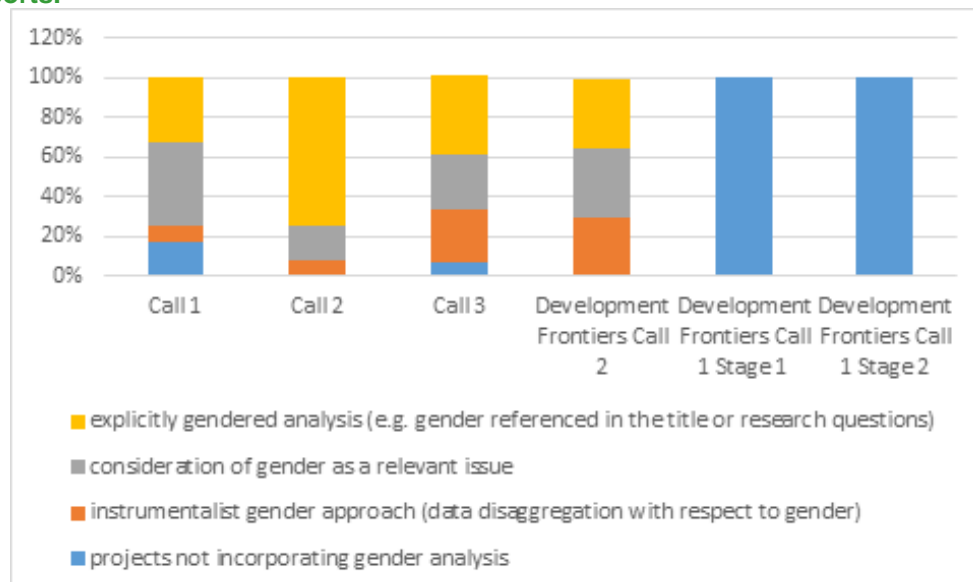


Since Pathways to Impact documents are developed at the start of the projects, this evidence should be complemented with reporting that documents how projects have materialised.

### Gender in project reports

Based on the grant holder responses in their most recent Annual Reports for Phase 3, a large percentage of grant holders said they used explicitly gendered analysis, up from 28% during Phase 2 (Bradshaw et al., 2015). Compared to Phase 2, the percentage of studies that only used a more basic instrumentalist gender analysis approach has declined (from 32% to 19%).

**Figure 16 - Extent to which gender was included (a) as a relevant issue, (b) taking an instrumentalist approach, (c) conducting gender analysis or (d) not incorporating gender analysis based on Phase 3 Annual Reports.**



## Box 18 – Insights from the online survey

### ***Gender in the Joint Fund: findings from the online survey***

There is relatively high awareness and consideration of gender stated by survey respondents and reporting of gender-sensitive methodologies. Nearly 95% of respondents said they had “made sure that our sample and engagement strategy included both men and women”; nearly 75% said they had held disaggregated sessions (focus groups, feedback sessions); and nearly 65% took into account specific needs and responsibilities when planning meeting and events (e.g. adapted timing and provided childcare, etc). Ensuring social inclusion through communication was taken into account by a number of projects, with 51% providing translation and 72% making provision for those who were illiterate.

There were some examples in the online survey of a gender lens being applied for ‘positioning for use’ and research uptake – for example, one project ensured their methodology and findings on gender were made available to others, including through acting in an advisory capacity for another project on disability and social protection.

## Box 19 – Project case study

### ***Women, work and social protection: synthesis and policy influence***

The Impact Initiative supported four Joint Fund projects – all looking at women, labour markets, and social security – to synthesise their findings. The projects were:

- Lone Mothers in South Africa - The role of social security in respecting and protecting dignity (PI Michael Noble, University of Oxford)
- Female Labour Supply and the Escape from Poverty: New evidence from household data (PI Andy McKay, University of Sussex)
- Choice, constraints and the gender dynamics of labour markets in Bangladesh (PI Naila Kabeer, London School of Economics)
- Social cash transfers, generational relations and youth poverty trajectories in rural Lesotho and Malawi (PI Nicola Ansell, Brunel University).

This led to a synthesis publication (ESRC-DFID research for policy and practice: women, work and social protection, February 2019), with the following key messages:

- Policymakers should use frameworks that recognise and capture the economic impact of all relevant activities undertaken by both genders, including unpaid work and caring obligations, the lion’s share of which falls to women.
- Social protection strategies for women surviving on very low incomes must go beyond cash transfers and include measures that uphold dignity and promote self-reliance, such as income-generating schemes.
- Where policy is focussed on providing women with access to the traditional labour market, the quality of employment opportunities must be considered alongside measures that support women juggling household and caring responsibilities for children and other family members

In March 2019, the Impact Initiative participated in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) in New York, securing sponsorship for an event on social protection and women from the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). The panel included two ESRC DFID grant holders and launched a report which included research from four grants.



## 8.4 Conclusion

Given that gender blindness still predominates in research, international development, and research for development, mandating the application of a gender lens in the Joint Fund was clearly beneficial in encouraging consideration of this issue. Express consideration to gender through call documentation and specifications has also been applied in other R4D projects, for example, the FCDO- and IDRC-funded Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA, 2013; Harvey et al., 2019), Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (Wells et al. 2018)<sup>2</sup>, and UKRI (and the Newton Fund), which now requires all proposals to include a gender equality statement outlining how applicants will ensure their projects contribute to reducing gender inequalities, as required under the International Development (Gender Equality) Act.

The sophistication of treatment of gender has increased, albeit from a very low baseline. There was little improvement from Phase 2 to Phase 3, and half of projects in Phase 3 still did not consider gender at all in their Pathways to Impact. However, these aggregate figures can disguise the fact that several Joint Fund projects actively contributed to understanding and addressing the structural causes of poverty and inequality. Thus, the Joint Fund has played a role in advancing practice – but there remains some way to go<sup>3</sup>.

## 9 Greater as a whole than the sum of its parts?

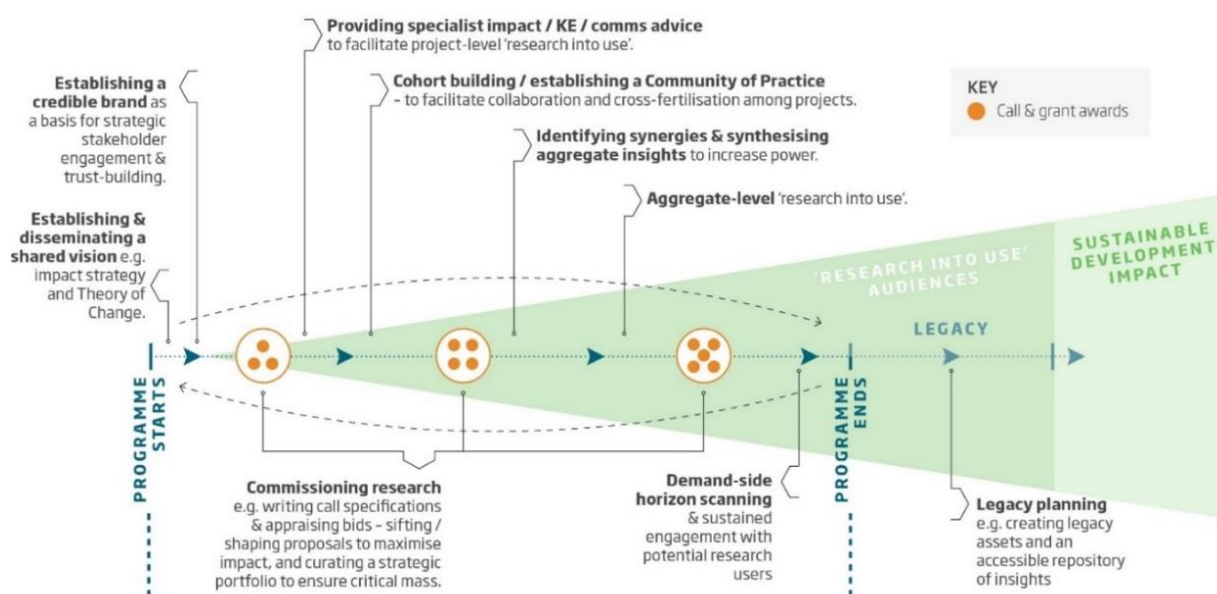
There is an increasing awareness among funders and the R4D community that simply commissioning a suite of thematically-focused projects does not necessarily lead to or maximise development impact,<sup>24</sup> and that large, multi-year investments that use a ‘programme approach’ can play a role in overcoming the research-to-impact disconnects that emerge at the project level (Izzi & Murray, 2019). Learning on these issues has only really started to come to the fore in the relatively recent past, so this is not information that the individuals who created the Joint Fund programme would have had access to during the design phase.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, we know that ESRC and FCDO have reflected on these issues over the life of the Joint Fund investment, deciding to invest in creating the Impact Initiative in 2015 to support and add value to the Joint Fund’s portfolio of projects.

We believe that evaluating the Joint Fund in relation to the value of its programme approach – i.e. the extent to which it was able to become greater as a whole than the sum of its parts – would be unfair because the standard (against which we would need to make a judgement) did not exist when the Joint Fund was being created. However, we did want to reflect on its achievements in this area - as an important dimension cutting across the three core EQs - to inform future programming. To this end, this chapter presents an overview of the ways in which a programme approach can and should add value to maximise impact, and reflects on the Joint Fund’s work concerning each component.

### 9.1 What is a ‘programme approach’ & why use it?

The literature and combined R4D experience of the evaluation team suggests there are a suite of inter-related functions and services that add value in terms of enabling a programme-whole to become greater than the sum of its project-parts (Cochrane & Cundill, 2018; Currie-Alder et al., 2020; Cundill, et al, 2019; Harvey et al., 2017). These are summarised in the programme approach framework presented below as Figure 17.

**Figure 17 - A framework for conceptualising a ‘Research for Development’ programme approach**



<sup>24</sup> For example, the 2017 ICAI Rapid Review of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) notes that, in its initial years, GCRF has resulted in “a scattered portfolio of research projects, rather than a concentration of effort on pressing global development challenges”

<sup>25</sup> Though the Joint Fund Business Case document did acknowledge the fact that research findings might be ‘too disparate to add up to anything’ as a key risk in 2012.

During the inception phase - **before project work begins** – it is valuable to establish a vision, theory of change, and impact strategy for the programme to guide all activities and project-level investment (Harvey et al. 2017). There is also often value in creating a brand and presence for the programme as a basis for strategic stakeholder engagement and trust-building to facilitate later ‘research into use’ activity. Putting in place structures and features that will enable effective collaboration between projects is also important, for example, thematic working groups, and small amounts of flexible funds to enable nimble responses to opportunities and unexpected collaborations (Cundill et al., 2019).

During the implementation phase – **whilst project work is ongoing** – a programmatic function (with the right skillsets embedded within it and appropriate resourcing) can support the research commissioning process, creating a stronger focus on development results in line with the impact strategy, i.e. writing call specification documentation, engaging with prospective applicants and appraising the impact orientation of bids to improve the standard of funded projects in relation to ‘research into use’. This can therefore maximise impact, both for individual projects in their own right and for the programmatic whole where it has been possible to curate a strategic portfolio with critical mass, in support of specific impact opportunities. This may require modification to team composition beyond just researchers, recognising that research for impact requires particular skills sets, such as for facilitating stakeholder engagement and effective communication beyond academic audiences (Prakash et al., 2019).

Once funded, it is also possible to enhance the impact potential of individual projects – making each project ‘the best it can possibly be’ – through the provision of specialist impact, knowledge exchange, and/or communications advice (of a standard and level that each project would not otherwise have access to) to facilitate project-level research into use. Relatedly, programmatic functions can enable spaces and structures that support cohort building activities to facilitate collaboration, peer learning, the cross-fertilisation of ideas and organic synthesis among projects, bringing people together and fostering a sense of community among researchers (Cochrane & Cundill, 2018). An important component of this is sharing of experiences and active reflection through an iterative process of monitoring, evaluation and learning that focuses on intended impact (Pasanen & Shaxson, 2016).

During the closure phase – **once project work is complete** – a programme approach allows time and resource to do two important, interrelated things:

- 1) Synthesise insights arising across the portfolio and develop aggregate ‘research into use’ products and activities in order to engage strategic stakeholders, i.e. individuals and organisations who might not be persuaded to engage with a single research project; and,
- 2) Linked to this process, purposefully plan and develop legacy assets – to tell the project- and programme-level story – and create an accessible repository of insights that can remain publicly available beyond the programme period.

**Throughout** the programme implementation period, a programmatic function can be systematically scanning the ‘research into use’ horizon to understand demand-side interests and build and sustain relationships with targeted potential users of research, including policymakers and practitioners. Importantly, the presence of a programmatic function with this line of sight on upcoming impact opportunities creates the potential for a positive feedback loop within the system where the research commissioning process can be shaped with impact potential in mind, i.e. curating the portfolio over time to maximise alignment between demand-side needs and the programme’s supply-side ‘offer’.

There is a wide range of options that can be employed to ensure that these programmatic functions are addressed, all requiring varying levels of resources and skills in terms of staffing. Varying approaches have been employed by other programmes concerned with Research for Development. BRACED, Future Climate for Africa, and UpGRO had independent units concerned with knowledge management (and coordination and capacity development in the case of FCFA). In SHEAR, the knowledge management was provided separately, but the organisation also happened to be involved in some of the projects. In CARIAA, these programmatic functions were enabled by IDRC’s senior

programmes officers in conjunction with dedicated staff within each of the projects working through resourced thematic working groups and spaces for collaboration, including Annual Learning Reviews. ESPA had a Directorate covering research impact, communication and monitoring and evaluation but, different from BRACED and FCFA, the Directorate was closely linked with the programme management unit.

As far as we are aware, there is no conclusive evidence on the value for money proposition (cost versus benefit) of each possible option (Harvey et al., 2019). Nor has there been a systematic comparison of the pros and cons of the various design modalities. It is therefore not possible to say whether the approach adopted by the Joint Fund to attempt to become ‘greater as a whole than the sum of its parts’ (as described below) constitutes a good or a bad result in value for money terms.

Nonetheless, with growing recognition of the importance of programmatic functions, and the increasing likelihood of larger portfolios that create space for programme level coordination and learning, this will be essential to maximise the impact of programmatic functions and value-add going forward. For clarity, we are not saying that the Joint Fund should have done each one of these things, and we cannot know how much additional impact we might have seen if more of these things had been done. But based on the evidence base, it is reasonable to assume that the more of these features we see for a programme like the Joint Fund, the more ‘Research Into Use’ and impact you can expect to emerge.

## 9.2 (How) did the Joint Fund deliver a programme approach?

The Joint Fund was, of course, created as a programme by virtue of the shared vision, objectives and focus, manifest in the call documentation and proposal appraisal process. However, if we are seeking to identify the tangible features of delivery specified in Figure 17 above within Phase 3 of the Joint Fund, there were two main mechanisms for adding programmatic value to the portfolio of otherwise discrete projects: 1) the introduction of the Impact Initiative support function, and 2) the 2019 Follow-on Fund (by invitation-only) call.

### The Impact Initiative

Launched in 2015, the Impact Initiative was designed to: maximise the impact of ESRC-DFID funded research on policy and practice relevant to developing countries; and maintain and strengthen the international profile of the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership and programmes within this, enhancing their reputation as centres of excellence for social science research on international development. The Joint Fund had been in existence for ten years at this point and was already three years into delivery of Phase 3, with a portfolio that had not been commissioned with the existence of an impact-oriented support function in mind. This need for retrospective application fundamentally shaped the form and function of the Impact Initiative.<sup>26</sup>

The Impact Initiative’s work clearly spans much of the infographic presented above. The Impact Initiative ‘brand’ and facility was created as an ongoing and trusted ‘one-stop shop’ for insights arising from research jointly funded by ESRC and FCDO, and there has been a strong and continuous focus on synthesis, cohort-building, and the identification of, and engagement with, policy audiences.

Interestingly, when we spoke with the Impact Initiative team, they noted that the balance of their approach had evolved over time. In the early stages, they went through the Joint Fund portfolio quite systematically to pick out the overarching themes and focused on those (e.g. health systems, disability, education) – supported by thematic leads (IDS Fellows) who could locate the Joint Fund ‘offer’ in the wider landscape and offer ‘research into use’ advice. They noted that this approach only took them so far, and was constrained by the fact that the Joint Fund portfolio is very diverse (making

<sup>26</sup> The funders and Impact Initiative team acknowledge that it took around 18 months for the facility to ‘find its feet’, with each having misaligned views on scope and remit. Clarity came on the back of detailed discussions linked to a Mid Term Review exercise.

synthesis difficult) and many of the grants in the portfolio had been closed for some time (with many researchers unwilling or unable to engage). Hence in the more recent past, the Impact Initiative team purposefully pivoted to become more opportunistic in:

- Responding to external opportunities, e.g., if there was a policy event, they'd look at the portfolio and ask 'what do we have that we can bring to that event'; and,
- Going to grant holders to ask them to identify policy themes, e.g., using formats like the Dragon's Den exercise done during the Power of Partnership conference in New Delhi (see [Section 4](#) above).

The Impact Initiative team are in the process of writing a paper to reflect on learning arising from this experience. In this paper, which we could access in draft format, the authors highlight the fact that their work and analysis points to a '*clear consensus on the power of the collective and the value of larger, more diverse bodies of evidence*' (Georgalakis, forthcoming 2021) where multiple research investments across geographies and topics are regarded as providing a more rigorous and ultimately relevant evidence base. Specifically, they highlight five important, inter-related components to this work that clearly span our 'programme approach' framework.

**Building relationships across research communities:** The Impact Initiative invested in building its own relationships with grant holders and increasing knowledge of the research in the portfolios. This increased its ability to identify synergies and mechanisms for grant holders to collaborate on events and outputs. Over time there was also increasing awareness and trust of the Impact Initiative amongst grant holders, supporting greater willingness to engage and recognition of the value of the opportunities created to collaborate amongst research cohorts, share research with policy and practitioner audiences, and maximise evidence uptake. Through events and outputs, the Impact Initiative was able to connect grants to contribute a strong policy offer which has more value to decision makers than would be possible by presenting the findings of any individual grant: '*this highlights the value of working with researchers to strengthen their epistemic communities and explore their different perspectives on the policy solutions in order to bring coherent and comprehensive messages into policy conversations*'.

"Becoming greater as a whole than the sum of your parts is really difficult if you can't see all the parts" (Louise Clark, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Manager, The Impact Initiative, Institute of Development Studies)

**Facilitating engagement between researchers and policy audiences:** A key element of the Impact Initiative's work was to act as a broker to create connections and build networks between researchers and with policy audiences, creating opportunities to discuss and interact around evidence findings and strengthening relationships to support research uptake. The Impact Initiative have found that '*research partnerships spanning civil society, academia, and policy being better placed to produce creative and realistic solutions to complex policy challenges... this combination of a critical mass of evidence that can shift dominant paradigms, more comprehensive and inclusive perspectives, and the establishment of wider networks and relationships makes a compelling case for collaboration across projects around pathways to impact*'. (Georgalakis, forthcoming 2021) In this role, the Impact Initiative facilitated the development of a strong understanding of the wider context that the research could be situated in, convening opportunities and spaces to connect researchers to relevant policy and practitioner conversations in order to use this evidence base to offer diverse methodological and thematic perspectives and solutions to development challenges.

As noted by one Impact Initiative interviewee, the type of proactive brokerage role played by the Impact Initiative has evolved well beyond the traditional understanding of impact in academia over the last few years, which used to regard impact-related work as '*little more than glorified comms*'.

**Supporting sustained interactivity for effective research – policy partnerships:** From the outset, the Impact Initiative approach acknowledged that it usually takes a lot longer than the usual



1-3-year project timeline for social science research to support sustainable change in policy and practice. The brokerage service developed by the Impact Initiative, therefore, emphasises the central importance of sustained interactivity between key stakeholder groups to: better understand shared interests and agendas that motivate participation; demonstrate the quality of the evidence and value of shared reflection of key issues from the different perspectives of policy, practice and research; and (importantly) build trust.

**“A programme approach helps to escape the project lifetime trap” (James Georgalakis, Director of Communication and Impact, IDS/ the Impact Initiative)**

## Box 20 - Project case-study

### ***Collaboration with the Global Coalition Against Child Poverty (GCACP)***

The Impact Initiative successfully influenced the Global Coalition Against Child Poverty to locate research evidence as central to its approach to advocating for change and achievement of the SDGs. Dialogue between the Impact Initiative and leading members of the Coalition including UNICEF and Save the Children in 2016 resulted in a research day held at IDS in November 2016 which brought together INGO campaigners, ESRC DFID grant holders, and other academics. Over subsequent months, the Impact Initiative continued to engage with the Coalition and pushed hard for a pan-African conference that could bring together members of this broad alliance with academics and policy actors, and donors.

The resulting ‘Putting Children First’ conference in Addis Ababa was held in 2017, providing a platform for bridging divides among 200 delegates representing a broad range of sectors, disciplines, and policy, practice and research. Co-convened by the Coalition and the Impact Initiative, the conference featured research from 22 ESRC-DFID grant holders representing 15 projects across both RLO and Joint Fund and including 10 southern research partners. Speakers included H.E Ms. Demitu Hambisa, Minister Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in Ethiopia, and Ms. Leila Pakkala, Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa at UNICEF.

The conference was highly policy orientated but also incorporated Impact Initiative participatory sessions on evidence informed decision making and a panel debate on research to policy processes. According to Richard Morgan, Director of the Child Poverty Global Initiative, Save the Children, and a Putting Children First Co-Organiser, it was ‘a miracle to get these people together in the same room’, whilst it was the ‘level of excitement and engagement’ across the broad range of stakeholders that really distinguished the event from other meetings and conferences held in the usually formal space at UNECA. Reflecting on the added value of a programme approach in the upcoming learning paper, James Georgalakis of the Impact Initiative notes that ‘for those involved in GCACP, this meta-synthesis of research is seen as far more likely to support sustainable change in policy and practice’.

**Legacy work and open access:** Legacy was a core component of the Impact Initiative service from the outset with a strong commitment to Open Access i.e. all Impact Initiative resources have been made available from the IDS OpenDocs repository.

**Supporting learning around impact and knowledge brokering:** The Impact Initiative team created a series of Impact Stories, designed to both highlight impacts achieved but also document learning around dimensions of impact, pathways and good practice. Publications such as the 2017 special collection and the IDS Bulletin on Research Policy Partnerships have been very successful, and the Impact Initiative team have been approached multiple times by funders including UKRI (GCRF specifically) and IDRC to share learning from the programme.



One of the key challenges acknowledged in the Impact Initiative learning paper is that multiple projects, despite sharing some methodological and thematic similarities, may not always add up to more than the sum of their parts, i.e. they may not cohere around an identifiable policy frame or problem, or geographic diversity, the range of research questions, and the focus on particular contexts may make it difficult to identify what they have to offer policymakers. That points to the area where the Joint Fund programme approach – as manifested in the Impact Initiative – is weakest in relation to the framework presented at the beginning of this chapter; namely, that the development of an understanding of demand-side / policy audience interests and upcoming opportunities for influence was disconnected from the research commissioning process. This was partly related to timeline of course, with much of the portfolio having already been commissioned by the time the Impact Initiative was launched, but there have been several calls since 2015, and the Impact Initiative were not involved in shaping call specifications or appraising bids. In this way, it was not possible to curate the portfolio in a way that maximised alignment between the Joint Fund’s supply-side ‘offer’ and demand-side interests.

## The 2019 Follow-on Fund call

The other substantive way in which the Joint Fund sought to become ‘greater as a whole than the sum of its parts’ in Phase 3 was through the delivery of the invitation-only 2019 Follow-on Fund which focussed on the following areas:<sup>27</sup>

- **Area 1 - Impact Enhancement:** Activities designed to build on and further the existing impact work of Joint Fund grants, to develop policy relevance and research user uptake.
- **Area 2 - Cross-Grant Synthesis:** Activities designed to facilitate collaboration between Development Frontiers Cohort 2 researchers to synthesise research findings.<sup>28</sup>

Area 1 was available to all applicants, but Area 2 was only available to PIs or Co-Is from the second Development Frontiers call. The call mandated that applications had to either focus on Area 1 or if they are following on from a Development Frontiers Call 2 grant, could focus on Area 2 or a combination of both. There were five awards made for the **Area 1 component**, see [Section 6](#) above. The minutes of the assessment panel meeting note that there were fewer proposals received for the **Area 2 component**,<sup>29</sup> nevertheless, two awards were made.

### Box 21 – Project case-study

#### Climate change and the environmental determinants of violence and mental distress in fragile contexts: Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Nepal

Led by Prof Tamsin Bradley at the University of Portsmouth, this project draws on two JF projects:

- 1) The ‘*Water-security in Ethiopia and the Emotional response of Pastoralists*’ (WEEP) project argued that current responses do not factor in the likely impact of such disasters on mental fragility and wellbeing; and,
- 2) The ‘*Narratives of violence: the impact of internal displacement on violence against women in Nepal and Myanmar*’ project that found that violence was a dominant male response during times of crisis triggered by increases in stress.

<sup>27</sup> <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20200930154153/https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/esrc-dfid-joint-fund-for-poverty-alleviation-follow-on/>

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, the Development Frontiers 2 call specification had noted that both funders wished to develop collaborative activities to bring successful applicants together to form a **Development Frontiers Cohort Coordination Group** to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange and research uptake. Additional funding was to be made available to foster collaboration between grants which have been funded under this call and all successful applicants were required to actively engage with this process. Our assumption is that the funders’ thinking evolved over time, morphing into the creation of this FoF Area 2 call.

<sup>29</sup> ESRC (2020), Minutes of Assessment Panel Meeting - ESRC-Dfid Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Follow-on Fund, 18th February, 2020

The proposal states that bringing these projects together will help the research team to better understand emotional and wellbeing responses to climate related disasters, and support impact by generating recommendations and guidance to shape interventions. In particular, this FoF Area 2 project will synthesise data through re-analysis, utilising a dual gendered and wellbeing lens that mainstreams a focus on different kinds of violence.

The project will create a framework for the development and humanitarian sectors intended to shape more targeted and holistic responses. This framework will be tested by non-academic champions in each context during the annual period of flooding (Myanmar and Nepal) and drought in Ethiopia to ascertain the extent to which such an overarching frame is possible.

The FoF Panel considered this was an innovative proposal bringing together data from two different projects, with a strong theory of change.<sup>30</sup> It was acknowledged there were challenges involved in combining two different sets of qualitative data, and the panel had some concerns regarding how impact would be achieved but agreed that the use of stakeholder champions would greatly enhance the likelihood of long-term impact in a transformative and sustainable way.

## Box 22 – Project case-study

### **The Next Frontier of Climate Policy: Joining the Dots of Bricks, Trade and Embodied Emissions from Cambodia and Bangladesh to the UK**

Led by Dr. Laurie Parsons at Royal Holloway (University of London), this project builds on his Cambodia-based '*Blood Bricks*' project that was funded by the 2017 ESRC-DFID Development Frontiers call. In addition, the grant includes a UK-based Bangladesh expert in Dr. Ricardo Safrá de Campos, former co-investigator of the '*Safe and Sustainable Cities*' project.

The proposed program of impact activities will build on the teams' experience of poverty and vulnerability in the Cambodian and Bangladeshi contexts to effect a radical change in policy on UK consumption emissions from the built environment. By linking the embodied costs outlined in previous grants to the indirectly incurred costs associated with UK trade and investment overseas, the proposed follow-on grant will seek active change in the industry. The research team will bring together construction industry stakeholders and academics of construction supply chains to explore the feasibility of scaling greener brick production practices for export to the UK and of introducing practices associated with lower carbon emissions, socio-economic and environmental impacts, into operations already exporting to the UK.

These grants were commissioned to start at some point between 1 April 2020 and 1 July 2020, with an end date no later than 31 March 2021. Covid-19 has disrupted and/or delayed activities for several of these projects. It has therefore not been possible to systematically assess delivery or results of these projects as part of this Phase 3 evaluation, but there are some observations we might make on the process and focus of the Follow-on Fund in light of the programme approach framework set out above.

The creation of a summative Follow-on Funding call at the end of the Joint Fund programme period is to be commended, though there might have been additional value in connecting the FoF call to the ongoing Impact Initiative 'research into use' activities, e.g. through specifying priority topics/themes / opportunities based on the Impact Initiative's understanding of the policy audience landscape.

Similarly, it was right to focus on impact and synthesis at this point in the programme period, but there might have been value in integrating the two issues more effectively. For example, the synthesis component focused on the development frontiers investments which only supported 'blue skies' research that is arguably (on average) further from the point of potential impact – might this have limited the opportunity for strong, utility-focused synthesis across the JF portfolio as a whole? At the same time, the impact component implicitly called for applications in support of single grant investments – might this have limited the opportunity for cross-grant impact-focused work?

<sup>30</sup> ibid

## 9.3 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning reflections

The DFID logframe was the framework for the Joint Fund’s Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL). As is conventionally the case for DFID/FCDO, the relative impact weightings of logframe outputs reflected the way in which funds were allocated towards various types of activities. Accordingly, Output 1 (*A portfolio of high quality, policy-relevant research on poverty reduction in low-income countries is delivered*) accounted for 40% of impact weighting, in consideration of the fact that the majority of allocated funds went to cover the research grants themselves, as opposed to uptake- and impact-support services.

The logframe served an important accountability purpose, allowing funders to rely on objective measures of research production and uptake, as well as other important dimensions of the Joint Fund such as North-South partnership, interdisciplinarity and gender. On the other hand, the logframe did not serve to significantly inform management choices or programme learning.

Over the years, it seems that the logframe became, to some extent, ‘out of sync’ with the way in which the Joint Fund developed in response to changed context and offered limited insights related to internal learning. In particular, research quality is measured in the logframe through conventional academic metrics (number of publications and citations), while the Joint Fund commissioning process has embraced a more holistic notion of research quality, which aligns well with the RQ+ framework (see [Section 4](#)).

With reference to research uptake, by emphasising the count of non-academic outputs, the logframe (and, relatedly, the reporting template) may have contributed to reinforce the impression, among project teams, that “more is more” when it comes to research uptake i.e. the more policy briefs and similar outputs are produced, the better. This emphasis on published outputs runs counter the learning expressed by many Joint Fund researchers that research uptake is primarily about building relations with key stakeholders (“people not papers”) and ideally, the production of outputs should be seen as supporting this broader process rather than as an end in itself (see [Section 5](#)).

Another issue that we highlighted with regard to the Phase 3 logframe is the focus on aggregate numbers of outputs produced across the Joint Fund portfolio. We have found that these aggregate numbers hide a substantial diversity among projects, in terms of outputs produced. This diversity is not per se problematic: in a programme like the Joint Fund, it is to be expected that some projects would be more prolific in terms of publications, while others would prioritise other dimensions, and/or take longer to produce publishable findings. However, it would be useful for a MEL system to be able to ‘pick up’ these differences, as this can usefully inform management and learning. Examples of such indicators may include “*Number of projects with at least one academic publication*”, and/or “*Number of projects with at least one publication authored/co-authored by Southern researchers*”.

While quantitative data is useful to get an overall picture, the type of R4D MEL framework that enables programme staff to unpack the complexity of R4D impact pathways can ultimately only be gathered through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators. In this sense, it would be useful for future programmes to envisage the development of ‘learning case-studies’ or ‘impact stories’ as an integral part of the MEL system. While the Impact Initiative did produce case-studies, these were not connected to the MEL system.

Finally, the reporting system for the Joint Fund was relatively light-touch, and – while that was appreciated by grantees – it meant that the Secretariat did not have a strong line of sight on the full portfolio of projects at any given time. Having a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures would necessarily require a more hands-on system of interaction, support and data collection at the Secretariat level - and whilst this upstream investment would cost more, we believe it would significantly enhance implementation at the project and programme levels, thus delivering stronger value for money overall.

## 10 Conclusions

Considering the evidence presented in this report in the round, the evaluation team have drawn the following conclusions for the Phase 3 evaluation of the Joint Fund programme.

**The Joint Fund has shown responsiveness and adaptability to a rapidly changing context.**

Phase 3 of the Joint Fund happened at a time of profound changes, globally and in the UK, both in academic research and in international development. As a result, the context of R4D today looks very different than it did back in 2012. The Fund has shown a remarkable ability to engage dialectically with this shifting context. While the Joint Fund is coming to an end at a time of multiple uncertainties (including the effect of Brexit on aid and research budgets, the Covid-19 pandemic and its implications for academia, as well as the UK government's recently announced merging of DFID with the Foreign Office), it is beyond doubt that the rich learning generated by the scheme continues to have urgent and far-reaching relevance.

**ESRC and FCDO worked effectively in partnership, with continuity in relationships being particularly important.**

In recent years, the programme has been managed via informal interaction between ESRC and FCDO, as opposed to having been overseen by a formal management group, as was the case in earlier stages. This seems to have worked reasonably well, though it did limit the evaluation to a degree (due to the lack of an audit trail around decision-making) and might have limited the ability for external stakeholders to engage with the programme strategically. The positive working relations between ESRC and DFID/FCDO appear due mostly to the commitment of individuals of each side, who were consistent in representing their own organisational interests and developing an understanding of the way in which the other organisations worked. This enabled trust and a deep knowledge of the Joint Fund as a collaborative effort to build over time.

The evaluation team cannot know for sure whether the programme would have functioned better, worse, or the same with a formal management group in this latter phase, but the existence of one might also have mitigated for risks (which thankfully did not materialise) around key members of staff moving on and away from the Joint Fund programme.

**The Joint Fund commissioning process has been inventive, adaptive, and responsive to emerging learning.**

The Joint Fund has moved, in its various calls, across the spectrum from favouring the spontaneous emergence of innovative questions and themes (Development Frontiers) to directing the research on specific themes (Programme grants). There has been an important recognition that different modalities of commissioning can yield different results, and that attention should be paid to ensuring that the commissioning process is 'fit for purpose'. The funders have been willing to think outside the box and try different things. However, more systematic inputs from Southern and non-academic stakeholders, and a closer involvement of the Impact Initiative in shaping the commissioning process, could have further enhanced impact orientation.

**The Joint Fund produced a wide-ranging portfolio of research, which scores well against both standard metrics of research quality, and more holistic research assessment frameworks (e.g. RQ+).**

Joint Fund research spans a wide range of development topics. This variety sets the Joint Fund apart from previous DFID - ESRC collaborations with a stronger thematic focus (e.g. ESPA, UPGro), and represents both a strength (in terms of high relevance for several SDGs) and a challenge (as it makes it more difficult to synthesise across projects). In aggregate terms, Joint Fund research measures well with regard to the number of academic publications as well as citations. However, these combined figures mask a high degree of disparity across projects, as well as a relatively low representation of researchers and institutions from Low Income Countries in Joint Fund publications. While the Phase 3 logframe adopts a fairly conventional notion of 'research quality', the various

funding calls have progressively expanded this meaning to include dimensions of importance, legitimacy and positioning for use.

**A variety of dissemination and engagement strategies have been used by Joint Fund projects to promote research uptake, with a strong focus on influencing policy.**

Findings from Joint Fund research have been disseminated to relevant users and stakeholders through a variety of channels, ranging from the conventional ones (e.g. policy briefs) to more creative avenues (e.g. use of visual arts and multimedia). There is significant variation within the portfolio, with some projects seeing dissemination of findings as a discrete step following the conclusion of research, while others being more proactive in engaging relevant users as an integral part of the research process. We are under the impression that the latter constitute the majority, but we also recognise that this may reflect a bias in our sample.

**The Joint Fund has actively sought to promote equitable North-South partnerships and Southern-led research.**

The approach taken by the Joint Fund was to encourage meaningful partnerships and avoiding a ‘tick-box approach’ or last-minute ‘partner-shopping’ to fit the requirements of a call. This seems to have been welcomed by grant holders. While avoiding a prescriptive approach to North-South partnerships, the Joint Fund has - over the years - taken concrete steps to promote the emergence and consolidation of equitable North-South partnerships. An overview of the Joint Fund portfolio shows many examples of well-established academic partnerships, with good prospects for sustainability. At the same time, the experience of the Joint Fund confirms that Southern-led research is not something that ‘just happens’ and it is not enough to simply allow Southern applicants to apply. Proactive and creative efforts need to be put in place.

**The experience of the Joint Fund demonstrates the need to consider how different countries, institutions, and researchers within the Global South benefit from R4D investments.**

Our analysis of Joint Fund publications shows that the majority of Southern authors are affiliated with well-established institutions in Middle Income Countries (particularly South Africa, China, and India). This trend is even more pronounced when we look at highly-cited publications. An implication for future R4D programmes is the need to unpack the generic notion of ‘Global South’, and to have a greater awareness of which countries, and which institutions and researchers within those countries, are benefitting from R4D investments.

**Important lessons have emerged around the practical and ethical challenges of engaging with local communities.**

Many projects appear to have given in-depth consideration to the practical and ethical challenges of engaging with non-academic stakeholders, in particular with local communities. Important lessons have emerged that are transferable to other R4D projects, particularly around the need for research teams to take time for building relationships and trust with local communities, and having the flexibility to adapt their research questions, methods, and process in order to ensure a fair engagement (and avoid unintentionally ‘doing harm’).

**Context matters: the experience of the Joint Fund highlights challenges of working in authoritarian/violent contexts.**

Grantholders have pointed at the specific challenges posed by complex contexts - such as authoritarian government, or contexts characterised by high levels of violence and fragility. It was noted how the current guidance and standards for R4D rely on generic principles that do not apply to these contexts. For example, engaging with the government and other relevant stakeholders openly and transparently is the bedrock of impact work. However, in complex contexts, this may not be possible, as relationships between various stakeholders are fraught with tension, and relevant research may need to stay, to a certain extent, under the radar in order to progress and lead to change. Applying mainstream guidance may lead to safety issues for local researchers, partners, and community members.



### **Grantholders have expressed high levels of satisfaction with the Joint Fund.**

The feedback we received about the management of the Joint Fund has been so far overwhelmingly positive. Grantholders appreciated the flexibility shown by the funders, and the possibility to adapt their project in response to changed circumstances on the ground, particularly when working in complex (authoritarian and/or violent) contexts. ESRC and FCDO were repeatedly described as ‘supportive’. It was particularly appreciated that the Joint Fund did not rely on tokenistic requirements for particular forms of collaboration (e.g. interdisciplinarity, North-South partnerships); instead, it accorded applicants the freedom to structure their project in the way that made more sense for its specific aim and research questions (according to the principle of ‘form follows function’). However, some grant holders would have welcomed more opportunities to engage with FCDO as a research user.

### **The Impact Initiative was a significant step forward in becoming greater as a programme whole than the sum of its project parts.**

The creation of the Impact Initiative in Phase 3 has added significant programmatic value through the creation of a ‘research into use’ ‘brand’ and ‘one stop shop’ for insights arising from research jointly funded by ESRC and FCDO, and the strong focus on synthesis, building relationships across research communities and facilitating effective engagement with policy audiences. Having been created later in the programme period, disconnected from the commissioning and Follow-on Funding processes, there was a limit to the value the Impact Initiative could add in relation to impact thinking, research communications and uptake on an award-by-award basis.

Relatedly, relatively light-touch MEL systems at the programme level – as manifest through ESRC reporting processes and the DFID/FCDO logframe – limited the ‘line of sight’ on project activities and progress meaning that opportunities to support project-level improvement, in relation to uptake and impact, were possibly missed. These systems collected data and measured progress using conventional academic metrics (as opposed to embracing a more holistic notion of research quality) and incentivised an outdated “more is more” approach to research uptake - i.e. the more policy briefs and similar outputs are produced, the better - which also likely constrained the ‘research into use’ quality of the portfolio of research the Impact Initiative had to work with.

### **The wide diversity of the Joint Fund portfolio posed both opportunities and challenges.**

The Joint Fund had a very diverse portfolio of projects and no unifying research theme – thus limiting the comparability with other R4D collaborations between DFID/FCDO and ESRC e.g. ESPA, RLO, UPGro.<sup>31</sup> Joint Fund project research also spanned geographic regions, methods and approaches, and ranged from ‘blue sky’ to applied research. The establishment of a ‘brand’ to bolster credibility and boost uptake was also purposefully enacted for the Impact Initiative (which included RLO) as opposed to the Joint Fund as a programme. While this openness was one of the strengths of the Joint Fund as it allowed exploratory research and flexibility in topics and approaches, it also posed significant challenges in terms of research synthesis, and ultimately limited the scope for programme-wide impact and legacy.

### **The experience of the Joint Fund highlights a dilemma around the role of ‘fundamental’ research in R4D.**

In part, the debate about research quality vs. impact can be reframed around a broader (and unresolved) question for R4D: to what extent should fundamental research (i.e. research that deals with key development issues, but does not have immediate potential to change policy or practice) be funded through ODA? We can see the pathway from research to impact as a line that goes from ‘conceptualising’ issues – how you think about issues, shaping debates – through to ‘real world’

<sup>31</sup> The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme (a collaboration between ESRC, NERC and DFID, running from 2009 to 2018) focused on the linkages between the environment and human wellbeing. The Raising Learning Outcomes Programme, established in 2014, has a specific focus on education. The UPGro programme (2013-2020) had a specific thematic focus (groundwater) as well as a regional focus (Africa).



application i.e. testing approaches or evaluating what works, through to directly influencing decisions. This is a fine balance for R4D programmes to navigate. It can be argued that R4D would be of limited value if it only focused on ‘the last mile’ of this path: such an approach could lead to overlooking structural problems and encourage researchers to focus on ‘low hanging fruits’, based on how easy it is to prove impact as opposed to how relevant a certain question is. On the other hand, it is important for R4D programmes not to conflate theoretical relevance of a question with its potential for impact: in other words, it is important even ‘upstream’ fundamental research – if funded through ODA – keeps an eye on ‘so what?’ questions, in terms of how findings can be ultimately used to influence decisions and inform practice.

The creation of a programme creates space for funders to negotiate this balance in a way, allowing them to commission a portfolio that delivers ODA compliant outcomes at an aggregate level because most of the projects in the portfolio deliver ‘real world’ application – whilst a minority is more conceptual in nature. In this way, it is possible to deliver ‘the best of both worlds’ - although the mechanisms through which you commission and monitor that applied-conceptual split would need to be carefully constructed.

**The Joint Fund portfolio is rich and diverse, with several promising examples of impact.**

The Joint Fund has shown an ability to reach out to a community of impact-minded researchers, and several projects already show clear progress in their pathways to impact. Overall, the experience of the Joint Fund goes to show that, while certainly impact ‘takes time’ and is to some extent unpredictable, it is not an elusive chimera that can only happen at some unspecified point in the future. It is possible to see meaningful progress towards impact within the timeframe of the project – if the necessary planning, skills and resources are in place. Having been created and delivered as part of a relatively small number of first-generation R4D investments, the Joint Fund can credibly claim to have helped to lay the foundation – in terms of experience and learning – for large-scale second-generation investments such as GCRF, both within the funder organisations and beyond amongst the network of potential grant applicants. In this way, the Joint Fund programme leaves behind a legacy that builds on and extends the influence and change achieved at the project-level.

# Learning stories

## 1. Local community engagement as a mechanism to understand routes out of extreme poverty after natural disasters

*In the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, Joint Fund research showed that working with communities can contribute to enabled parties to have a better understanding of how to alleviate poverty including how government and NGOs can best support this through policy and other interventions.*

### About the project

The research sought to understand the strategies that work in relation to poverty alleviation in post-disaster urban environments and the conditions necessary for the success and scaling up of these strategies. Following Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, it asked the question: What factors shape pathways into and out of poverty and people's experience of these, and how can policy create sustained routes out of extreme poverty in ways that can be replicated and scaled up?

The research was a longitudinal study over three years, working on the ground with the communities to understand these factors and how policy can support routes out of poverty. A mixed-methods approach was taken with surveys and focus groups taking place with the same people throughout the project. This also enabled researchers to build strong relations with the community.

At the community level, there was strong and sustained engagement in the project. Following the project, several local researchers went on to enrol in further study related to poverty, resilience, and disaster environments. Governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders have received policy briefings, although it has been challenging at times to gain traction.

### Key lessons and implications for R4D

**Community engagement and involvement from the beginning of research is critical for success.** Having local researchers as part of the team provides the foundation for effective research.

**Mainstreaming gender requires researchers to go into research with an open mind and be culturally aware of different approaches and structures.** Having an all-female team can help with engagement.

**Working in conflict and disaster zones can be hard on researchers.** It is important to be sensitive to this and have reflexivity as a researcher.

Title of project Poverty Alleviation in the Wake of Typhoon Yolanda	
Dates	March 2015 - March 2018
Funded value	£350,738
Lead institution	University of Nottingham
Principal Investigator	Dr. Pauline Eadie
Main research partner institutions	University of the Philippines Los Baños Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)

## 2. Conducting research in contexts of armed conflict and political fragility: lessons from a Joint Fund project in the Philippines

*A Joint Fund project in the Philippines explored how armed conflict affects the management of maritime resources and the livelihoods of local fishing communities. This experience shows the challenges of conducting research in contexts of armed violence and diffused insecurity.*

### About the project

Sustainable fishing requires regulation, efficient co-ordination, and governance of common resources. This project sought to explore how the presence of armed actors affects the capacity of fishing communities to manage their activities, and how this, in turn, affects livelihoods, environmental conservation, and dynamics of poverty and inequality. By using longitudinal data, the project unveiled how the political economy of conflict affects the governance of high-stakes environmental resources over time. Findings were presented to policy makers and other relevant stakeholders (including government officials, community leaders, and fishermen) in a forum titled ‘Armed Group Governance and Sustainability of Environmental Resources: the case of the Philippines’, which took place in November 2019 in the City of Zamboanga.

### Key lessons and implications for R4D

***Conducting research in challenging political climates requires adaptability and flexibility.***

The project started in a very challenging political environment: the Martial Law had just been enacted, and violence in Mindanao was intensifying. Plans for fieldwork had to be reconsidered, as going ahead would have endangered researchers as well as communities. The research team welcomed the flexibility to change their fieldwork.

***Handling of data requires particular care.*** Particular care should be taken in situations of insecurity and instability when it comes to handling and presenting data. To protect the safety of local communities and informants, data should only be presented in anonymized, aggregate form.

***Working with credible, influential partners is key to research uptake.*** The research team included Filipino partners who had already worked as advisors to the government and helped shape policy and regulations. This was crucial to support the project’s pathway to impact.

***For researchers, retaining political neutrality is crucial.*** At the same time, it was essential for researchers to avoid being perceived as ‘political actors’. The research team envisaged its role as equipping policy makers with information, rather than giving them definitive recommendations and specific guidance (equipping policy-makers rather than steering policy-making).

Title of project	Armed Group Governance and the Sustainability of Environmental Resources: The Case of the Philippines
Dates	October 2017 - November 2019
Funded value	£275,573
Lead institution	University of the Andes, Colombia
Principal Investigator	Professor Ana Maria Ibanez
Main research partner institutions	Asian Institute of Management (AIM) – Philippines Western Mindanao State University - Philippines Institute of Development Studies (IDS) – UK

### 3. The economic and social impact of motorcycle track upgrading in Liberia

*Local organisations, working with academic partners, evaluated the impact of upgraded motorcycle track infrastructure in Liberia to ascertain its influence on social and economic development.*

#### About the project

In post-conflict Liberia, motorcycle taxis have provided improved access to markets, health, and educational facilities, but are generally unable to navigate the footpaths from farm to village and from village to roadside. This research set out to evaluate the impact of upgrading footpaths to motorcycle tracks connecting rural Liberian settlements with markets and healthcare facilities.

Through baseline and endline studies, the **main grant** successfully demonstrated that upgrading existing footpaths to enable access by motorcycles had created greater economic opportunity and improved social and health outcomes within rural communities. However, this was not enough on its own to change government investment and master planning policies. To engineer change regarding transport infrastructure and track development, further evidence of use and impact was needed. This evidence was expected to demonstrate the impact of the track improvements, understand better the technical skills required to upgrade tracks, and to develop a model to successfully maintain the tracks.

In the **follow-on grant**, the PI worked closely with the Lofa Integrated Development Association (LIDA) to provide evidence and solutions regarding impact and the technical skills and community mobilisation required to maximise the opportunities presented through track upgrading. Specifically, the follow-on research gathered more data on track usage (via Swansea University Funding) in a second pilot location (construction of track funded by European organisations) and is developing a manual on technical track construction and maintenance as well as community mobilisation via the Joint Fund. The manual will be freely accessible to national/local governments, donors, implementing partners, Liberian engineers, and local communities. This evidence will enable sustainability and replicability of the programme locally and possibly within other parts of Africa.

The research has provided significant evidence and outputs that have resulted in impact within Liberia and the potential for impact further afield. In particular:

- The Liberian government has received evidence produced as part of both grants to help shape major infrastructure and public works programmes in the country.
- The track upgrading has led to an opening up of economic opportunities in rural communities as they now have easier access to markets. The track has primarily been used by farmers as a route to market, but others have benefitted as well. This has resulted in easier access to healthcare and education and has opened economic opportunities for women.
- Communities have been empowered to take on track construction and maintenance. This has led to several spin-off businesses related to track and motorcycle maintenance.
- International donor agencies have welcomed the research as it has provided evidence that investments are making a difference and support the market-driven introduction and spread of motorcycle taxi transport, strengthening the case for further track developments in Liberia as well as other parts of Africa.

## Key lessons and implications for R4D

**Local partnerships are key to successful delivery.** They support accountability, deliverability, and successful outcomes, and ensure better access to government officials and policy makers.

**Co-designing of grant applications leads to better community engagement and traction.** It also results in greater participation by women as the projects are rooted in their local communities. It is easier to disseminate findings if they have been co-designed and co-produced.

Title of projects	At the end of the feeder road: assessing the impact of track construction for motorbike taxis on agrarian development in Liberia (main grant) Finding traction: using an 'upgrading footpaths to motorcycle taxi accessible tracks' construction and maintenance manual to increase impact and reach (Follow-On Funding)
Dates	June 15 - November 18 (main grant) April 20 - June 21 (Follow On Funding)
Funded value	£149,415 (main grant) + £98,852 (Follow-On Funding)
Lead institution	Swansea University
Principal Investigator	Dr. Krijn Peters
Main research partner institutions	Wageningen University Njala University Lofa Integrated Development Association (LIDA)

## 4. Participatory video for community-led disaster response in Nepal

*Using participatory video methodologies to engage rural village communities to sensitise policymakers to their lived experience and ensure that disaster responses are informed by the views of local communities.*

“I saw myself and I saw that I could actually speak and that was a great thing for me. Several important people from my village were watching the videos and I felt important. I felt good”. (community member)

“The impact I’m most proud of was on our impact on participants who went through some technical training but also had a crash course on policy impact”. (Simon Rushton, PI)

### About the project

The project was designed in response to the recognition that some rural village communities in Nepal have not been comprehensively supported to rebuild their homes following earthquakes. The project aimed to give voice to these communities using a Participatory Video methodology.

Communities were empowered to shape research questions and supported to present their findings to policy audiences at the local, district, and national levels. In this way, the project empowered policymakers to understand the experience and reality of local communities. Many officials had never been to those remote rural villages and were not aware of how they had been affected by the earthquake.

The project’s primary mechanism to promote research uptake was the screening of the video for policymakers and officials. The research team learned a lot from these screenings, which were led by community members themselves. Overall, the screenings were successful and, as a researcher put it, they “got better over time”.

The project contributed to academic knowledge on resilience as a concept, on the Nepal case specifically, and on the use of participatory video for policy advocacy. Community participants (including 2 interviewed for this case study) received their allowance to rebuild their home shortly after the screening of the videos and they credit the video project as the sole reason for this. Feedback from the NGO project partner suggests that the project was well received at all levels of government – local, regional and national.

“They [central government] said it was a good initiative, they said they wanted to do more. It gave a very good insight for urban people to understand the suffering [...] and how their work can benefit, from their projects”. (Research partner)

### Key lessons and implications for R4D

The project had co-production at its core. The project team was not prescriptive in designing research questions for the community participants. They provided training in film making and how to conduct an interview. Beyond the training, the community participants were encouraged to develop their own thinking around issues of resilience, reconstruction, and disaster support and to approach the project using their own ideas and questions rather than those pre-prescribed by the



research team. This was described as a “peer to peer” and a “bottom up” approach by the research team. The project successfully engaged meaningfully with communities in remote Nepal, who had been affected by earthquakes, many of whom had lost their houses. Key factors of success included:

**Mutual trust:** The successful engagement of communities has been down to the relationships held by PHASE Nepal, the NGO project partner who were well-known in the villages and therefore trusted by the community members.

“I have known PHASE Nepal for 5 years and I have a good relationship with this. This helped with getting involved”. (Community member)

“Some of the PHASE people were familiar to me. I understood what it was for and felt very positive”. (Community member)

**Enthusiasm:** There was enthusiasm amongst the community to participate and the research team needed to refine the criteria for participation to ensure representation and fairness.

“Everyone [in the village] wanted to do it! We had a meeting with the local council and developed criteria for what we were looking for. We wanted a balance of men and women. We wanted to engage different castes and ethnicities. Each village is in 9 wards and we wanted 1 person from each ward. We needed a fair way to split people. In some areas there were 40 people”. (Researcher)

**Support and encouragement by the project team:** Some community participants, including 2 interviewed for this evaluation, report feeling nervous at the beginning of their involvement and explain the encouraging role that the facilitators have had in encouraging them to be involved.

“In the beginning, I was a bit afraid to speak to an outsider, especially with a video. I was a bit hesitant. I didn’t know how to speak, I am a village lady and a bit afraid. But some of the [research and NGO] staff speak really well, and they encouraged me. They told me that I speak really well with Nepali and I speak really well about my experiences”. (Community member)

“I said to the project team ‘I will look horrible and sound horrible, I am so afraid’. They said, ‘it doesn’t matter, if you are nervous, we can cut that bit out [of the film] so that people don’t see that part, there is no right or wrong way to do it, just tell what you know’. They consoled me”. (Community member)

**Community empowerment:** As well as creating the videos, community participants were involved in the screening events. This was important as it ensured that community participants were able to see how their involvement was received and contributed to a sense of ownership over the process.

“When people came to interview me, I was a bit shy and excited – how will this go? Will I speak well? Will my voice be well represented or not? I had lots to say but will I be able to tell the story in the right way? But when I spoke, I spoke well. This was my favourite moment. I was hesitant but when I started speaking the facilitators helped to make me feel comfortable. The people [research team and NGO] were so friendly and kind, I got the confidence slowly”. (Community member).

“When the screening was done in the village it was a fun experience. I saw myself and I saw that I could actually speak and that was a great thing for me. Several important people from my village were watching the videos and I felt important. I felt good”. (Community member)

**Gender inclusiveness:** A female Col reflected that being a woman gave her a different perspective on the engagement of community members and enabled the team to engage more women in the methodology.

“We really have to work hard to engage women at grassroots level [in research]. In one village we couldn’t find any women [to participate]. We started just working with men but then I disagreed – I said no, we need to encourage women to participate. I went to the village and I asked them [women] to get involved. Without my involvement that wouldn’t have happened. It would have been more difficult for my male colleagues to do this. [...] with this participatory work you get to spend time, build rapport. It makes a huge difference. It is better for women. I come from a village but then the women see me and they realise it is possible to engage, to be independent, it can be very powerful”. (Researcher)

Title of project	Resilience policymaking in Nepal: giving voice to communities
Dates	September 2017-September 2018
Funded value	£296,316
Lead institution	University of Sheffield
Principal Investigator	Dr. Simon Rushton
Main research partner institutions	PHASE Nepal (NGO)

## 5. Gender-sensitive design improves scope for inclusive development impact

*Inclusive by design, building on past experiences in different contexts and existing collaborative partnerships both within the consortium and with the communities, a Joint Fund project in Burkina Faso created inclusive spaces for common property resource management decisions to optimise water management.*

“Not everything that is written up in an article captures how you need to work behind the scenes to achieve positive outcomes... the process is time-consuming, involves many actors and many activities in a short period, and is very resource-intensive to create the conditions necessary for success” Marlène Elias, PI.

### About the project

Effective community-based management of common-pool resources is essential to promote sustainable development in contexts facing environmental degradation and social conflict. In the seasonally dry tropics, water stored in reservoirs can transform the lives of people in areas of persistent poverty by providing dry season income and food security through fish, livestock, and crop production. Yet the intended co-management between communities and the state often fails, giving rise to inequitable distribution of water and other agricultural resources that, in turn, leads to stark inequalities in costs and benefits of reservoirs among households and communities. Establishing inclusive and effective governance structures for co-management of common property resources is thus essential.

This project convened stakeholders around two reservoirs in Boulgou province, Burkina Faso, through inclusive 'innovation platforms' that provided spaces for face-to-face learning, exchange, and negotiation. Through the innovation platforms, stakeholders with conflicts of interest related to reservoirs were able to identify, compare and implement community-driven innovations, including participatory monitoring. The effects of these dialogues were more equitable and sustainable management of, and access to, land, water, and associated benefits and proof of concept for active and integrated governance structures.

Although there are established institutions (rules around reservoirs) in theory, they were not functioning effectively in practice – but this did create a space in which the project could work to support their effective functioning. The innovation platforms unpacked conflict and challenges, resulting in a clear action plan to create an inclusive community governance committee to manage the reservoir, to increase the height of the dykes and rehabilitate the reservoir channels, and to work with communities to develop and implement a sustainable action plan. The success of the project and the utility of bringing together so many relevant actors was shown by the fact that stakeholders wanted to extend the consultation framework to the city level, and some resources had been secured to enable this.

The importance of women's participation in reservoir management has been recognised, and they have created a sub-group to advise a new water users' committee; and young people became involved in leadership positions, which increases the likelihood of sustainability.

The functioning fora were successful in raising funds for channel maintenance, increasing the likelihood of continued impact post-project. However, the resource-intensive nature of the process raises questions about post-project impact because someone has to lead and convene.

### Key lessons & implications for R4D

**Grassroots identification of the need for a project increases the likelihood of impact:** in this case, previous research and a survey at the start identified that more effective common property management of scarce water resources was a common concern because all groups of the population were concerned about water availability drying up and a decline in water quality.

**Understanding context, including power relations and the relationships between various actors, is critical for success.** Creating favourable conditions for inclusion – and designing spaces to enable women and youth to be able to raise their voices - was key for inclusive participation and sustainability and equity of management decisions arising out of the innovation platforms, given the way in which gender and age intersect to determine who is winning or losing from the creation of the reservoirs.

**Involving the right people is essential.** This project brought together consortium partners with complementary experience in contact theory in other contexts (Bioversity International), good facilitation skills and relationships with the target communities (SNV World), and design and implementation of participatory monitoring systems in developing country contexts (King's College London and Université Ouaga I Joseph Ki-Zerbo).

**Open-mindedness, respectful relationships, and willingness to work together to address issues arising in interdisciplinary partnerships make it possible to allow breakthroughs.** In this project flexibility and reflexivity were required to identify the form and style for effective communication of scientific information to different groups.

Title of project	Pathways out of poverty for Burkina Faso's reservoir-dependent communities
Dates	October 2017- May 2019
Funded value	£293,658
Lead institution	Bioversity International
Principal Investigator	Dr. Marlène Elias
Main research partner institutions	SNV World, King's College London, Université Ouaga I Joseph Ki-Zerbo

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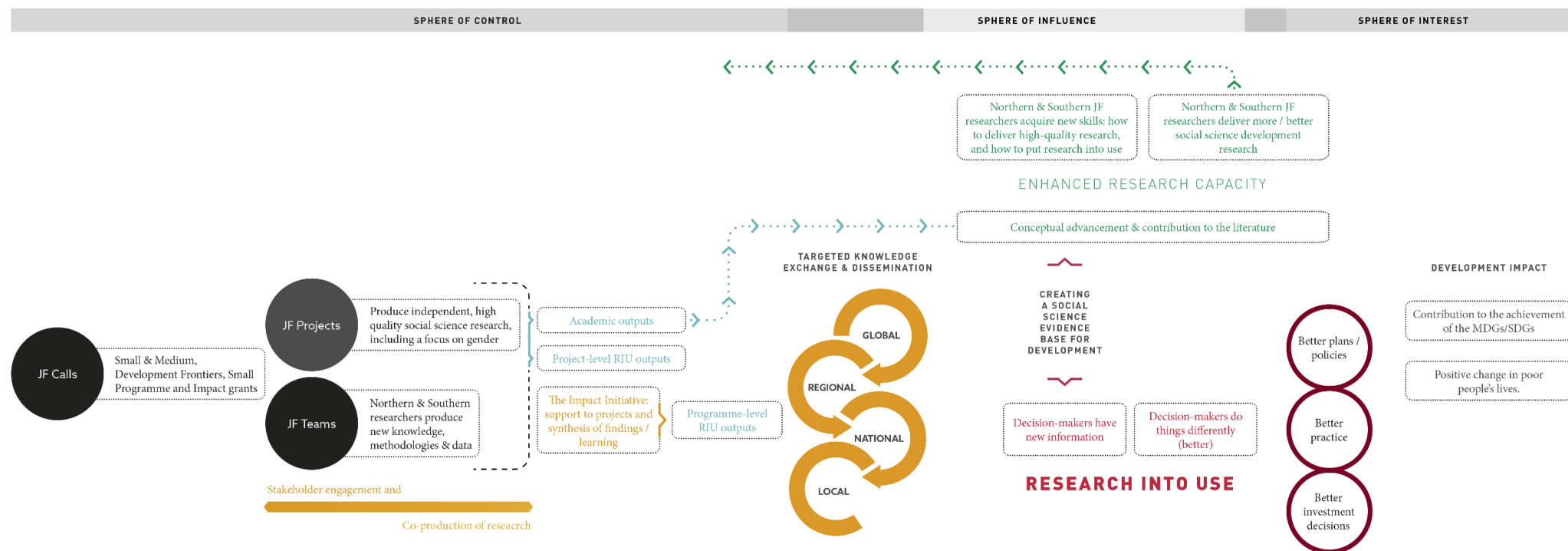
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## Annex 1: List of interviews

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Tim Conway	Senior Social Development Advisor, Research and Evidence Division	FCDO
Jo Duffy		ESRC
Catherine Flynn	Senior Research Portfolio Manager, International Development	ESRC
James Georgalakis	Director of Communications and Impact	Impact Initiative/ IDS
Lyndy Griffin		ESRC
Nina Marshall	Strategic Lead for Public Policy and Engagement	ESRC
Joanna McGowan	Head of Profession, Economics and Senior Economic Adviser	FCDO
David Parsons	Team leader for <i>Review of the ESRC-DFID Impact Support, Synthesis and Cohort-Building Services used to support ESRC-DFID Joint Programmes.</i>	Leeds Beckett University
Jennie Popay	Chair of several Joint Fund assessment panels	Lancaster University
Andrew Shaw	Evaluation Adviser, Research and Evidence Division	FCDO

## Annex 2: Theory of Change



## Annex 3: Evaluation Framework

### EQ1: Has the Joint Fund met its aim to be a provider of independent, high-quality social science research?

Sub-questions	Impact enablers	Gender
<b>EQ 1.1:</b> How has the Joint Fund fared in terms of <i>research integrity</i> , i.e. technical quality, appropriateness, and rigour of research design and execution?	<b>I1</b> - Has interdisciplinarity been related to better research quality, as measured through integrity, legitimacy and importance?	To what extent has a gender lens been included in the definition of research questions and methods? To what extent it has emerged in research findings?
<b>EQ 1.2:</b> How has the Joint Fund fared in terms of <i>research legitimacy</i> ?	<b>C1</b> – Has co-production been related to better research quality, as measured through integrity, legitimacy and importance?	In terms of research legitimacy, to what extent has the research process been procedurally fair to both men and women?
<b>EQ 1.3:</b> How has the Joint Fund fared in terms of <i>research importance</i> ?	<b>P1</b> – Have equitable partnerships been related to better research quality, as measured through integrity, legitimacy and importance?	How has the research process fared alongside the "gender continuum" ('gender exploitative'-'gender blind'- 'gender-sensitive' – 'gender transformative')? In terms of research importance, how has the Joint Fund research been valuable to women relative to men?

### EQ2: To what extent have the outputs from the Joint Fund led to research uptake and the use of findings and recommendations by policy-makers and practitioners?

Sub-questions	Impact enablers	Gender
<b>EQ 2.1:</b> To what extent has Joint Fund research been intentionally positioned for use as an integral part of research commissioning, design, and management?	<b>I2</b> – Has interdisciplinarity supported positioning for use and uptake of Joint Fund research?	To what extent has gender been considered in the 'positioning for use' and uptake strategies of the Joint Fund?

<p><b>EQ2.2:</b> To what extent have Joint Fund projects, and the programme as a whole, been flexible and creative in capitalising on emerging opportunities to promote research uptake and use?</p>	<p><b>C2-</b> Has co-production supported positioning for use and uptake of Joint Fund research?</p>	<p>Has there been consideration of to whom benefits of uptake will accrue?</p>
	<p><b>P2</b> – Have equitable partnerships supported positioning for use and uptake of Joint Fund research?</p>	

**EQ3: Is there evidence that the Joint Fund has achieved the intended impact, namely that ‘Policy and practice to reduce poverty in low-income countries are demonstrably informed by the programme-generated evidence base’? If so, how significant has this been?**

Sub-questions	Impact enablers	Gender
<p><b>EQ 3.1:</b> To what extent has Joint Fund research had a demonstrable impact on policy?</p>	<p><b>I3-</b> Has interdisciplinarity been an impact enabler in the Joint Fund?</p>	<p>How has the impact of Joint Fund research (on policy and practice, or through other channels) benefitted differently men and women?</p>
<p><b>EQ 3.2:</b> To what extent has Joint Fund research had a demonstrable impact on practice?</p>	<p><b>C3-</b> Has co-production an impact enabler for the Joint Fund?</p>	
<p><b>EQ3.3:</b> To what extent had Joint Fund research had other types of impact, beyond policy and practice?</p>	<p><b>P3-</b> Have equitable partnerships been an impact enabler in the Joint Fund?</p>	



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## Annex 4: Online survey

The online survey was our first port of call to engage Joint Fund researchers. The survey was launched in June 2020, using the online platform Survey Monkey, and promoted through three rounds of emails: a mass email to all Phase 3 Principal Investigators (PIs); follow-up individual emails to all PIs in original project sample; and emails to all Phase 3 Co-Investigators (Co-Is), divided by project. The survey was also advertised on the Impact Initiative website and Twitter feed.

The majority of respondents are Co-Is (22) followed by PIs (17) and researchers (2). Just about half of respondents (21) are based in the United Kingdom; 10 are based in Asia (Bangladesh, China, India, Maldives, Nepal, and the Philippines); 7 are based in Africa (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe); and 3 are based in the Americas (the United States and Colombia). As per the type of institutions represented, over half (24) were Universities in the Global North, 12 were Universities in the Global South, and there was some representation of research centres and NGOs, in the Global North (1) and in the Global South (4).

At the end of the online survey, respondents were asked for their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. 29 respondents (over 70% of the total) expressed their availability for a follow-up interview. All those who had expressed availability were contacted to schedule an interview, regardless of whether their project featured in the original sample or not. However, several respondents who had initially expressed availability did not respond to the follow-up request for interview. The online scheduling system Calendly was used to ease the process and maximise the opportunity for respondents to have the conversation at a time of their convenience.

## Annex 5: Project-level interviews

Project title	Number of interviews
Blood Bricks	2
Improving research infrastructure on social assistance	1
A comparative study of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of alternative poverty eradication interventions in extremely poor areas of N. Ghana	1
Resilience policymaking in Nepal: giving voice to communities	5
Poverty Alleviation in the Wake of Typhoon Yolanda	3
How Can Technology Improve Learning? Information Technology, Education and Welfare in Niger; and Technology, Monitoring and Teacher Support in Niger	1
Armed Group Governance and the Sustainability of Environmental Resources: The Case of the Philippines	1
Energy on the move	1
Parliamentary Effectiveness	1
Water-security in Ethiopia and the emotional response of Pastoralists (WEEP)	2
How the Urban Poor Define and Measure Food Insecurity and Nutrition	1
Armed Group Governance and the Sustainability of Environmental Resources: The Case of the Philippines	1
Pathways out of Poverty for Burkina Faso's Reservoir dependent Communities	1
Finding Traction: using an 'upgrading footpaths to motorcycle taxi accessible tracks' construction and maintenance manual to increase impact and reach	2

## Annex 6: Data science analysis

### Text mining in relation to gender

The evaluation team used computer-assisted text mining methods to explore the extent to which a gender lens was included in the project proposal and reporting documents for the Joint Fund. This approach was used given the large number of project proposals and reporting documents.

We summarise below the specific methods and documents used for each gender evaluation question. EQ1 focussed on the extent to which funded projects included a gender lens into their research objectives and/or methods, whilst EQ2 was focussed on the extent to which gender was considered in the research uptake strategy of the grantee projects.

Evaluation questions	Approach details
<b>EQ 1: To what extent has a gender lens has been included by projects funded by the Joint Fund?</b>	The evaluation team assessed the presence and frequency of gender-related words included in the Call for Proposal (CfS) documents covering all funding phases and funding calls within the phases. These documents described the research questions and methods used by the grantee. To describe the type of gender methods used by the grantees, the evaluation team summarised the methods that were listed in the grantees most recent Annual Report.
<b>EQ2: To what extent has gender been considered in the 'positioning for use' and uptake strategies of the Joint Fund?</b>	The Pathway to Impact documents were analysed using the same text mining approach used as for EQ 1. The Pathway to Impact documents were written by the grantees during the inception phase of their research projects, describing the uptake and impact strategies of the research outputs. Pathway to Impact documents were available for Phase 2 and 3 only.

The specific words (terms) that were used to be indicative of gender included: "gender", "sex", "woman", "female", "girl", "mother", "maternal", "man", "father", "boy" and "male". As part of the analysis, we also explored the extent to which both women and men were mentioned in the same documents. The terms "gender", "woman", "female", "girl", "mother" and "maternal" were used to indicate mention of women. For classifying mention of men, the terms "man", "father" and "male" were used.

All the documents were pre-processed before analysis to improve the efficiency and accuracy of the text mining analysis. The pre-processing of the project documents involved removing symbols, numbers, punctuation, and commonly used words that were not needed for interpreting the meaning of the text, called stop words (e.g. "the", "a", "in"). As part of the pre-processing work the evaluation team also converted all words to their base form ("women" to "woman"), also called lemmatisation in the Natural Language Processing field.

The text mining analysis was conducted using the quanteda and tidytext packages in the R statistical computer software program. The evaluation team also used the ggplot2 and dplyr packages for data manipulation and visualisation.

## Analysis of data derived from the Digital Science *Dimensions* system

**Authorship:** In order to determine Global North and South participation in publication output, publications associated with grants in each call were identified by:

- a. the publication being reported in Gateway to Research (via Research Fish) against a grant.
- b. an acknowledgement link between the grant and the call being identified in Dimensions.

Each publication was then matched to its record in Dimension, via its doi. (Note this method excludes publication outputs that do not have dois, and that this generally means that analysis is limited to more formal scholarly outputs such as journal articles, or in some cases book chapters.) Using derived affiliation data in Dimensions each author was then classified as either a Global North or Global South collaboration,

**Interdisciplinarity:** Having identified the authors involved in papers created as part of the ESRC/DFID, further detail on each author was gathered. Again, using Dimensions, the entire publication history for each author was gathered. As each publication is classified with the Units of Assessment to which its research belongs, it was possible to attribute a primary Unit of Assessment for each author and use this as a proxy to represent their discipline focus. Joining this additional data back up to the publications and grants from the fund, it was possible to create two interdisciplinary views of research across the fund:

- (1) A matrix of interdisciplinary collaboration counting the number of publications that include researchers from Unit of Assessment X and Y
- (2) A matrix of interdisciplinary collaboration counting the number of grants that include researchers from Unit of Assessment X and Y

**Citations Analysis:** Using Dimensions and again matching on dois, publications from all three phases of the program were identified. Using this publication set, publications within the program were classified by Sustainable Development Goals. SDG were attributed to each paper based on a training set developed by the Digital Science Consultancy team.

Where it was not possible to classify publications directly in Dimensions, the classification most commonly assigned to other publications linked to the same grant was used.

Using a field normalized citation metric (field citation ratio), publications in the program were then compared to the global set of publications within each Sustainable Development Goal. Using this comparison, the number of publications from the fund in the top 1,5, and 10 percent of publications (based on field citation ratio) was calculated. Note: Publications published in 2019 and 2020 are not included in the analysis, as there is not enough time for citations to accrue.

## Annex 7: Online qualitative discussion

We invited all Phase 3 PIs and Co-Is to participate in a 3-day online moderated discussion. This took place in November 2020. The aim of this portion of our evaluation methodology was to provide an opportunity for researchers from Northern and Southern institutions to discuss key issues related to their research and the impact it generated. The online discussion format gave participants the opportunity to participate at a time of the day that suited them, thus mitigating challenges related to time differences and internet connectivity. Participants from different locations could react to one another's responses. Participants had the option to retain anonymity.

Eighteen participants agreed to take part in the discussion. Ten participants were from Northern institutions and eight were from Southern institutions. Sixteen (16) participants responded to at least one question and five (5) responded to every question. Our moderators were able to ask follow up questions to participants responses. This was an opportunity to clarify points made by respondents to check understanding and invite a more detailed response.

Our 3-day discussion guide was informed by themes of interest emerging from our previously-conducted interviews with PIs and Co-Is. An outline of the questions we asked:

Day themes	Examples of questions asked
<b>Day 1 - Intro, getting to know your project and how it came about</b>	Reflections on the call design and application process – what do you remember? How was the experience? How did you decide who to work with? How were the partnerships brokered and what did they look like? Were specific discussions held about how the partnership would work (rather than just about the research process)?
<b>Day 2 - Navigating the trade-offs between research excellence, development impact, and collaborative research processes</b>	Did any tensions arise between the need for research impact and development impact as the process unfolded? How were these addressed? How did the partnership and collaborative research process unfold? What issues arose, and how were they addressed?
<b>Day 3 - Influencing policy – digging deep into the challenges, limitations, and success</b>	"Excellent research will always be used" - do you agree or disagree with this statement? We have heard from our evaluation so far (and other evaluations we've done) that there are assumptions that social science will influence policy and that this would be the main channel to bring about development impact. Is this assumption something you recognize? Is it a fair assumption?

### Reflections and lessons on methodology

What went well:

- PIs and Co-Is were keen to be involved and we identified a reasonable number.
- We attracted a good number of respondents from the Global South which helped to address some of the previous bias towards Northern respondents
- Respondents were given the option of retaining their anonymity and this seemed to work well

- Conducting the online qual after the telephone and case study interviews had been completed was a good opportunity to "reflect back" and test some of our emerging findings.

What we would consider trying in the future for similar evaluations:

- Hosting a separate online qual discussion for respondents in the Global South to invite a more direct and open dialogue about any challenges/tensions working with Northern institutions;
- Hosting a woman and minority-gender only discussion to explore any learning about the research grant from a gender perspective;
- Hosting a sub-discipline specific discussion to provide an opportunity to explore discipline-specific challenges and explore the extent to which "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts";
- Host a regional discussion (e.g. a country or a region within a country) for all Fund holders and their stakeholders to explore the extent to which there has been synergy between research streams and any catalytic impacts;
- Inviting respondents to complete a pre-survey to ask what key questions/themes they would like to discuss and designing the discussion around their interests.



