
GLOBAL CHALLENGES RESEARCH FUNDING: ANALYSIS OF 2020-21 REPORTS

PURPOSE

1. To report on the use of formula ODA funding in 2020-21, and to update the Committee on the current position with the International Science Partnerships Fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Note the paper.
3. Advise the executive on actions to best position the sector for future ODA research funding.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4. There are no financial implications.

RISK ASSESSMENT

5. There are no risks associated with this paper.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

6. All applications to GCRF and the Newton Fund must include a Gender Equality Statement. SFC asked institutions to report on their arrangements for gender equality and outcomes in their annual returns for formula GCRF. The reports highlighted a range of gender sensitive practices in the design and selection of research proposals, and recorded information on the gender profile of researchers supported by ODA funding.
7. The GCRF case studies collected in 2020-21 include several examples of research design

for gender equality, and practices to support gender equal participation in LMIC partner research teams. A [toolkit](#) was produced by genderEd (for the University of Edinburgh) to provide guidance on completing GCRF Gender Equality Statements.

ISLAND COMMUNITIES

8. All Scottish universities received GCRF formula funding from 2016-2021, enabling them to support a range of projects in island and/or remote communities. In particular, UHI took forward various projects relating to its particular research strengths, focusing on multilingualism, archaeology and tourism in island communities.

CARBON REDUCTION

9. All projects supported by formula GCRF addressed one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2020-21, 56 of the 409 funded activities included a focus on SDG13: Climate Action.

PUBLICATION

10. This paper will be published on the Council website.

FURTHER INFORMATION

11. Contact: David Beards, Senior Policy Officer, tel: 0131 313 6520, email: dbeards@sfc.ac.uk.

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PURPOSE

12. This paper invites the Committee to note the use of formula ODA research funding in 2020-21, and the current position with the International Science Partnerships Fund.

BACKGROUND

13. The Global Challenges Research Fund was launched in 2016 as a £1.6bn programme to address the sustainable development goals in developing countries (DACs), delivered by the UK Research Councils and HE funding bodies. SFC managed formula ODA funding of £41,726,521 over FY2016-17 to 2020-21:

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
£2,392,400	£4,012,495	£10,279,379	£11,825,888	£13,216,359

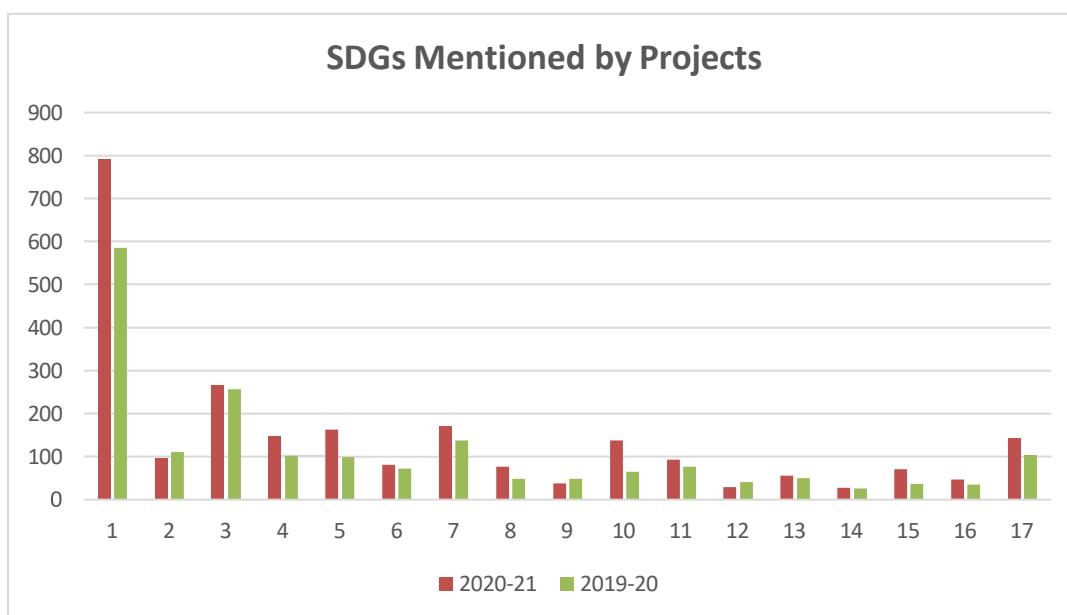
14. Following the UK Government decision to reduce ODA spending to 0.5% of GNI in 2020, BEIS reduced ODA research funding from 2021 and discontinued the formula GCRF managed by the UK funding bodies. The funding changes, together with disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, had significant impacts. This paper focuses on the final set of institutional reports, which cover work supported by the FY2020-21 formula funding.

USES OF FORMULA GCRF IN SCOTLAND (FY2020-21)

15. Funding of £13,216,359 was allocated in FY2020-21. The [SFC Announcement](#) provided guidance on the use of funding. Institutions were allowed to deploy funding until the end of December 2021, given the disruption caused by COVID. 409 discrete activities were supported, involving Scottish universities and 88 different partner countries – similar numbers to previous years. Institutions were encouraged to submit project case studies with their reports. 81 case studies were received; these are listed at the Annex and are available to Committee members on request.

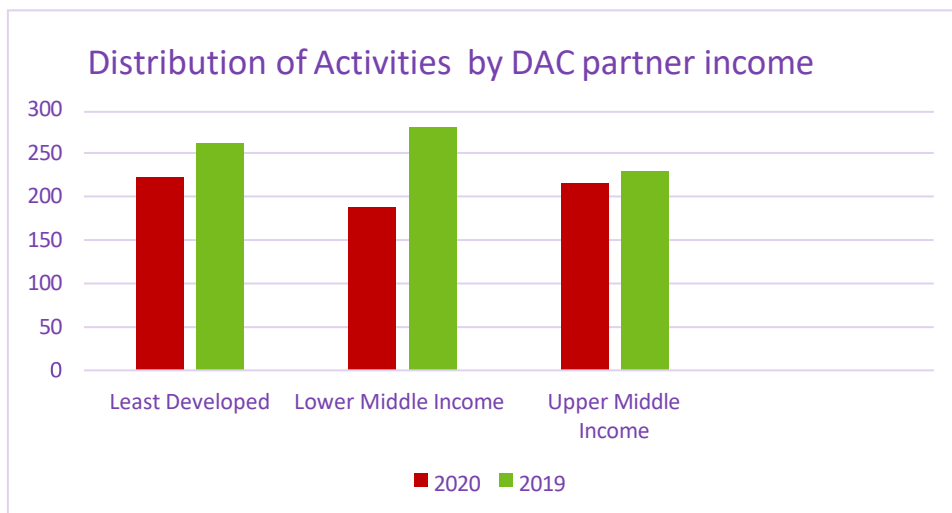
- 16. Broken down by size, 4% of the funding was deployed as small grants of >10k (typically mobility grants, workshops, preparatory studies); 36% was deployed as medium grants of £10 – 50k, and 60% was deployed as large grants of >£50k for major studies, FEC or other co-funding for larger projects.
- 17. £1.812m (around 14%) was allocated to Full Economic Costs on Research Council grants. One institution used the grant in this way for the first time, citing the various time and other challenges encountered during 2020-21. Smaller institutions had fewer options to redeploy funding in the event of disrupted plans; a small amount of the funding will need to be clawed back principally for this reason. About 5% of the funding was used for staffing and related administration costs.

Distribution of Activity by Sustainable Development Goal



- 18. The chart shows how many times each SDG was mentioned as an aim of the funded activities (many projects sought to address more than one SDG). There is a good spread across all SDGs with SDG1 (No Poverty) emerging as by far the most common cited area of interest, followed by SDG3 (Health).

Distribution of Activities Across Partner Countries



19. The graph records beneficiary countries listed by projects, grouped by income. Compared to 2019, this suggests some shift of emphasis to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) – indeed some institutions reported deliberately refocusing support to LDCs in 2020-21. India was the most frequently mentioned partner, and there has been a noticeable increase in engagement with Sub-Saharan African nations.
20. Institutions have highlighted the value of small grants in developing new DAC relationships, typically used for mobility grants, workshops, preparatory studies. Grants of <10k accounted for 4% of total expenditure.
21. The majority of the formula funding (£7.8m or 60%) was used for larger grants of >£50k. Some institutions reported focusing funding on a smaller number of projects as relationships developed and areas for greatest potential impact were identified.

Impact of ODA funding cuts and COVID

22. Uncertainty about the funding position throughout 2020 (the formula funding was announced in two instalments) delayed the start of some activities, and the ODA funding cuts meant that some project grants were withdrawn, so that projects could not complete or proceed to delivery stage. In some cases, formula GCRF was used to off-set reductions to Research Council-funded projects. While some £30m of ODA grants were reported as won during 2020-21, institutions reported a decline in the number of successful applications for follow-on grant funding compared to previous years.

“The effects of both COVID-19 and the cuts to overseas aid have been noticeable as shown by the decline in successful follow-on funding for GCRF-remit projects... In 2018-19, project PIs leveraged four times as much money as was invested; in 2019-20, they leveraged double the investment; but in 2020-21, they leveraged only the same again. The reported number of follow-on applications for this year’s projects has also fallen dramatically.”

23. The continuing impact of COVID disruption to international travel caused much research fieldwork to be delayed, cancelled or re-designed. This had a particular impact on studentships where it was not possible to complete project work for theses: in several cases institutions agreed time extensions and replacement funding to enable these students to complete.
24. The shift to remote working posed a challenge for collaboration at a distance, but also prompted widespread and rapid adoption of online communication and collaboration tools. This has laid a foundation for more effective and deep remote research collaboration, which is important in the context of likely continuing pressures around international travel and opportunities for face-to-face encounters and overseas fieldwork.
25. These factors were in addition to the existing complexities of working in DAC countries. The flexibility and perseverance demonstrated by staff to deliver outcomes from their projects during this difficult period is notable. Nevertheless, the funding cuts have affected morale, trust and the value derived from prior investment in partnerships.

“(The) team were able to deliver training of on the use of mass spectrometry online. In the past, this would have likely entailed a visit to the lab in (Scotland), and/or the trainers travelling overseas. On this occasion, the team were able to ship the equipment required for the research (overseas), before delivering the training online. It is unlikely this mode of delivery would have taken place had the restrictions not been in place.”

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES AND OPTIONS

Building the ODA Research Base

26. Overall, 106 studentships were supported by the funding in 2020-21. Several institutions sought to place early career researchers (ECRs) at the heart of their ODA work, enabling promising academics in Scotland and overseas to pursue research careers committed to tackling global challenges. The GCRF has supported junior research posts, offering opportunities to PhDs and post-docs, and in some cases has involved ECRs assuming lead roles in projects. This has helped develop the postgraduate research base and the ODA research community in particular.

Resources to Support ODA Research

27. Universities have developed good practices in ODA research, including internal processes and resources for ODA compliance and safeguarding, and various resources have been created to support ODA research: a Research Ethics Toolkit, a Due Diligence Toolkit, ODA Research Toolkit, and a Gender Equality Toolkit. These are available to all institutions.

A Long-term Commitment

28. ODA research funding has led to a strategic shift in the way Scottish universities approach international research collaboration and a more visible alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. GCRF has built research capacity, opportunities for career development here and overseas, and support resources.
29. Despite the winding up of GCRF, Scottish universities remain committed to the agenda, as shown by, for example, the launch of various institutes related to sustainable development and the commitment to support fellowships from internal funding.

Future of ODA Research Funding

30. BEIS has announced that the GCRF and Newton Fund will close at the end of FY2022-23. A new International Science and Technology Partnerships fund is being established to support ODA and other international research, to open from FY2023-24. There is no indication that the new Fund will involve a formula funding stream for SFC to manage. The remaining UK GCRF funding is being used to cover existing commitments, and UKRI recently allocated some additional block funding to institutions with the largest portfolios of ODA projects.
31. An evaluation of GCRF by Itad consultants has been underway since 2021. [Outputs from the foundation stage of the evaluation](#) are available. SFC has provided evidence and interviews. BEIS has involved funding bodies and other delivery partners in considering the findings of the evaluation as it progresses, and how this learning can inform the design and KPIs for the new International Science and Technology Partnerships fund.

RECOMMENDATIONS

32. The Committee is invited to:
 - Note the paper.
 - Advise the Council executive on actions to best position the sector for future ODA research funding.

LIST OF PROJECT CASE STUDIES (FULL SET AVAILABLE ON REQUEST)

Contents**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN**

GCRF-AFRICAP: agricultural and food-system resilience: increasing capacity and advising policy

Evaluating opportunities and barriers to establishing an autonomous and functional sickle cell anaemia (SCA) unit in Cabinda, Angola

COVID-19 and water security in the world's largest refugee camp: can groundwater development safely meet the increased water demand to fight COVID-19 in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh?

Development of novel modified scorpion venom peptides as anti-SARS-CoV-2 virus

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Readymade Garment Industry in Bangladesh

Improving the academic attainment of children in disadvantaged schools in Malawi through strengthening school-community engagement

Low cost, easy to use, recombinant antibody-based test strips capable of rapidly detecting cyanotoxins in drinking water wells/reservoirs

RALENTIR: Reducing land degradation and carbon loss from Ethiopia's soils to strengthen livelihoods and resilience

Capacity Building in Educational Inclusion in Cambodia: Efficacy & Interculturality

Brazil-UK partnership for development, improvement and implementation of integrated person-centred care in health systems powered with artificial intelligence (AI)

Surveys of natural glaciers and creation of an ice stupa: a solution to improve Himalayan-Karakoram mountain community resilience to water scarcity

Enhancing Collaboration between State, Civil Society and Community in the Face of Crime and Chronic Violence in Mexico

Providing Timely Evidence to Facilitate the Socio-economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic in Rwanda

Increasing participation in cancer screening and treatment in Nepal

Conversations on African Security

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

Renewable energy for resilient health

Potato Improvement in multiple LMIC Countries

Growing up on the Streets fellowship programme: building capacity and creating influence

EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY

Street Soccer PiTCH – Players in Training, Coaching and Health

Development of Concentrator for Solar Dryer Application in Rwanda

Determining infectious disease exposure of people in North

Cathelicidin-Derived Host Defence Peptides as novel therapeutic antivirals for Zika Virus

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Building an Ethics Toolkit for Global Challenges Research

Testing the production advantage of the chicken frizzle gene in tropical climates

The MoTHER (Maternal and Child Health and Wellbeing). (Breastfeeding in Mexico

Syrian Women in Agriculture

E-waste Re-engineering Strategies in Nepal

Sustainable Harvest Rates in Miombo Woodland Trees

Ocean Literacy as a vehicle to support sustainable development and gender equity in coastal communities: Assessment of needs, opportunities and novel partnerships in Latin America

Digital Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Improving Treatment Outcomes for TB and HIV patients in Africa

The Right to Food and Nutrition Cluster

Improving earlier diagnosis and precision medicine for reduced mortality of breast cancer in Kenya

Sustainable Management of the World's Largest Savannah: putting research into action (SMS-Action)

Co-creating a social enterprise pilot with marginalised Afro-Colombian and Indigenous young people in the Colombian Pacific

Capacity Building to Monitor the Impacts of Global Change in the world's largest savannah (SavannaChange)

Development of a Solar Cooker based on Phase-Change Materials

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Creating sustainable solar energy for the Blantyre-Blantyre Clinical Research Facility

The Equality Project: Starting from Home. Reducing gender inequalities in Kenya and Tanzania

Developing new approaches to diabetes management in Pakistan and low-and-middle-income countries

Re-costing the earth: indigenous governance of reforestation in Southern Mexico

Supporting the Next Generation of Wildlife Managers in Tanzania

HERIOT WATT UNIVERSITY

Air Pollution in Thailand and its detrimental health impacts

Using Air Quality Models to Analyse Environmental and Social Inequalities

Multi-hazard prediction and disaster response management in Indonesia

Promoting community's sustainable development - Valuing ecosystem services affected by economic activities

Mainstreaming biodiversity into coastal development: A sustainability roadmap for Paracas, Peru

Implementing a Mineral and Energy Resources Classification System for Africa (AMREC)

SRUC

South Asian Nitrogen Hub

The Role of Data-Driven

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

Developing a sustainable future for guinea fowl farming in Ghana: tackling juvenile mortality using a multidisciplinary approach

Tuberculosis in the time of COVID-19: improving safety in healthcare facilities

Overcoming the COVID-19 dilemma in tuberculosis (TB) and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) research and care

A health systems analysis and modelling of methods to maximise uptake and utilisation of advanced diagnostics in low- and middle-income countries during public health emergencies – the case of COVID-19

St Andrews - Africa Health Research network (StAAHR)

Contextualised diabetic retinopathy training and screening package for low resource settings

Patient-centred pharmacovigilance to improve reporting of adverse drug reactions amongst those living with HIV and TB in Uganda

Government Revenue and Development Estimations (GRADE) longitudinal estimates

Aamusnaan Maya Initiative: report translation and dissemination

Co-creation of Conservation Knowledge for Coastal and Marine Reserves

Pro-conservation livelihoods and community capabilities for Marine Protected Area governance

Cultural Heritage Hub

Community Crafts and Culture

Biocultural heritage and community voice in Amazonia

(Un)archiving (Post)Industry: engaging heritage and developing cultural infrastructures

Addressing health and development drivers through cross-border youth engagement: social cohesion, sustainability, and well-being in the Mano River Basin

Recovering Ukrainian women's history to promote gender equality and build capacity for preservation of marginalised cultural heritage

The role of intangible cultural heritage through history in the development of coastal communities (Tanzania and Scotland with additional scoping activities in Peru)

The creation of a slit drum as catalyst and symbol of the revival of customary Samoan music

Motorcycling as peacebuilding: violence prevention through police-cyclist dialogue .

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

GCRF and International Researcher Toolkit

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

Development of a Smart Controller enabling interaction between off-grid interconnected SHSs networks and power system

3D Telemedicine: Transforming Telehealth in Ghana

Territorial defence from Covid-19 in the Amazonian and Atlantic forest regions of Brazil

Tjwao Storytelling as a source for legal empowerment in Tsholosho, Zimbabwe

The COVID 4P Log for Children's Wellbeing: Gathering Multi-Country Insights Using a Novel Fast-Capture App

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST OF SCOTLAND

Developing strategies for arts-based engagement in combatting modern slavery in Ghana

Community-Level Tourism Resilience in Nepal

Investigating natural assets degradation in the settler-colonial context: the case of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)

UNIVERSITY OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

CHORTENS (Creating Helpful Open Research Tools for Engaging New Staff)

Assessing the Risk of Veterinary Drugs to Critically Endangered Vultures in Pakistan and Bangladesh (PHASE IV)