As part of the UK COP26 Presidency Adaptation & Resilience campaign, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is working with partners to co-develop an international Adaptation Research Alliance for launch at COP26.

This global collaborative effort will seek to catalyse increased investment and capacity for action-orientated research that supports effective adaptation to climate change – primarily in developing countries – at the scale and urgency demanded by the science.

**Background and Problem Statement**

Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a changing climate requires transformational adaptation that is driven by local needs. This must be enabled and supported by actionable knowledge – both of the risks of climate change, and of tangible solutions.

This actionable knowledge comes through a process of action-orientated research - an iterative process of interdisciplinary and co-produced research that creates knowledge that: is usable in practice and outcome-focussed; creates equitable partnerships between stakeholders and researchers, leads to capacity-building and enhances the resilience of those most vulnerable to current and future climate risks.

However, the current scope and scale of action-orientated research is insufficient to address the magnitude and urgency of actions needed across sectors. Six key deficits impede our efforts:

1. There is significant under-investment in action-orientated research that improves the understanding of climate risks and leads towards actionable, locally and contextually relevant solutions.
2. Research agendas are often decoupled from the needs of the most vulnerable and are not set in user-centred and action-orientated ways.
3. Misaligned incentives and institutional barriers often prevent the multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research that is needed to effectively link knowledge and implementation.
4. There is a lack of coherence in investments along the chain from research through to useful application, and a lack of coordination and collaboration to ensure effective use of scarce funding.
5. There is insufficient emphasis on creating lasting institutional and knowledge capacities in the communities, regions and countries facing the greatest climate adaptation and resilience challenges.
6. Implementation efforts do not pay sufficient attention to learning, leading to a lack of knowledge about the benefits and effectiveness of adaptation interventions. In part this is due to the lack of metrics to evaluate progress on adaptation and resilience.

In short, there is inadequate concerted effort towards the research needed to build climate resilient futures. The Adaptation Research Alliance seeks to redress this situation as a matter of priority, with a particular focus on developing countries.

**The Vision and Mission of the Adaptation Research Alliance**

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is a coalition of institutions across the adaptation research and action communities that brings together both traditional ‘research funders’, such as science councils, and ‘action funders’, such as development donors, multilateral financial institutions, philanthropic organisations and the private sector – motivated by the shared goal of scaling investment in action-oriented research. The ARA envisions a world by 2030 in which the research community is a
highly valued partner to policymakers, practitioners and the most vulnerable communities, and engages effectively for the delivery of innovative, user-driven solutions for adaptation and resilience from the global to local levels.

The **mission** of the Adaptation Research Alliance is therefore to accelerate and scale investments in action-orientated research in developing countries, that addresses the pressing knowledge needs for adaptation and resilience of the most vulnerable, builds capacity at all stages from research to action, strengthens research–implementation linkages, and promotes greater learning.

**Functions, Activities and Outcomes**

The ARA will deliver on its mission by conducting activities spanning three strategic functions:

1) **Advocacy**: The ARA will advocate globally for greater emphasis, investment and enabling environment to support action-orientated research for adaptation and resilience from the global to local scales, by influencing and aligning the efforts of relevant actors.

2) **Research planning and cooperation**: The ARA will provide a forum for better research planning and cooperation, acting as a connector and an enabler for the variety of actors seeking to promote action-orientated research, target emerging priorities, and enabling partners to plan and coordinate better to achieve greater effectiveness and impact.

3) **Resource mobilization and delivery**: The ARA will ‘walk the talk’ by creating, operating and facilitating targeted and long-duration programmes that deliver resources for action-orientated research in developing countries. These programmes will strengthen capacity along the full chain from research to action at scale, recognising the interconnections from individuals to institutions, and the need to build capacity across a range of skills and functions, including transdisciplinary collaboration, peer learning, knowledge brokering, and access to and use of information to inform action.

The activities implemented under the three functions will lead to six **key outcomes**:

1) A **global multi-stakeholder coalition** co-developed by stakeholders from the South and the North to promote and catalyze action-orientated research and improve coordination and linkages for enhancing impact;

2) **Increased profile for action-orientated research** within the research and action communities, with improved understanding of action-orientated, user-centred research and its value;

3) **Increased funding in developing countries** for action-orientated research on adaptation and resilience from a diverse set of funders – including traditional research funders and action funders;

4) **Capacity-building** along the whole chain from research to action, at individual and institutional levels, expanding on existing schemes and building a more integrated approach to better link science, innovation and application;

5) **Enhanced learning** through improved research – implementation linkages;

6) **Strengthened collaboration** across nations (South-South, South-North), across disciplines and across scales to improve understanding of risks and promote development of locally-relevant solutions.

Taken together, the outcomes of the ARA will lead to the following **intended impacts**:

- Enabling more effective adaptation and resilience actions that reduce climate risks to achieving societal goals in both developed and developing countries, particularly for the most vulnerable people, including women and girls, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and other marginalised groups;
• Facilitating access to climate finance for adaptation through a stronger, more tailored, evidence base that also improves our understanding of what works;
• Increasing capacity in developing countries to do and use research to develop local adaptation and resilience solutions.

**From Concept to Reality: Operational principles**

In carrying out its activities under each of the strategic functions, the ARA will adhere to **four operational principles**.

1. The ARA will be an inclusive, open and transparent coalition of countries and interested organisations. Decisions will be made in a participatory manner by the members of the alliance, and activities will be co-developed. This alliance should draw upon – and draw together – existing international organizations working in this space; scientific funding networks; major funders of adaptation etc. The exact priorities, mechanisms and commitments should be co-developed.

2. The ARA will **promote Southern leadership** through its activities and ensure that its programmes and activities empower Southern researchers and institutions, building long-term human and institutional capacity and helping address existing informational, structural and power imbalances.

3. The ARA will ensure its activities follow the mantra “**think big and think long term**”. The importance of avoiding short-termism and piecemeal approaches will therefore be an important factor shaping the nature of the ARA’s activities.

4. The ARA will champion the **promotion of gender equality and social inclusion**. The consideration of the rights of, and opportunities for, women and girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and migrants and refugees, among other marginalised groups, will be central in the conceptualisation and implementation of all ARA activities. These considerations will be shaped by relevant local or regional contexts.

**Key milestones**

A soft launch of the ARA is planned at the Global Gobeshona Conference on Locally Led Adaptation on January 23, 2021. At this stage ARA members will be requested to endorse the ARA concept and agree to engage in the development process of the Alliance.

The Adaptation Research Alliance aims to launch formally at COP26.

The period between December 2020 and the launch at COP26 is the development phase of the ARA. This development phase will be overseen and guided by a Steering Board and supported through a combination of bilateral engagements, three working groups and commissioned analysis. The development phase will seek to confirm specific, differentiated commitments from ARA partners and define ARA governance structure and operational modalities.

Rosalind West, FCDO
Anand Patwardhan, University of Maryland
Co-chairs of ARA Steering Board