

Framework on Best Practice in environmental and other research in UK Overseas Territories (summary)



Introduction

Aim

The aim of this exercise was to develop principles to enable increased prospects of resourcing for environmental work in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) to address needs agreed by workers in the UKOTs. If these are adhered to both by those planning work and applying for funding and permissions and by the funding bodies, there are good prospects of moving towards a more equitable system.

This framework was developed by circulating a draft of this document (with supporting material), and later a revision in the light of initial comments, to bodies active in the UKOTs, for comments on the draft by early June and early July, respectively, before holding an online workshop on it on 25th July 2022 to confirm the document and explore ways in which other bodies whose decisions affect UKOTs can be encouraged to adopt the framework.

This framework does not arise from nowhere. It builds on the recommendations and conclusions relating of improving equity in the access to funding already agreed by UKOT and Crown Dependencies practitioners (both NGO and governmental) at the online conference of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) in March 2021, *Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World* (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/onlineconference2021/>), as well as from other conferences in the series, the experience of NGOs in the UKOTs themselves and researchers based around the world, and the *Statement of 4th UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 28 - 29 April 2021* (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/environment-ministers-council/fourth-meeting-2021/>). Use of this framework will also help fulfil some of UK's commitments under various international treaties, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, for example its Nagoya Protocol on *Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity* which aims at "sharing the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in a fair and equitable way" (see <https://www.gida-global/care>).

This Framework is available to be adopted by any organisation which wishes to strengthen equity in environmental work.

Background

Scientific research underpins conservation of nature and other heritage across the world. Across the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), researchers and conservationists work together to answer questions and understand the natural world. Resource limitations mean that priorities and compromises have to be made on where to focus efforts.

This framework development, led by UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, is part of the project *From blue iguanas to blue vervain: sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories*. The project is led by UK Centre of Ecology & Hydrology, with partners in Montserrat National Trust, National Trust for the Cayman Islands, Meise Botanic Garden (Belgium), Leeds Museums and Galleries & the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. There is more information at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/blue-iguanas-to-blue-vervain/>. This is supported by grant reference AH/W008998/1 within the *Hidden Histories* programme of the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) & Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) on understanding environmental research in the context of historical colonialism and making recommendations to address (potential) existing and future inequalities. Community and non-academic partners, based in the UK Overseas Territories, are core partners of this and our other projects to assist the pursuit of excellent research and engagement of the wider community including the general public.

The above mentioned project is demonstrating how colonialism has shaped and continues to shape the ecosystems of the Territories. It is centred on case studies from Montserrat and the Cayman Islands.



However, it is using the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum's network of links with all Territories and Crown Dependencies to look at wider aspects. It will also uncover and share hidden records and materials from the Territories held in the UK (and elsewhere in the world), and aim to develop best practices for research and knowledge-sharing to ensure that data and materials from the Territories are researched, used and shared equitably.

The framework follows the process of designing and delivering research, from the call for funding applications, through the involvement of partners, the development and consideration of applications, designing and undertaking the work, reporting it and ensuring access to the result.

The summary of the resulting framework is below, divided into five sections.

A Framework of Best Practice to ensure equity in environmental and other research for UK Overseas Territories and in UK funding of it (summary)

Ensuring equity of research knowledge, data sharing and scientific development for UK Overseas Territories research and conservation and capacity building

Sections 1 and 2, in particular, build on earlier conclusions of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council and the conferences of conservation practitioners in these territories (see Introduction above). The full version of the framework is available at

<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/framework-of-best-practice.pdf>

1. *Towards a more suitable and sustainable framework of decision-making on funding for conservation and research in the UKOTs.*

Decisions on funding priorities and individual grants should be made in an inclusive manner based on recommendations from those with first-hand experience of running projects in the UKOTs. Funding and appropriate decision making should be made available in a number of spatial and geographic scales to include individual UKOTs and cross-UKOTs. Funding should be made available in a spectrum of temporal scales e.g. with longer-term funding available for projects that cannot reach their potential within a single grant round.

2. *Priorities for research and conservation, and planning projects and proposals, are co-produced with local users.*

Research is collaborative and should be co-produced from the beginning with multiple stakeholders. Particularly local actors (e.g. governmental or NGO bodies experienced in territory environmental work) should have the main voice in determining where and how cross-territory funds available should be spent, to ensure inclusion of local knowledge.

3. *Projects should be outcome- and benefit-orientated.*

The outcomes of the projects lead to balanced positive benefits for the local environmental, societal and cultural systems involved. The projects have been developed through co-production to address users' needs and will therefore provide co-designed solutions. These will address the identified needs by having positive benefits that can be taken up by the communities and systems they address and that are sustainable for a significant time.

4. *Equitable inclusion of the public, including disadvantaged groups, involved in research through participation and education.*

Inclusion of the UKOT public, especially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups who suffer from structural discrimination. (As defined by the United Nations, this may include young people, women, disabled people and gender-orientation, ethnicity and poverty), is essential if environmental knowledge and its use are to be maintained and developed in the future. This requires funding and access by people at all levels of society to learn about the environment, and includes educational programmes for young people from early years to post-graduate level, teacher-training, and learning resources that utilise UKOTs contexts, as well as address climate-change, biodiversity-loss and ways of addressing these.

5. *Knowledge Exchange and Engagement; access to scientific literature, data, results and specimens.*

Knowledge sharing through engagement and exchange is key to transformative outcomes within local communities. It is essential that shared access to tools, information, data, scientific literature is made widely and equitably available across the UKOT community and NGOs. Combined with active learning by doing, project outcomes will enable continuous development of local and shared UKOT capability, in turn enabling more effective and efficient future projects, outcomes and benefits.