

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



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.org/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 Monserrat 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 resulting framework is below, divided into five.

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

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). In some cases, the wording draws on matters discussed in these.

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.

Some specifics include:

- a) Core funding for environmental monitoring is awarded to UKOT conservation bodies, including NGOs and their umbrella body.
- b) The decisions on funding priorities need to restore the inclusion of opinions of those with first-hand experience of running projects in the territories (as was the case in the early 2000s).
- c) The panel advising on the selection of projects to grant-aid should be restored to its earlier inclusion of mainly those with first-hand knowledge of running projects in the UKOTs (as was the case in the early 2000s) and be balanced in regard to interests, e.g. as regards terrestrial and marine.
- d) Funding must be provided for research/development that fulfils international agreements.
- e) Grants must provide funds for research/development that support non-profit organisations doing the work on the ground and those partners which they need in support.
- f) The replacement to the EU Erasmus educational exchange scheme must be of equal benefit to, and should include specifically, UKOTs.
- g) Longer-term funding is given for projects that cannot reach their potential in 3 years – e.g. capacity-building, tree-growing and other recovery projects; if grants cannot be provided for this duration, there should be a presumption in favour of follow-up grants that provide extension without gaps, to build on previous successes.
- h) The neglect of funding on terrestrial ecology and conservation in recent years, so as to give resources mainly to marine, must be ended, especially as most endemic species in UKOTs depend on terrestrial environments.
- i) Generally arbitrary priorities for funding are unhelpful and should be avoided as they lead to failures to fund important projects and a divisive situation (e.g. marine vs terrestrial; NGO vs official; academia vs conservation bodies); a more integrated approach would better reflect reality.

- j) Reduce delays in implementing policy after the project developing it ends.
- k) Funding applications for UKOTs need to be simpler and more concise, quicker in length of consideration for approval, and fairer in terms of allowing more time for development of cooperative proposals than the time allowed for a panel to consider them – in some schemes the reverse of the present situation.

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.

Some specifics include:

- l) If the lead partner is not based in the UKOT(s) to which the proposal relates, it is essential that local partners are engaged from before the proposal is drafted and throughout the project, with their staffing and other requirements funded within the project budget. UK Government and other potential funders should focus resources on local project officers and on provision by NGOs and others experienced in UKOT work of any technical help needed to capitalise on the considerable local enthusiasm for conservation and environmental initiatives.
- m) Governmental or NGOs experienced in territory conservation work should have the main voice in determining where and how cross-territory funds available should be spent.
- n) Funding should be related to agreed priorities, and the territories should not have to compete for the allocation of such funds through an assessment process external to them and largely removed from local knowledge.
- o) Support should be given to long-term projects involving knowledge transfer to local NGOs through cooperation with the wider scientific and environmental community.
- p) The UK Government and other potential funders should focus resources on provision by experienced NGOs and others of the technical guidance, and the project officers in-territory needed to capitalise on the considerable local enthusiasm for conservation and environmental initiatives.
- q) UK Government needs to reverse its recent tendency to divert the use of traditional sources of grant-funding from cost-effective and experienced local and supporting UK NGO bodies to support instead UK government agencies and institutions, some of which are not experienced with some territory situations, however experienced they may be generally, and pay more regard to experience and proven success in the Overseas Territories, especially NGOs. The UK Government should revert to the more cost-effective approach of concentrating grant-funding on conservation bodies in the Overseas Territories and their umbrella body, rather than on research institutions and consultancies.
- r) UK Government funding applications need to be less bureaucratic and repetitive, and consideration of projects should not take many months more than the time for application preparation. The assessments should be by those with Overseas Territories project-running experience and not based on box-checking scores.
- s) Ensure core funding for UKOTs in quantifying the monetary and non-monetary value of ecosystem services (*e.g.* water-supply, storm-protection, tourism underpinning, terrestrial food and material supplies, fisheries) and integrating these into policy-making on UKOTs are important.
- t) Ensure core funding to undertake red-listing for species on UKOTs.
- u) Ensure core funding for development of biodiversity indicators to support UKOTs in conservation planning.
- v) Ensure core funding to provide economic evidence of the benefits that the environment provides (*i.e.* environmental statistics as produced in natural capital accounting) should be produced and used as evidence within policy and planning decision-making to manage the environment and its ability to support sustainably territories' prosperity and well-being.
- w) Ensure core funding for a model that addresses the needs of territories for sustainable development planning.
- x) Recognise and support long-term, continuous and adaptive restoration projects as both current and new threats emerge.
- y) Commission a review of previous UKOT funding awards to see the successes of completed projects and outstanding issues of less successful projects to ensure lessons are learned and shared across UKOTs and important gaps are prioritised for filling.

- z) Communication between stakeholders working on a territory is essential to avoid duplication of efforts, and all parties (including UK government agencies) working in the Overseas Territories should be more open to speaking with other stakeholders, especially NGOs, to avoid duplication of effort. They should recognise the capacity constraints on local NGOs, which in most cases depend on voluntary work, and ensure funding to enable their contributions to be built into project budgets, and communication should be encouraged with idea-sharing being undertaken in good faith.
- aa) Ensure financial support for local bodies within territory for projects.
- bb) Ensure significant proportions of funds of new projects are awarded to UKOT bodies.
- cc) Ensure core funding to support delivery of International Agreements from across the UKOTs by bodies with experience in doing this.
- dd) Ensure core funding is available to grant writing courses for UKOT staff.

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.

Some specific include:

- ee) Measurement of activities (benefits and outcomes) needs to be built into the project.
- ff) Measurement of activities needs to continue after project end.
- gg) The project needs to be adaptable so that if disbenefit or harm is determined to be happening the project can be terminated or altered appropriately.
- hh) The project should be action-orientated to enable implementation by appropriate local groups.
- ii) Where possible, projects should look to identify common themes and lessons that can be shared across the UKOTs (accepting the diversity of the UKOTs may mean this is not possible in some cases) and across other territories with similar needs (while recognising the need for inclusion of local users in any lesson exchanges); some funders already collect this information, but not all share it widely.

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.

Some specifics include:

- jj) People at all levels of society need to have the same access to learning about the environment and supporting biodiversity.
- kk) Ensure recognition and provision of core funding to support volunteer coordinators on UKOTs is given.
- ll) Ensure core funding to deliver educational programmes for young people on environmental monitoring is given from early years to post-graduate level.
- mm) Ensure core funding to support apprenticeships in taxonomic identification and biodiversity monitoring, with opportunities for cross-territory and UKOT-UK exchange, is given.
- nn) Ensure core funding for teaching and learning resources for teachers (in UK and elsewhere) to use that utilise UKOTs for context and scenarios relating to actual work taking place there.
- oo) Ensure core funding for public education and climate-change adaptation and support to regulate polluters and support measures which will halt the biodiversity crisis and mitigate climate change to escalate a transition to a green economy.
- pp) Ensure that climate-change adaptation topics are integrated into National Curricula and the mass media at all levels.

- qq) Ensure core funding for training for teachers and the development of educational material (including on natural disasters and resiliency) and specific education officers on environmental issues.
- rr) Support given to build and maintain capacity in UKOT bodies and their staff, including to use and maintain new technologies for biodiversity monitoring.

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.

Some specifics are included in the sections above; other include:

- ss) Core funding is given to allow for UKOT research and conservation staff access to scientific publications currently held behind paywalls.
- tt) Core funding for capacity building in GDPR, Data Management, Stakeholder Engagement and Communication training (as required) is given.
- uu) Core funding for training in use of open source tools like R, QGIS and iNaturalist (as required) is given.
- vv) Core funding for training in museum curation (as required) linked to core funding for infrastructure improvements to allow suitable curation.
- ww) Core funding to ensure cost-effective and best use of resources to facilitate sharing of information.
- xx) Ensure good documentation of materials, including secure storage of data and photographs and potential for off-island storage to deliver good quality biodiversity data for decision-making and monitoring progress.
- yy) Develop protocols for data storage, access to these, and time-restrictions (*e.g.* to allow analyses and publication).
- zz) UKOT team members involved in the research should be included as paper authors.
- aaa) Ensure that acknowledgements sections are comprehensive and approved by UKOT team before publication.
- bbb) As part of the data management planning of proposal, discussion should be at project inception if materials are going to be collected from the UKOTs.
- ccc) Nagoya Protocol and Intellectual Property Rights must be considered as part of the process of data and material collection.
- ddd) Questions of specimens need to be addressed: practicality of local care and collation; needs, such as air-conditioning; alternatives such as online collections possibly managed out of territory without cost, but making clear territory intellectual property rights. Various approaches are available to consider.
- eee) Ensure a mechanism so that Ministers and senior officials of Territory & UK Governments have regular briefings from NGOs and other local ecological experts on threats to ecosystems (including from natural disasters), legal commitments, local biodiversity issues, progress on existing restoration projects, and opportunities for future work.
- fff) Ensure mechanisms to link organisations that help the UKOTs/CDs make the best use of science and other information for decision-making, when local government or NGO staff may lack technical expertise in the focus area.