

Virtual workshop
14 & 15 September 2021

Event Report



Adaptation Research Alliance

Consultation Workshop



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



Author information

This report was prepared by the International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED) and Jonathan Walter.

About the event

Adaptation Research Alliance, European Consultation Workshop, 14 & 15 September 2021.

Organised for the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) by IIED.

ARA is a global collaborative effort to catalyse increased investment in 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. ARA is an initiative of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

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Image Caption: Working together to find solutions
(FCFA programme)
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International Institute for Environment and Development
235 High Holborn, Holborn, London WC1V 7DN, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

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 www.facebook.com/theIIED

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Executive summary

ARA overview and workshop goals

The ARA is a global collaborative effort to catalyse increased investment in 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. The ARA has proposed six Adaptation for Research Impact Principles to better link knowledge to action. It has three functional areas – advocacy, research planning and cooperation, and resource mobilisation and delivery – and six workstreams.

The workshop brought together participants from 27 European organisations, with 3 goals: to identify best practice; to encourage European organisations to consider joining the ARA and endorse its principles; and to catalyse new long-term partnerships and collaborative action research on adaptation in vulnerable communities.

Synergies between participants' activities and ARA's functional areas

1. Advocacy to support action research on adaptation

- For many participants, advocacy in the context of research is about knowledge sharing and efforts to influence policymakers to translate knowledge into policy design and implementation.
- South to North learning is an important form of advocacy to ensure that the realities of those on the frontlines of battling climate impacts are accommodated.
- Advocating around principles, for example on locally-led adaptation, can throw up significant organisational challenges.

2. Structured knowledge, learning and research activities

- Learning starts by understanding how people experience hazards and listening to their needs, rather than making assumptions.
- Funders need to know this requires long-term, continuous relationships between researchers and communities, which could take ten years or more to yield outcomes.
- We need to invest in locally-owned research capacities that can apply learning to influence adaptation policy and practice.

3. Resource mobilisation for action and research on adaptation

- Donors should conduct scoping workshops in locations where they plan to mobilise resources, to ensure user demands are at the centre of the process.
- Researchers in the global South need funding, to help them co-design interventions.
- Research should inform programme design rather than being an afterthought – but researchers don't realise the power they have to impart critical insights to funders and steer them towards gaps in action research that need funding.
- The adaptation community should engage more closely with the private sector, which is keen to participate.

Landscape of initiatives and key learnings

Workshop participants shared insights from 19 European organisations engaged in forms of action research relevant to climate change adaptation and resilience. This section presents a snapshot of initiatives sorted by funders, research organisations and implementers. Key learnings and lessons from participants' experience include the following:

Funders

- Linking research with local policy formulation is challenging
- Need to synthesise knowledge from different local initiatives into a comprehensive 'systems view'
- Difficult to strengthen local knowledge centres in an institutionally weak and corrupt environment
- Climate impacts and adaptation requirements are very regionally specific, making knowledge-transfer from one context to another challenging
- Need realistic expectations from research with three-year funding
- Collaboration between funders, researchers, practitioners and policy makers delivers new insights and greater integration of adaptation into existing processes
- Help projects communicate findings better, bridge projects to new funders

Research organisations

- Need for better communication between organisations on priorities, expectations and issues such as M&E indicators and need for flexibility
- Should acknowledge that "experts" and "communities" often have divergent priorities
- Need for language translation is often under-emphasised in technical work on adaptation, but is key to ensuring inclusive and comprehensive processes
- Existing governance structures struggle to work with complex and interconnected systems that stretch beyond national borders
- Adapting scientific data into actionable information needs a lot of effort and funding
- Research organisations should engage from the start with policy-makers to ensure that the tools which are developed are appropriate and usable
- Important to focus on qualitative issues (e.g. "empathy") to understand pathways for delivering policy impact

Implementers and conveners

- Need to ensure alignment in donor and host government policies on adaptation
- To keep key stakeholders engaged requires better dissemination of data-driven results through effective communication and advocacy
- Important to focus on challenges and barriers preventing the adoption of good practice, alongside collating examples of good practice
- Crucial to emphasise collaboration, connection and application of knowledge to ensure the research-practice divide is effectively bridged
- Community ownership and management of adaptation processes is key

Strengthening the ARA

Participants in breakout sessions crowdsourced ideas on ways to strengthen the agendas for four of the ARA's workstreams, by focusing on two questions:

- What are the likely challenges in operationalising this workstream?
- Do you have any suggestions to strengthen this workstream?

Workstream #1: Evidence reviews

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
How can ARA members from the global South and local communities direct analysis towards areas that interest them?	Ensure that ARA member organisations from the global South and local communities take a leadership role in analysis and evidence generation
Learning lies in the messiness of the process – how do we ensure that the storyline of outcomes does not mask this?	Provide sustained support to members from the global South and local communities to present new evidence iteratively and comprehensively
How can the evidence that is generated be noticed, assimilated and employed to shift behaviour and policy?	Engage new kinds of actors (e.g., journalists, designers) to bring case studies to life and present them in user-friendly formats

Workstream #2: Consultative processes

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
Lack of clarity around inclusivity of workstream and level of engagement from local, national and international actors	Communicate to members more clearly from the start what are the aims and scale of consultative processes as well as the nature of participation
Need to ensure equal participation between those with lived experience and those with “expert knowledge”	Need to ensure that local communities or those who can legitimately represent their point of view are included meaningfully.
Need to ensure that the selection of topic areas is transparent	Influence topics for research funding calls to make them more relevant to policy and practice

Workstream #3: Co-creation space

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
Ensure local communities own any projects that are co-created	ARA should encourage donors to support inclusive, bottom-up coalitions
Conflicts of interest may require professional facilitators to smooth out	Incubate coalitions or communities of practice of Southern actors to self-identify shared priorities on action research
Ensure authentic co-creation, not simply extraction of ideas from members in global South	Pitch this workstream to donors as sifting multiple research priorities from actors in the global South

Workstream #4: Tracking, sharing & learning

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
This workstream needs to demonstrate impact	Build in feedback loops so that learning can influence programme design and practice
Lack of clarity on whether adaptation practitioners and policymakers will be able to use the knowledge generated	Use communications professionals to capture and package learnings in attractive formats to enhance their value and impact
Risk of data overload that misses the big picture and fails to analyse processes behind successful outcomes	Develop a process that sustainably links to existing learning networks to develop a comprehensive picture over time

Conclusion & implications for the ARA

1. ARA needs to embrace a broader range of issues and develop a model of engagement to ensure that stakeholder initiatives inform its workstreams

The core functional areas of the ARA are well-aligned with key activities being pursued by European stakeholders, but the alliance should embrace a broader range of issues:

ARA's advocacy should encourage behavioural shifts by institutions to ensure local perspectives are given the importance they deserve in decision-making.

ARA's focus on technical and sectoral aspects of adaptation should be balanced with more emphasis on understanding the processes needed to make adaptation research for impact a reality.

ARA's resource mobilisation workstream should help catalyse private sector investment in adaptation action and research.

ARA urgently needs to develop a sustained, structured model of engagement to ensure that European stakeholders' complementary initiatives inform activities within ARA's workstreams.

2. Participants proposed three key roles for the ARA: frontline champion, bridge-builder and knowledge-broker

Frontline champion – ARA could ensure the voices of those with “lived experience” from the frontlines of climate change are represented in decisions to fund adaptation action and research, and in international climate policy processes.

Bridge-builder – ARA could build links and improve collaborations between institutions in Europe, North America and the global South.

Knowledge-broker – ARA could capture and communicate key insights regarding which interventions have or have not helped vulnerable communities, by embracing a dynamic, interactive learning system predicated on knowledge co-creation.

3. The ARA should focus more on addressing the structural, governance and systemic challenges preventing effective adaptation

ARA's focus on exploring the technical dimensions of enhancing adaptation practice needs to be balanced with the structural dimensions of tackling climate risk.

Existing governance structures struggle to work with complex and interconnected systems – an essential factor in ensuring comprehensive and sustainable resilience.

ARA could encourage funders to reassess short-term financing horizons that often fail to provide adequate learnings and research insights.

ARA could help develop a deeper understanding of the types of knowledge needed to influence adaptation policy; it could also build a consensus around optimal adaptation metrics and the feedback loops needed between practice, research and policy.

“The vision of the Adaptation Research Alliance is a world in which the research community is a highly valued partner to policymakers, practitioners and the most vulnerable communities”

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are those of the participants, as captured during the workshop from 14-15 September 2021. They do not necessarily represent the views of either IIED or FCDO.

1. Introduction

Innovation and inquiry have key roles to play in building a climate-resilient future for everyone, especially those hit hardest by the impacts of climate change. This requires research that improves the understanding of climate risks and leads to actionable, locally relevant solutions. However, a number of barriers prevent progress along this road from knowledge to implementation. Research agendas are often decoupled from the needs of the most vulnerable and lack an action-orientated focus. Institutional barriers prevent the coordinated, multidisciplinary research required to make effective use of scarce funding. Many existing programmes for climate adaptation and resilience neglect the need to embed knowledge and learning in communities and regions most at risk. These are the challenges that the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) has set out to solve.

1.1 Overview of the ARA – purpose, principles & agenda

The vision of the ARA is “a world in which the research community is a highly valued partner to policymakers, practitioners and the most vulnerable communities”. In her opening address, Dr Rosalind West, climate science lead at the FCDO and co-chair of the ARA, added to this vision by speaking of the need to harness science and innovation in an inclusive and user-centred way.

1.1.1 Purpose of the ARA

The ARA is a global collaborative effort to catalyse increased investment in 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. The ARA defines action-orientated research as “an iterative process of transdisciplinary and co-produced knowledge that: is usable in practice, outcome-focussed and demand driven; 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”.

The present disconnect between research and adaptation action has serious consequences for communities most vulnerable to climate change. The ARA seeks to create a paradigm shift in which both researchers engage with practitioners and practitioners inform research, until the two are no longer binary concepts but woven together. This in turn requires innovative collaborations between multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, funders, researchers and actors on the ground. The ultimate purpose is to ensure that adaptation solutions are relevant, impactful and sustainable.

1.1.2 Six challenges to solve

The ARA is seeking to solve six challenges that prevent the effective application of research insights into programmes that improve the lives of those at greatest risk:

1. Under-investment in action-orientated research
2. Disconnect between research and the needs of the most vulnerable
3. Misaligned incentives and institutional barriers
4. Low coherence and coordination in adaptation research
5. Limited capacity in communities and developing countries, and
6. Limited learning from implementation – including a lack of metrics.

The ARA is addressing these challenges through six principles for adaptation action research, three broad functional areas of activity and six workstreams, all of which are summarised below.

1.1.3 Principles for climate adaptation action research

The ARA is proposing the following six principles (in draft form, to be finalised ahead of COP26), which aim to promote adaptation research for impact.

1. Research is demand-driven, solution-orientated and leads to a positive impact on the lives of those at risk [Who or what is the research for?].
2. Research is transdisciplinary and co-produced through a collaborative effort with users [How should research be carried out?].
3. Research emphasises societal impact [How is research valued?].
4. Learning-while-doing ensures that actions are evidence-based [How can research-action links be strengthened?].
5. Research builds capacity and empowers actors for the long-term [What can research enable?].
6. Research processes address structural inequalities faced by women, youth, children, disabled and displaced people, Indigenous Peoples and marginalised ethnic groups [How can research address some root causes of risk?].

1.1.4 Three functional areas

1. **Advocacy:** the ARA will advocate globally for greater emphasis, investment and an enabling environment to support and incentivise action-orientated research and its uptake for informing adaptation and resilience from the local to global scales. ARA advocacy will emphasise more widespread uptake of research to inform effective adaptation planning, decision-making and implementation at all levels. A key element of the ARA's advocacy efforts is the development and uptake of a set of principles for adaptation research for impact to better align and link knowledge to action, with the objective of maximising the benefits to those most at risk.
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. The ARA will target emerging priorities driven by demand and enable partners to plan and coordinate better to achieve greater effectiveness and impact in their research efforts.
3. **Resource mobilisation 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 between individuals and 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.

1.1.5 Six workstreams

1. Evidence reviews and analytical backstopping
2. Consultative processes for identifying research needs and opportunities
3. Co-creation space for network formation, coalition building and new programmes
4. Tracking, learning and sharing (TLS)
5. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) linkages and strategic partnerships
6. Principles and membership campaigns

1.2 European workshop – aims and objectives

The European ARA workshop brought together adaptation-focused actors from several European countries, representing government, science councils, funders, researchers and implementing organisations. The workshop had three goals:

- Identify best practices on investments in action-orientated research and innovation focused on adaptation and resilience.
- Socialise the ARA with European organisations to co-develop the ARA and to encourage European organisations to consider membership of the ARA and endorse its Adaptation Research for Impact Principles.
- Catalyse new, innovative partnerships and commitments to long-duration collaborative action-orientated research programmes, with a focus on adaptation and resilience in vulnerable local communities and the global South, drawing on European expertise and sharing lessons.

2. Synergies with the ARA

The serious work on Day 1 of the workshop started with a breakout session in which three groups of participants addressed three questions, each of which maps to one of the ARA's three functional areas:

1. Has your organisation undertaken any **advocacy activities to support action research** on adaptation to climate impacts?
2. What kind of **structured knowledge, learning and research activities** does your organisation undertake or support to enhance adaptation?
3. In what ways does your organisation help **mobilise resources for action and research** on adaptation to climate impacts?

The following sections draw out the insights of workshop participants reflecting on how their organisation's activities align with the ARA's three functional areas.

2.1 Advocacy to support action research on adaptation

Some participants engage in traditional forms of advocacy, such as urging donors to fund action research and pilot projects or raising issues not yet on the radar of decision-makers. Other participants suggested that advocacy – among researchers at least – is less about lobbying or persuasion and more akin to sharing knowledge with a wider pool of stakeholders than might otherwise have been engaged.

One of the challenges of action research is to weave knowledge from different types of stakeholders and translate that into policy. Efforts by researchers to influence policymakers in this way are considered to be a form of advocacy. Participants said we need to develop methodologies for researchers to engage with policymakers – both to co-create research and to ensure an effective translation of research insights and local knowledge into policy design and implementation.

South to North learning (another type of advocacy) needs to be explored further. One participant described how advocacy to apply peatland management lessons from Indonesia in other contexts had led to their operationalisation in Ireland. This demonstrates the opportunity of applying the knowledge of communities on the frontline to influence the design of both adaptation research and implementation. Equally, before we know what to advocate for, we must understand local perspectives and the needs and demands on the ground. This in turn requires us to develop a sound methodology to ensure we engage with at-risk communities in an inclusive and ethical way.

The ARA has proposed a set of adaptation research for impact principles but participants indicated that advocating around principles can be challenging. Drawing on experiences of other similar initiatives such as the principles for locally led adaptation, participants noted that while it is relatively easy to come up with inclusive commitments and overarching frameworks, applying those principles to can throw up significant challenges. For example:

- What is the commitment our organisation can make to consistent, long-term engagement?
- What role do we see ourselves playing in the long-term transformation of communities?
- How do the principles challenge our own organisations to change?
- What are the limitations within our organisations and the context in which we operate that make those changes and shifts difficult?
- How do we best navigate the complexity around defining the users in user-driven research?

When advocating for certain positions and principles, it is important to be honest about the organisational difficulties in taking those forward.

The ARA team acknowledged that advocacy means something different to each member – for example, it is as much about influencing behaviour as policy.

2.2 Structured knowledge, learning and research activities

Participants' responses on this topic fall into two broad categories. The first relates to specific issues in which organisations are engaged, which cover the full gamut of climate change adaptation, from linkages between climate change and migration to sectors such as food security or health. The second category relates to different approaches participants take to structuring their research activities. Below are some key insights.

Participants said that learning begins by understanding how people experience hazards, listening to their needs and understanding who is the "most vulnerable", rather than making assumptions or using generalised categories of vulnerable "types". This practice of listening to lived-experience leads to co-design of research and co-creation of knowledge that is itself a change-making process. Achieving this level of insight requires developing continuous, long-term relationships with communities and local organisations. Researchers and funders need to understand that these processes may take ten years to yield measurable outcomes and impacts.

A key challenge in action research is ensuring that its outcomes can be applicable at a micro-scale and across contexts. Greater cross-regional learning between researchers could ensure a more coherent research process where similar kinds of work are conducted to capture comparable data across different geographies.

When adaptation projects end, knowledge is removed and consequently lost. We need to invest in building locally owned structures in at-risk communities and regions that retain the knowledge generated. These can support, for example, knowledge-sharing between universities and curriculum developers, peer-to-peer learning and coaching, and local capacity building in adaptation and resilience. Long-lasting impact requires systemic change. This means building research capacities within communities so that they not only own the research data and insights, but they can also apply that learning to inform local and national adaptation and resilience programmes.

Structured learning between non-academic stakeholders can result in serendipitous rather than linear research processes that generate unexpected insights and impacts. For example, in the Bangladesh coastal city of Chittagong, researchers from Exeter University created a participatory action-research methodology that built shared understanding between marginalised migrants and urban planners. The city authorities are now using the process to develop their five-year master plan.

It is vital that research influences both adaptation policy and operational programme design. To achieve this requires building meaningful partnerships and coalitions that draw on the adaptation research for impact principles and emphasise co-creation and collaboration. Equally, it suggests that institutional learning is as important as individual learning.

2.3 Resource mobilisation for action and research on adaptation

Participants said it is important to start from the evidence base when deciding in which areas to mobilise resources. This requires carrying out scoping workshops in locations where resources would be used, to capture local articulations of what is most needed. Donors and implementers must answer the vital question: are resources being mobilised specifically with demand-driven, local user engagement at the centre of the process? Equally important is to build sustainable capacity in areas where resources are focused, so that projects can have long-term impacts after the funding ends. This requires an effort to create the right partnerships to co-design interventions. Researchers in the global South need to be engaged and funded.

As part of this process, donors and implementing agencies need to engage with their local partners to understand the realities around resource mobilisation. This may also lead to changes in perspective. Rather than thinking only about how we can mobilise resources, we could flip the question and ask: how can those on the ground mobilise us as funders? Several participants have experience of co-developing proposals with funders from the global South, to jointly mobilise funds and build research into operational initiatives. However, one key challenge is to ensure that the research is not simply tagged onto the implementation as an afterthought, for instance, by ensuring that knowledge,

learning and research components are developed alongside the core technical components of adaptation programmes.

Another important insight was that researchers need to understand the power they have in influencing funding streams. Rather than sitting back and responding to programmes that ‘fall from the sky’, researchers should see themselves as active agents of change, able to impart critical insights to funders and steer them towards gaps in action research that require more resources.

Finally, participants highlighted the growing role of private finance. Large companies are keen to get more engaged in adaptation. Organisations can fund their activities through a blend of official development assistance and private sector resources.

The ARA could play a number of useful roles in relation to resource mobilisation, as follows:

- Build links with different networks of donors, including the private sector, to influence and align discussions on funding
- Work with different donors to ensure their adaptation actions and funding align or work together, rather than duplicating or conflicting
- Explain to the research community how funders make their decisions
- Support the networking of different organisations involved in adaptation research and implementation to ensure closer collaboration, and
- Work with donors to increase the focus on adaptation as an important topic of research.

“Rather than sitting back and responding to programmes that ‘fall from the sky’, researchers should see themselves as active agents of change.”

3. Landscape of initiatives

Workshop participants shared insights from 19 European organisations engaged in forms of action research relevant to climate change adaptation and resilience. This section presents a snapshot of these initiatives, along with key lessons and learnings. The examples, which are not an exhaustive list of all the adaptation-related activities undertaken by each organisation, are collated below under the following categories:

- Funders
- Research organisations, and
- Implementers & conveners.

3.1 Funders

The [Dutch Research Council \(NWO\)](#) funds the [WOTRO Science for Global Development](#) initiative, whose research programmes engage cross-sectoral stakeholders including policymakers, development workers, researchers and the private sector. A key aim is to strengthen research capacity in developing countries by breaking down barriers between disciplines. Its Bangladesh project is building a permanent, locally led research facility – a ‘spider in the web’ that synthesises and evaluates different knowledge streams from past initiatives and mobilises that knowledge to inform future policy and implementation. WOTRO has tried to link its work with local policy formulation, but this has proved challenging. The project is still in a very early stage, so this is work in progress. The action research space in Bangladesh would also benefit from greater visibility of and coordination between other local and international projects engaged in similar work.

[FORMAS](#), the Swedish government research council for sustainable development, is funding a decade-long national research programme on climate (2017–2026), which adopts a “transformation-oriented” systems approach with a focus on just transition processes. Lessons include the need to synthesise knowledge from different projects to build a platform that draws together local initiatives into a whole-systems view.

The [German Federal Ministry of Education and Research \(BMBF\)](#) has set up two regional research centres in Africa, focusing on climate change impacts in some of the most affected regions of the continent:

- West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use ([WASCAL](#))
- Southern African Science Service Centre for Climate Change and Adaptive Land Management ([SASSCAL](#))

The two centres are supported by long-term investment from BMBF, but they are locally owned and are run by independent boards. They focus on creating regional knowledge hubs and building the capacity of young people. The centres have successfully rooted themselves in the sustainability agendas of their regions, which include transboundary climate impacts. However, BMBF has found it difficult to strengthen knowledge centres in an environment which is institutionally weak and corrupt. There is also a challenge around moving from a long-term funding to a self-funding model.

BMBF is also funding [RegiKlim](#) – a research programme which generates climate information to inform regional German policymakers in their adaptation planning and decisions. The [German Environment Agency \(UBA\)](#) is linking these regions together to share results and transfer knowledge. One learning is that climate impacts are very regionally specific and pose different adaptation requirements, making simple knowledge transfer challenging.

The [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(SIDA\)](#) funds “impact research” for sustainable development in regions that need to adapt to climate change, for example in the Mekong Delta. Research programmes must be co-designed and co-produced with local stakeholders, to strengthen a reciprocal understanding of local needs and solutions and to build local capacity. Some key learnings include the need for “realistic” expectations from research that is only funded for three years and that researchers should be based in the country where the research is being done to ensure that local realities are reflected adequately.

The [Swedish Ministry of the Environment](#) has convened over 30 agencies to work in a national knowledge centre on climate adaptation. The ministry’s key learning is that, while adequate resources are vital, there is much work to be done to better integrate adaptation into existing processes. It has proved very useful to have a national vision on adaptation, while tasking different government agencies to work on knowledge-sharing and adaptation within their own mandates delivers a level of integration and up-to-date insight that a single agency would find hard to achieve.

The [Swedish Research Council](#) has granted three years of funding to 26 research projects (out of 200 applications) in sustainable development and adaptation for low-income countries. The criteria for approving grants included local stakeholder engagement, co-creation and dissemination, with a focus on capacity building in the global South. One key learning is to help projects better synthesise their findings and communicate their results. This will allow projects to build better on past work. A second key insight is the need to bridge projects to other funders who could assist the projects in continuing to implement their results. This in turn requires the council to build its own skills in that area.

Table 3.1 Summary – landscape of initiatives by funders

Funder & project	Project overview	Indicative learning
Dutch Research Council (NWO) – WOTRO Science for Global Development	Strengthens cross-sectoral research capacity in developing countries	Linking research with local policy formulation is challenging
FORMAS – national research programme on climate (2017-2026)	“Transformation-oriented” systems approach with a focus on just transition	Need to synthesise knowledge from different local initiatives into a systems view
BMBF – WASCAL & SASSCAL	Locally owned regional research centres in West and Southern Africa	Difficult to strengthen local research centres in an institutionally weak and corrupt environment
BMBF – RegiKlim	Research programme to generate climate information for regional German policy-makers	Climate impacts and adaptation requirements are very regionally specific, making knowledge-transfer challenging
SIDA – impact research	Co-produced research programmes in e.g. Mekong Delta	Need realistic expectations from research with 3-year funding
Swedish Ministry of the Environment – national knowledge centre on CCA	Over 30 government agencies collaborating in the establishment & operation of national knowledge centre	Collaboration delivers new insights and greater integration of adaptation into existing processes
Swedish Research Council – 3-year funding to 26 research projects in global South	Criteria – local engagement, co-creation, capacity building	Help projects communicate findings better, bridge projects to new funders

3.2 Research institutes

The [Basque Centre for Climate Change \(BC3\)](#) is participating in an EU-funded project called [LIFE Urban Klima 2050](#), which brings together over 20 research organisations in a 6-year, €19.8 million programme to inform the implementation of the Basque Country's climate change strategy (KLIMA-2050). BC3 aims, in its own words, “to foster the co-production of knowledge relevant to decision-making by integrating environmental, socio-economic and ethical dimensions of climate change”, adding it “considers that coordinated transdisciplinary (i.e., interdisciplinary and participatory) research approaches are essential in the post-Paris Agreement era”. One key lesson from BC3's engagement with LIFE Urban Klima 2050 is the need for better communication between organisations – as well as between researchers and funders – over priorities, expectations and issues such as M&E indicators. A second key lesson is to explain to partners that when it comes to scientific research, flexibility is key as plans have to be adjusted based on shifting operational contexts.

[IDDRI](#), an independent policy research institute, has been funding [STORISK](#), a research-led approach to understanding the risks and adaptation challenges small islands in the Pacific and Indian Oceans face from climate change. The project gathered researchers from various disciplines (including climatology, geomorphology, geophysics, ecology, human and environmental geography, political sciences and law) to understand local projections of climate risk and to plot pathways that could address future threats. The pandemic has unfortunately interrupted communication workshops planned with local communities. Yet, several key learnings have emerged. There has been considerable tension between what scientists think is important to know and communicate to communities, and what communities and local decision-makers want to know. Meanwhile, there is insufficient understanding or analysis of the cascading, cross-border effects of climate risk and associated responses such as migration.

The [Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\)](#) is contributing to the [Climate & Development Knowledge Network \(CDKN\)](#), which aims to combine knowledge, research and technical advisory in support of locally owned and managed policy processes. Led by the South Africa-based SouthSouthNorth organisation, CDKN is an alliance of think tanks and NGOs across Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, which focuses on social and gender inclusion in climate action and NDC implementation. It is currently responding to calls from policymakers around the need for a practical manual on setting targets, logframe indicators and results frameworks for setting inclusive adaptation ambitions and monitoring progress against these. The network has generated considerable interest in its methodology for developing robust indicators on social and gender inclusivity. One of the key challenges has been translating across language barriers in the context of transdisciplinary field work where not all local actors can understand discipline-specific language.

The [Stockholm Environment Institute \(SEI\)](#) has joined forces with ODI and IDDRI to create [Adaptation Without Borders](#), a new global partnership working to strengthen systemic resilience to the cross-border impacts of climate change. After two years of research and consultations, the partnership warns that cascading climate risks will become a defining issue for climate diplomacy, but these transboundary risks currently receive too little recognition or policy-driven analysis. For example, floods in South Asia hamper rice production and exports, triggering a doubling in prices among importers such as Senegal. Conversely, investments in resilience in one market can benefit markets on other continents. Adaptation Without Borders is investing in new research to inform policy measures to address transboundary resilience through global collaborative efforts. The project has found that existing governance structures struggle to work with complex and interconnected systems that stretch beyond national borders. It has proved difficult to address nationalist and protectionist attitudes. It would be worth investigating if lessons could be applied from the area of water management, where considerable research, policy experience and best practice have led to effective regional and global governance arrangements.

The [Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute \(SMHI\)](#) is a research partner in [FANFAR](#), an EU-financed project that has co-designed a pilot system for operational flood forecasting and alerts in West Africa. SMHI's work has focused on bridging the gap between scientific, hydrological data and concrete forecasting information that vulnerable communities can act on. The weather forecast production system is operated by West African institutions and over the past three years it has saved several thousand lives. The project's main challenge was adapting scientific data into actionable information.

Another challenge is funding: while project-based funding has enabled the initiative to get started, long-term core funding is needed to maintain it. Peer-to-peer learning between SMHI and sister institutions in the region has also proved useful.

The [UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology \(UKCEH\)](#) is one of 16 research partners in AMMA-2050, which builds on the largest multi-disciplinary research effort ever undertaken in the area of African climate and environment, the African Monsoon Multidisciplinary Analysis (AMMA). The programme examines how the monsoon will change in the coming decades and how this information can be most effectively used to support climate-compatible development in West Africa. The project partnership trained local teams in Burkina Faso and Senegal to use climate models to inform decisions on infrastructure and land management. For example, the models predicted that if no climate change mitigation actions were taken, millet production would decrease by 30% by 2050. One key learning to date has been to engage from the start with policy-makers to ensure that the tools which are developed are appropriate and usable.

The geography department of the [University of Exeter](#) has conducted observational and action research into human security in cities at risk of climate change in the coastal city of Chittagong, Bangladesh (also known as Chattogram). One key objective of the programme was to build empathy and shared understanding between recently arrived migrants and city planners through participatory research. It succeeded and now city planners are using the same process to develop a five-year master plan for the port city, while the University of Dhaka is taking the methodology to the national level. The programme challenged the notion that the analysis of climate risk only entails understanding hazards and emphasised the importance of understanding vulnerability. One key learning was the ways of developing qualitative indicators to evaluate the extent to which the research programme created empathy. Another insight is that long-term collaborations, for example between the universities of Exeter and Dhaka, can lead to a scaling up of national policies based on action research, but these kinds of relationships need to be built up over decades with both good will and multiple funders.

Table 3.2 Summary – landscape of initiatives by research institutes

Research institute & project	Project overview	Indicative learning
LIFE Urban Klima 2050, BC3	6-year programme to inform the implementation of the Basque Country's climate change strategy	Need for better communication between organisations on priorities, expectations and issues such as M&E indicators and need for flexibility
STORISK, IDDRI	Multi-disciplinary approach for understanding climate risk and adaptation pathways	Need to acknowledge that "experts" and "communities" often have divergent priorities
CDKN, ODI	Combines knowledge, research and technical advisory in support of locally owned and managed policy processes	Need for language translation is often under-emphasised in technical work on adaptation, but is key to ensuring inclusive and comprehensive processes
Adaptation Without Borders, SEI, ODI & IDDRI	Global partnership working to strengthen systemic resilience to the cross-border impacts of climate change	Existing governance structures struggle to work with complex, interconnected systems that stretch beyond national borders
FANFAR, SMHI	Bridges the gap between scientific, hydrological data and concrete forecasting information that vulnerable communities can act on	Adapting scientific data into actionable information needs a lot of effort and funding

Research institute & project	Project overview	Indicative learning
AMMA-2050, UKCEH	Examines how African monsoon will change in the coming decades and how this information can be most effectively used to support climate-compatible development	Need to engage from the start with policy-makers to ensure that the tools which are developed are appropriate and usable
Human security and climate risk in cities, University of Exeter	Examines pathways for accommodating the priorities of migrant populations in urban development planning	Important to focus on qualitative issues (e.g. “empathy”) to understand pathways for delivering policy impact

3.3 Implementers and conveners

[EIT Climate-KIC](#) is Europe’s largest public-private partnership focused on climate innovation to mitigate and adapt to climate change. As an innovation agency, it brings new ideas and thinking to climate challenges by supporting start-ups and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to bring their solutions to market faster. Its key objective is to ensure resilience is part of development strategy, identifying blockers and opportunities through approaches that embrace technology, policy, behavioural change and lobbying. The organisation has found that varying operational modalities and governance structures among both donors and governments in countries hosting research projects require careful navigation. This can lead to challenges in implementing action research on the ground.

[GIZ](#) is currently executing the [Climate Resilient Economic Development project](#) (2019–2022), in partnership with the governments of Kazakhstan, Viet Nam and Georgia. The project aims to build an understanding of the likely impacts of climate change on local economies and societies, to help governments design relevant policies and adaptation measures. The project has faced several key challenges. The project had to bring different stakeholders together to unlock the information silos of different ministries and organisations. Project leaders also realised that, to maintain a high level of stakeholder engagement, they had to improve the dissemination of data-driven results through effective communication and advocacy activities.

The [Global Center on Adaptation \(GCA\)](#), founded in 2018, describes itself as “a solutions broker, bringing together governments, private sector, civil society, intergovernmental bodies, and knowledge institutions that can address the obstacles slowing down adaptation action”. GCA’s initiatives include the [Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program](#), which aims to mobilise \$25 billion by 2025 to scale up innovative and transformative adaptation measures, including climate-smart digital technologies for agriculture and food security, accelerating infrastructure resilience, empowering youth through jobs and entrepreneurship, and creating innovative financial instruments for adaptation and resilience. Research teams will work alongside project staff to study local vulnerabilities and levels of digital readiness. The research will also look at barriers preventing the adoption of practices, climate weather services, price and market services, and insurance services.

The [Global Resilience Partnership \(GRP\)](#) convenes over 60 public and private organisations to innovate and share knowledge on how to invest in resilience for development. In partnership with the Bangladesh-based International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and South Africa-based SouthSouthNorth, it hosts the [Resilience Knowledge Coalition](#), a “network of networks” whose stated purpose is “getting the best knowledge and practice on resilience used to shape policies, plans and investments to deliver a resilient future”. The coalition approaches this purpose through three core functions: Collaborate (peer-to-peer learning and capacity building), Connect (agile online platforms for knowledge) and Apply (incubating solutions, synthesising evidence and getting knowledge into use). The Resilience Knowledge Coalition is a sister initiative to the ARA and both organisations are collaborating.

[Wetlands International](#) is engaged in a [Building with Nature](#) programme in Asia which aims to integrate nature-based solutions into water and marine engineering practice. The organisation is collaborating with the Indonesian government, UNESCO, ecologists, engineers and researchers, to reverse extreme coastal erosion through creating cost-effective hydrological infrastructure, such as mangrove forests, as an alternative to traditional coastal engineering solutions. In addition to protecting the coastline, the approach has shown cultural and societal benefits. The Indonesian government is now scaling up the model across 15 districts. Lessons include the need to invest in the enabling environment – for example building the political will required to change regulations while also building ownership at governmental and community levels. Community ownership and management of the process has proved key. Additional success factors included starting small, embedding action research within local institutions and being prepared to take risks.

Table 3.3 Summary – landscape of initiatives by implementers

Implementer & project	Project overview	Indicative learning
EIT Climate-KIC	Focused on climate innovation to mitigate and adapt to climate change	Real need to ensure alignment in donor and host government operating modalities on adaptation
Climate Resilient Economic Development project, GIZ	Builds an understanding of the likely impacts of climate change on local economies and societies in Kazakhstan, Viet Nam and Georgia, to help governments design relevant policies and adaptation measures	To keep key stakeholders engaged requires better dissemination of data-driven results through effective communication and advocacy
Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program, GCA	Aims to mobilise \$25 billion by 2025 to scale up innovative and transformative adaptation measures	Important to focus on challenges and barriers preventing the adoption of good practice, alongside collating examples of good practice
Resilience Knowledge Coalition, GRP	Getting the best knowledge and practice on resilience used to shape policies, plans and investments to deliver a resilient future	Crucial to emphasise collaboration, connection and application of knowledge to ensure the research-practice divide is effectively bridged
Building with Nature, Wetlands International	Reversing extreme coastal erosion through creating cost-effective hydrological infrastructure	Community ownership and management of adaptation processes is key

4. Strengthening the ARA

The workshop devoted 90 minutes on Day 2 to breakout sessions to crowdsource ideas on ways to strengthening the agendas for 4 of the ARA's workstreams:

1. Evidence reviews and analysis
2. Consultative processes: identifying research needs and opportunities
3. Co-creation space: the space where innovation meets climate adaptation
4. Tracking, sharing and learning (TSL)

The moderators presented a summary of each workstream and then led a brainstorming to capture participants' views on two key questions:

- What are the challenges that we are likely to face in operationalising this workstream?
- Do you have any suggestions for helping overcome these challenges or for strengthening this workstream? How could you contribute?

4.1 Workstream #1: Evidence reviews

This workstream aims to provide the rigour required for robust and evidence-informed decision-making around new programme development. The ARA is undertaking a suite of evidence reviews to unearth the mechanisms in policy, funding and practice that lead to best practice for adaptation research for impact in the climate adaptation sector and to advocate for action research for adaptation. The ARA is starting with four evidence reviews:

- Iconic examples of action research – evidence for building resilience
- Identification of good practice – an inventory of action research approaches
- Policies for increasing investment in action research – including allocation of R&D budgets in V20 countries
- Funding models and mechanisms for action research – including via multi-stakeholder partnerships

4.1.1 Challenges in operationalising this workstream

The first question raised was – what is the process for selecting these four areas of work and is there a way that members of the ARA, especially from the global South, can direct the analysis to areas that interest them? In response, the ARA team said that the co-creation workstream is designed to allow all members to collaborate and propose areas where further evidence is needed.

The ARA is aiming to document 20 iconic examples of action research in time for COP26 (after which the workstream will engage with members again to identify additional topics for review). “Iconic” may not be the best term – “lighthouse” and “golden nugget” examples were also suggested, or perhaps simply “good practice”. The long-term view of what these evidence reviews should look like is very much work in progress and will be defined by ARA members. For now, the ARA is using its six principles as the lens through which to analyse and select good practice.

One participant highlighted that the temptation to present a clear storyline during research processes (such as an evidence review) can mask the messiness of the process and miss the nuance of how genuine or inclusive the process was. Yet the learning may lie in the messiness and the nuance. It was acknowledged that the ARA must focus on processes as well as outcomes to provide useful insights on topics for review.

There was discussion around what counts as “action research” or “evidence”. Is experiential learning as valid as more formal research? There needs to be a clear set of parameters to determine what constitutes evidence. Also, thorough evidence reviews often cost more than people are willing to pay. The risk is that the methodology gets scaled back and it then becomes more difficult to speak with confidence about what the evidence is telling us.

4.1.2 Suggestions to strengthen this workstream

A rich source of evidence and case studies is the [Climate-ADAPT](#) platform maintained by the European Environment Agency (EEA). Also, the World Commission on Dams conducted a consultative process on best practice some time ago which has learnings that may be applicable. The ARA could engage with parties such as these on this workstream.

The selection of evidence would benefit from **deliberative dialogues with ARA members, especially from the global South**, rather than a process where knowledge is simply extracted. Sometimes it is challenging for hard-pressed organisations to present case studies in a coherent and informative way. The risk is that the same examples keep resurfacing, promoted by only those organisations that can afford to communicate them well. The ARA has an opportunity to **offer resources, guidance and support to members from the global South to bring new evidence to light** and present it in a compelling way.

Operationalising this workstream will take more than selecting good practice examples. The ARA needs to think through creative ways to make the case studies more useable by a range of actors. This will need resources. The ARA should **consider commissioning environmental journalists to bring the case studies to life** and put them in context by connecting the science with local stories and testimonies. And beyond simply producing the evidence in a report, the ARA should allocate time and resources to **communicate the results through user-friendly means, such as infographics, scribed cartoons and podcasts**.

IIED volunteered to share with the ARA their review of adaptation good practice – these “lighthouse” examples brought together good approaches identified by least developed country (LDC) governments and civil society through a year of workshops. IIED also proposed sharing the “champion” examples of locally led adaptation initiatives, to look for evidence of learning and action research. Wetlands International expressed an interest in a mutual exchange of both global and local knowledge with the ARA.

Table 4.1 Summary – Evidence reviews: key points

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
How can ARA members from the global South and local communities direct analysis towards areas that interest them?	Ensure that ARA member organisations from the global South and local communities take a leadership role in analysis and evidence generation
Learning lies in the messiness of the process – how do we ensure that the storyline of outcomes does not mask this?	Provide sustained support to members from the global South and local communities to present new evidence iteratively and comprehensively
How can the evidence that is generated be noticed, assimilated and employed to shift behaviour and policy?	Engage new kinds of actors (e.g., journalists, designers) to bring case studies to life and present them in user-friendly formats

4.2 Workstream #2: Consultative processes

This workstream aims to identify key research and knowledge needs and opportunities to ensure that meaningful, relevant and significant approaches are prioritised in climate adaptation. The consultative processes aim to bring a diverse group of experts together (whether academic or those with lived experience) in a multi-staged process to discuss broad topic areas and agree how to identify what needs to be researched in those areas. The end-result will be communicated to a funder, actor or intermediary in such a way that they can take that information and act on it. The processes started two months ago by focusing on four topic areas:

- Gender and social inclusion
- Food systems / small-holder agriculture
- Climate risk assessments in LDCs
- Global health: climate resilient health systems

4.2.1 Challenges in operationalising this workstream

One participant was concerned that the workstream did not link to the UNFCCC and the country-level process of articulating adaptation priorities between NAPs and NDCs. They also queried the extent to which the ARA willing to invest in strengthening entire knowledge systems within developing countries to enable them to generate the information and analysis necessary to inform national policy processes and implementation. The ARA responded by clarifying it is part of two UNFCCC processes: the [Nairobi Work Programme](#), a knowledge-to-action hub of over 425 diverse organizations committed to closing knowledge gaps to scale up climate adaptation action, and the [Paris Committee on Capacity-building](#) to support climate action in developing countries.

There is a lack of clarity around whether the consultative processes take place at the local, national or global level, which leads to questions around the inclusivity of the workstream. The process for deciding who takes part in these consultative processes or which topic areas are selected is not clear. Donors do not appear to be involved – but if the process does not fit with funders' delivery plans, they are unlikely to put money behind it. If, however, the intention is to engage more at a local level, then the ARA needs to understand the institutional barriers for users in entering these processes, to ensure that those with lived experience and expertise participate on an equal footing with those possessing “expert knowledge”.

Depending on the area of focus, different questions arise as to the purpose of the workstream. For example, if the primary focus is at national or international level, will the results of the workstream be used to nudge national governments to fund identified research priorities? Or will these ideas be fed to international funders to respond with calls for research? And if the primary focus is local level needs, how will the global perspective be integrated?

4.2.2 Suggestions to strengthen this workstream

Several participants expressed concern that the processes might focus too much on technical or topic areas, when there is an opportunity to **explore wider and more tricky issues around governance and policy**. The added value of this process could be to help highlight a set of overarching questions that might apply across topics or regions, for example: how do we know we are doing adaptation and what are the most effective ways to track progress in adaptation? Additionally, stakeholders felt this workstream could be used to position the ARA at a more strategic level of engagement with policy processes, for example by **providing comparative research to support policy-makers in defining metrics** and enabling countries to report on them.

Participants sensed an **opportunity for the ARA to influence the topics of research funding calls** to make them more relevant to policy and practice, but that might require aligning those topic areas more closely to those that funders are interested in supporting. Regardless, there was agreement that the ARA needs to **clarify the aims and scale of these consultative processes**. This must be defined

at the start of the process. It would be useful for the ARA to **share TORs for the workstream** with members and potential partners to clarify how it is intended to work.

Table 4.2 Summary – Consultative processes: key points

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
Lack of clarity around inclusivity of workstream and level of engagement from local, national and international actors	Communicate to members more clearly from the start what are the aims and scale of consultative processes as well as the nature of participation
Need to ensure equal participation between those with lived experience and those with “expert knowledge”	Need to ensure that local communities or those who can legitimately represent their point of view are included meaningfully.
Need to ensure that the selection of topic areas is transparent	Influence topics for research funding calls to make them more relevant to policy and practice

4.3 Workstream #3: Co-creation space

The aim of the co-creation space is to bring ARA members and other key adaptation partners together in a safe space to co-create new approaches to adaptation challenges and to identify new solutions. The co-creation space is intended to be the enabling environment that will facilitate the systemic shift that is required to enable action research for climate adaptation. The workstream’s objectives include:

- Pivot from a landscape of competitors to coalitions, particularly among private-sector entities, funders and research institutes
- Co-develop new programmes for climate adaptation action research
- Generate, trial and scale up new funding models and approaches for adaptation research for impact
- Form and strengthen networks and consortia of actors to cooperate in the adaptation research for impact process

In this breakout, the ARA was looking for ideas on how best to create a space where participants could meaningfully collaborate to address challenges such as making partnerships work or managing trust deficits and power dynamics.

4.3.1 Challenges in operationalising this workstream

Power dynamics are a key challenge in this workstream – it will be vital that local communities own any projects that are co-created. The workstream needs to create the right enabling environment for the co-creation process, which in turn requires sufficient funding to bring the right people together. The more complex the process of co-creation, the harder it will be to maintain a level playing field between Northern and Southern participants. There may also be conflicts of interest between participants, for example if the ARA convenes users of funding and donors in the same space. Professional facilitators will be needed to ensure a smooth process.

Several participants identified people’s time as a key challenge – Zoom overkill and pressing commitments mean there must be a clear incentive for people to participate. There is a risk that contributors from the global South are running out of patience with Zoom dialogues that simply become extraction processes for Northern agencies to unearth ideas to pitch to donors. Co-creation needs to be authentic – and it needs to be there from the start. Or is there is a risk of too much repetition in discussions like these.

4.3.2 Suggestions to strengthen this workstream

Donors should offer **more support for building alliances between those utilising the funding** that they provide. However, it takes time and skill to create alliances that are inclusive, bottom-up and allow people with different interests and expertise to be heard. The ARA has a great opportunity help plug this gap, perhaps by learning from existing processes in the global South that are aimed at building coalitions.

This workstream aims to create sandboxes in which new ideas can be co-created and tested. It's vital that Southern actors and policy-makers get involved in this process – and this could happen at the local, regional and international levels. The ARA could **encourage leadership by coalitions of governments or other actors in the South to identify action research in areas of shared priority**. The ARA could also share an overview of funding opportunities with Southern actors and facilitate their access to international funders.

The ARA has an opportunity to shape a great **pitch to donors with this workstream, by offering an initiative that sifts the ideas of dozens of organisations – from North and South** – into a coherent set of action-orientated research priorities. Participants believed that donors would be particularly interested in seeing a demand for this kind of research coming from the global South. It may make sense for donors to respond to ideas developed by others, to avoid conflicts of interest. In addition, the ARA could **facilitate peer-to-peer learning between donors, to encourage them to support more** collaborative, flexible and less bureaucratic approaches to funding action research and adaptation programmes.

The ARA could improve the efficiency of this workstream by **aligning with and learning from existing alliances and events** that ARA members are already participating in. For example, the ARA could convene the research community together with – among others – the LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience ([LIFE-AR](#)), the Global Mangrove Alliance or the Global Resilience Partnership. Simply mapping the relevant actors in the landscape would be a useful start.

IIED offered to support the ARA in connecting with southern networks, federations and social movements, including the governments of LDCs and small island developing states (SIDS). The Global Resilience Partnership is keen to engage in this workstream, as is Wetlands International, which can involve its Southern leaders and help the ARA connect to global partnerships and programmes with adaptation agendas and the ability to scale up and replicate.

Table 4.3 Summary – Co-creation space: key points

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
Ensure local communities own any projects that are co-created	ARA should encourage donors to support inclusive, bottom-up coalitions
Conflicts of interest may require professional facilitators to smooth out	Incubate coalitions or communities of practice of Southern actors to self-identify shared priorities on action research
Ensure authentic co-creation, not simply extraction of ideas from members in global South	Pitch this workstream to donors as sifting multiple research priorities from actors in the global South

4.4 Workstream #4: Tracking, sharing & learning

The ARA is on a journey to learn how to apply and conduct action-orientated research. This workstream will design a process and a framework to help members learn from their own experience as well as from each other, through knowledge-sharing platforms and events. The workstream will promote learning and capacity development of ARA members in the following ways:

- Development of a functioning platform for ARA members to track actions, share experiences of putting the principles into practice and learn from one another
- Emphasis on within-institution learning, as well as across-institution learning, to build a community of practice within the ARA
- The platform will enable the ARA to learn from its members and support the validation of the Adaptation Research for Impact Principles over time

4.4.1 Challenges in operationalising this workstream

“The word ‘platform’ leaves me dead”, said one participant, adding: “You put it there and hope people will go and sort themselves out – it won’t happen! Most learning does not happen on platforms or in isolation, it happens together and it happens iteratively.” The challenge with this workstream is to make it sufficiently interactive and dynamic to achieve its aims – but this requires resources that the project does not have. The ARA could bring funders into the discussion – especially those interested in the “learning” component – and make the argument for more resources to allow learning processes to happen.

Participants queried the end-result of this learning activity and what the ARA intends to achieve from this workstream. For example, asking members to provide information tracking their progress could become an onerous administrative burden that is unlikely to deliver useful results, unless it is contextualised, incentivised and explained comprehensively.

Several participants were concerned about information overload, carrying the risk that the “big picture” will be lost in the detail. It is easy to harvest data on outcomes, but much harder to analyse the process – the enabling and hampering factors – that led to those outcomes. It would be very useful for the ARA to organise processes to draw out that learning from the experience of members and document the findings.

4.4.2 Suggestions to strengthen this workstream

If the ARA’s aim is to strengthen the links between research and action, then this workstream needs to **build in feedback loops to processes where learning can influence programme design and practice**. The ARA could use this workstream to emphasise the need for adaptive management. Are there existing project-planning platforms that this workstream could feed into?

The ARA could **use communications methodologies to support the way members learn**. For example, the ARA could employ a journalist or writer to interview a researcher to create a short learning piece or send a reporter to visit projects in real time to ask questions and share answers. There is also an element of accountability in presenting the information that we ask others to provide. Packaging what people learn and how they learn it – in concise, attractive publications – can help motivate people.

It is important for the ARA to **link this workstream to existing networks of learning**, for example [weADAPT](#), which itself has links to other networks as well as an interactive world map of case studies and climate data. To overcome the risk of a static platform, the ARA needs to **bring people together to learn and collaborate through webinars and live events**.

The website that this workstream envisages will also need to be dynamic – its success will depend on how it looks and its end-user interface. Rather than hiding information in folders, the **website should look at ways to present learning in graphic formats**. For example, the EC has created an excellent interactive atlas with filters to select climate information, thematic project area, year and so on.

The Global Resilience Partnership and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH) both showed interest in engaging in this workstream.

Table 4.4 Summary – Tracking, sharing & learning: key points

Challenges	Ways to strengthen
This workstream needs to demonstrate impact	Build in feedback loops so that learning can influence programme design and practice
Lack of clarity on whether adaptation practitioners and policymakers will be able to use the knowledge generated	Use communications professionals to capture and package learnings in attractive formats to enhance their value and impact
Risk of data overload that misses the big picture and fails to analyse processes behind successful outcomes	Develop a process that links sustainably to existing learning networks to develop a comprehensive picture over time

“Most learning does not happen on platforms or in isolation, it happens together and it happens iteratively.”

5. Conclusion & implications for the ARA

An analysis of the salient points of discussion over the two days of the ARA European workshop leads to the distillation of four key, cross-cutting insights and implications for the alliance, detailed below.

1. ARA needs to embrace a broader range of issues and develop a model of engagement to ensure that stakeholder initiatives inform its workstreams

Section 2 demonstrates that stakeholders are engaged in different types of “advocacy” initiatives aimed at strengthening adaptation research and practice (the ARA’s first functional area). This includes sharing knowledge to shape financing agendas, influencing policy processes, employing local knowledge from at-risk communities to shape adaptation initiatives, and supporting the development of common charters for influencing adaptation practice.

Similarly, workshop participants indicated their involvement with a variety of structured knowledge, learning and research activities (the ARA’s second functional area). These activities fall into two categories: 1) knowledge, learning and research on technical and sectoral entry points; and 2) approaches and processes important for successful adaptation.

Meanwhile, all stakeholders were engaged in a variety of resource mobilisation activities (the ARA’s third functional area) and underlined the critical importance of ensuring that resources for adaptation respond to demand and align with the needs of vulnerable groups, and that the private sector is playing an increasingly important role in adaptation financing.

Although these synergies exist, participants urged the ARA to ensure its functional areas accommodate a broader range of issues. Stakeholders felt the ARA’s advocacy function was sharply focused on influencing policy and funding, but overlooked the importance of advocating for a behavioural shift by institutions to ensure local perspectives are given the importance they deserve in decision-making. Similarly, participants maintained that the ARA’s current focus on technical and sectoral aspects of adaptation research and practice should be balanced with more emphasis on understanding the processes and partnerships needed to make adaptation research for impact a reality. Discussions on resource mobilisation revealed the importance of the ARA complementing its current emphasis on shaping and mobilising public finance with efforts to catalyse private sector investment in adaptation action and research.

While the ARA’s outreach to these institutions was merited and timely, the alliance urgently needs to develop a sustained and structured model of engagement to ensure that these initiatives (that are highly in sync with the ARA’s theory of change) start to inform activities within its various workstreams.

2. Participants proposed three key roles for ARA: frontline champion, bridge-builder and knowledge-broker

a) ARA as frontline champion

Workshop participants proposed the ARA could play the role of an intermediary and a champion, to ensure the voices of those on the frontlines of climate change are represented in decisions to fund adaptation action and research, as well as in international climate policy processes. In the discussion around the ARA’s learning function, stakeholders emphasised the importance of continuous, long-term relationships with communities and local organisations to ensure that the “lived experience” of those facing climate risks informs research and learning. In the discussion around the ARA’s co-creation space, participants further underlined that outputs from this workstream would only be valid if they had buy-in from vulnerable populations and were not simply a product of deliberation between “experts”. Participants argued powerfully that the ARA has a key role to play in galvanising actors from the global South to co-create solutions, to package evidence and learnings effectively for communication, and to lay emphasis on insights from lived experience alongside those from expert knowledge.

b) ARA as bridge-builder

Participants supported the ARA's thrust on catalysing partnership and collaboration, and the workshop shed light on the different ways in which it could do this. It could, for instance, link institutions in Europe working on adaptation action and research with one another; it could improve collaboration between organisations in Europe and in other regions of the global North (e.g., US and Canada); and it could build bridges between institutions in the global North and those in the global South that make up the bulk of the alliance's membership.

c) ARA as knowledge-broker

A third role that participants felt the ARA could play was that of knowledge-broker. For example, the ARA could help spotlight key issues that deserve more attention from those forging policies and making financing decisions around adaptation action and research. Participants underscored the importance of the ARA capturing, consolidating and communicating insights on which interventions have or have not helped vulnerable communities battle the impacts of climate change. However, simply producing more reports or launching a web platform to disseminate information is unlikely to deliver impact – the ARA needs to create a dynamic and interactive learning system predicated on knowledge co-creation.

3. The ARA should focus more on addressing the structural, governance and systemic challenges preventing effective adaptation

Some participants voiced concerns that the ARA's focus on exploring the technical dimensions of enhancing adaptation practice misses an opportunity to engage more deeply with the structural dimensions of tackling climate risk. More specifically, participants felt that ARA's decision to examine issues such as climate resilience and smallholder agriculture, climate change and public health, climate risk assessments, and financing streams for action research on adaptation shows a somewhat sectoral and narrow remit – whereas some of the most endemic barriers for successful adaptation are less technical and more structural. Participants highlighted that existing governance structures struggle to work with complex and interconnected systems – an essential factor in ensuring comprehensive and sustainable resilience.

The ARA could work with funders to encourage them to amend their financing structures and approach: for example, the time horizons of most donor-funded action-research projects (typically three years) are unlikely to provide adequate learnings and research insights. Similarly, the workshop highlighted the importance of understanding the right pathways to influence adaptation policy processes. The ARA could help develop a deeper understanding of the types of knowledge and evidence needed to influence adaptation policy. The alliance could also build a consensus around optimal adaptation metrics and the types of feedback loops needed between practice, research and policy.

Integrating feedback from this group of salient European institutions working on adaptation research and practice will strengthen the Adaptation Research Alliance, support progress with its theory of change and in turn help ensure that vulnerable communities are not only able to function but to flourish, despite shocks and stresses from a changing climate.

Annex 1: List of workshop participants

1. Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA)
2. Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
3. Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3)
4. British Consulate-General Munich
5. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)
6. DLR Projektträger
7. EIT Climate-KIC
8. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
9. Formas (Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development)
10. German Environment Agency (UBA)
11. Global Center on Adaptation (GCA)
12. Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS)
13. Institute for Sustainable Development & International Relations (IDDRI)
14. International Institute for Environment & Development (IIED)
15. International Rescue Committee (IRC)
16. Ministry of the Environment, Sweden
17. Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
18. Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
19. Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre
20. Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)
21. Swedish Development Cooperation Agency, Sida
22. Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute (SMHI)
23. UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH)
24. University of Exeter
25. Vetenskapsrådet (Swedish Research Council)
26. Wetlands International
27. WOTRO, Dutch Research Council

Annex 2: Workshop agenda and schedule

Day 1: 14 September 2021, 11.00 CET – 16.00 CET

Time (CET)	Session	Purpose
11.00–11.10	Welcome to the room	Welcome and tech introduction
11.10–11.30	FCDO keynote welcome – Dr Rosalind West, FCDO IIED agenda run-through – Aditya Bahadur, IIED	Aims of the workshop and agenda run through
11.30–11.45	Icebreaker	Participant introduction
11.45–12.45	Introducing Adaptation Research Alliance	Providing an in-depth overview of the ARA and understanding the imperative for membership
12.45–13.30	Break	
13.30–13.45	Participant poll	
13.45–14.45	Break-out group exercise	Understanding alignment with ARA functions
14.45–14.55	Break	
14.55–15.35	Report back and plenary discussion on findings	Summary report back from group exercise and further discussion
15.35–16.00	Next steps for tomorrow	Reflect on emerging findings and set expectations for the next day

Day 2: 15 September 2021, 11.00 CET – 16.00 CET

Time (CET)	Session	Purpose
11.00–11.10	Welcome back	Welcome new arrivals and share aims for the day
11.10–11.20	Icebreaker	A chance to meet others in the workshop and welcome newcomers
11.20–11.30	Presentation of emerging findings	Presentation of key findings from the previous day
11.30–12.15	Country breakouts – lightening talks from participants	A chance for participants to share the work they are doing using examples
12.15–12.20	Break	
12.20–13.00	Country breakouts – lightening talks from participants	A chance for participants to share the work they are doing using examples
13.00–13.45	Break	
13.45–15.15	Breakout group exercise	Building the agenda for the ARA - crowdsourcing ideas
15.15–15.20	Break	
15.20–15.40	Plenary discussion	Membership asks and offers
15.40–16.00	Thank you and next steps	IIED and FCDO present top line future directions based on workshop

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is a global collaborative effort to catalyse increased investment in 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. The ARA's focus is on adaptation research for impact to better link knowledge to action. It is an initiative of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

IIED organised the ARA's European Consultation Workshops on behalf of FCDO and ARA, 14 & 15 September 2021. The workshop brought together participants from 27 European organisations. This report presents the results.



International Institute for Environment and Development
235 High Holborn, Holborn, London WC1V 7DN, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

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