Adaptation Research Alliance

CONCEPT NOTE

JULY 2021

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

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

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is an integral component of the Adaptation & Resilience (A&R) campaign, one of the four goal priority areas for the COP26 Presidency. The ARA focuses on ensuring that increased ambition can be delivered through evidence-based action, supporting the campaign objective to scale up adaptation, and recognising that practical action is required to minimize and avert loss and damage. We need a step-change on adaptation, collaborating with governments, business, and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to prepare for climate risks, mobilise further action, and increase adaptation financing.

The campaign is championing a range of initiatives to deliver three core internationally-focussed areas:

Plan - Plan, anticipate and respond to climate change, by enhancing disaster preparedness and embedding climate risk across all investments.

Act - Take action to reduce vulnerability in key priority sectors, enhance adaptive capacity and strengthen resilience of people, nature and the economy by working and learning from others

Finance - Significantly increase overall quantum of finance and improve quality and access of finance to local institutions and those most vulnerable.

The ARA has relevance to each of these areas, connecting up the knowledge-science-action agendas and highlighting the critical role that research has to play in informing effective action at local and national levels to reduce the risks from climate change.

At the centre of the A&R campaign, the UK has launched the Adaptation Action Coalition (AAC) alongside co-chairs Egypt, and Bangladesh, Malawi, St Lucia, Netherlands and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The AAC now has over 30 member countries with the mission of driving adaptation action, based on the best evidence from science and practice. Countries are asked to endorse the ARA and its principles as part of their commitment to the AAC, and will be invited to nominate relevant national organisations/ministries to become ARA members.

The ARA has an excellent opportunity to inform and underpin adaptation actions with pioneering research and technical expertise.

1. Background and Problem Statement

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

This actionable knowledge requires a process of **action-orientated research** - 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.

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

1. There is significant **under-investment** in action-orientated research that improves the understanding of climate risks and leads towards actionable, locally and contextually relevant solutions that meet local needs and demands.

2. Research agendas are often **decoupled** from the needs of the most vulnerable and are not set in user-centred and action-orientated ways. There is also a **mismatch** in the timescales of investments in research (often short-term project orientated) versus the demonstrable need for long-term sustained investment to achieve impactful results.

3. **Misaligned incentives** and institutional barriers often prevent the multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research that is needed to effectively link knowledge and implementation.

4. There is a **lack of coherence** in investments along the chain from research through to useful application, and a **lack of coordination** and collaboration to ensure effective use of scarce funding.

5. There is insufficient emphasis on creating lasting **institutional and knowledge capacities** in the communities, regions and countries facing the greatest climate adaptation and resilience challenges.

6. Implementation efforts do not pay sufficient attention to **learning**, leading to a lack of knowledge about the benefits and effectiveness of adaptation interventions. In part this is due to the **lack of metrics** to evaluate progress on adaptation and resilience.

In short, there is inadequate concerted effort towards the research needed to build climate resilient futures. The Adaptation Research Alliance seeks to redress this situation, seizing the opportunity to strengthen coordination and scale-up investments in action-orientated research to enable achievement of our societal goals under a changing climate, with a particular focus on developing countries.

2. The Adaptation Research Alliance and its Theory of Change

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) is a coalition of institutions across the adaptation research and action communities that brings together both traditional 'research funders', such as science councils, and 'action funders', such as development donors, multilateral financial institutions, philanthropic organisations and the private sector – motivated by the shared goal of scaling investment in action-orientated research and effective adaptation solutions. The Alliance provides a forum that brings together these research and action funders with active stakeholders along the full chain from research through to action, including research organisations, intermediary organisations, practitioners, civil society organisations, academic networks, science-policy-practice networks etc. The ARA envisions a world by 2030 in which the research community is a highly valued partner to policymakers, practitioners and the most vulnerable communities, and engages effectively for the delivery of innovative, user-driven solutions for adaptation and resilience from the global to local levels.

The ARA will contribute to the realisation of this vision by implementing its Theory of Change (Figure 1), which defines the ARA's mission in response to the problem statement, and specifies the functions, outcomes, impacts and values that will enable the ARA to achieve its mission.
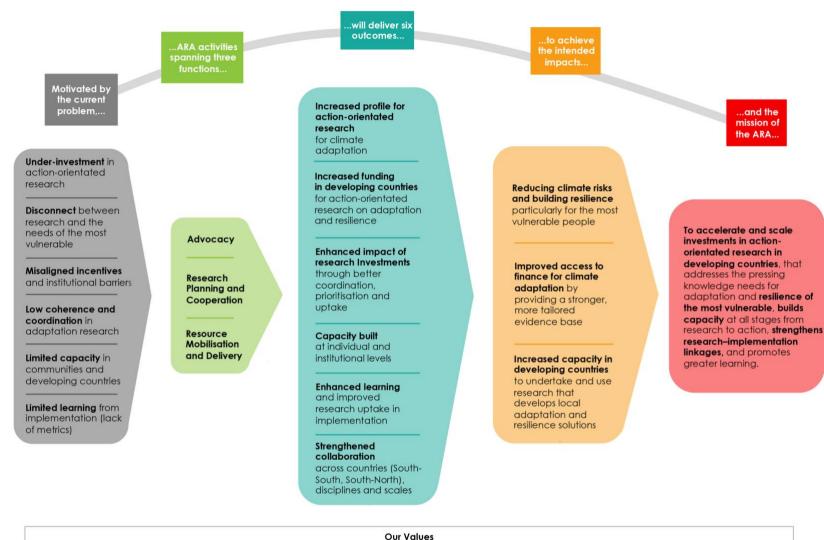
2.1 The Mission of the Adaptation Research Alliance

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

2.2 Functions of the ARA

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

1. **Advocacy**: The ARA will advocate globally for greater emphasis, investment and enabling environment to support and incentivise action-orientated research and its uptake for informing adaptation and resilience from the local to global scales. ARA advocacy will emphasize 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 Climate Adaptation Action Research to better align and link knowledge to action; with the objective of maximizing the benefits to those most at risk.

Motivated by the current problem,...

- **Under-investment** in action-orientated research
- **Disconnect** between research and the needs of the most vulnerable
- **Misaligned incentives** and institutional barriers
- **Low coherence and coordination** in adaptation research
- **Limited capacity** in communities and developing countries
- **Limited learning** from implementation (lack of metrics)

...ARA activities spanning three functions...

Advocacy

Research Planning and Cooperation

Resource Mobilisation and Delivery

...will deliver six outcomes...

Increased profile for action-orientated research for climate adaptation

Increased funding in developing countries for action-orientated research on adaptation and resilience

Enhanced impact of research Investments through better coordination, prioritisation and uptake

Capacity built at individual and institutional levels

Enhanced learning and improved research uptake in implementation

Strengthened collaboration across countries (South-South, South-North), disciplines and scales

...to achieve the intended impacts...

Reducing climate risks and building resilience particularly for the most vulnerable people

Improved access to finance for climate adaptation by providing a stronger, more tailored evidence base

Increased capacity in developing countries to undertake and use research that develops local adaptation and resilience solutions

...and the mission of the ARA...

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

Our Values
ARA activities uphold operational principles of: openness and transparency; Southern leadership; thinking big and long-term; and gender equality and social inclusion

Figure 1. The ARA Theory of Change

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

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

2.3   Outcomes of the ARA

Activities implemented under the three functions will lead to **six outcomes**:

1) **Increased profile for action-orientated research** within the research and action communities, with improved understanding of action-orientated, demand driven, user-centred research, its value and best practices;

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

3) **Enhanced impact of research investments** by ensuring that they are better coordinated, and better targeted to address the priority knowledge needs to inform interventions supporting the most vulnerable, and that there is greater uptake of research to inform decision-making;

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

5) **Enhanced learning** by better engaging the research community in monitoring, evaluation and assessment activities, improved knowledge management and peer-to-peer networks across the research and action communities;

6) **Strengthened collaboration** across nations (South-South, South-North), across disciplines and across scales through a global multi-stakeholder coalition, co-developed by southern and northern stakeholders, to improve understanding of risks and promote development of locally-relevant solutions.

2.4 The ARA's Impacts

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

- Enabling more effective adaptation and resilience actions that reduce climate risks to achieving societal goals in both developed and developing countries, particularly for the most vulnerable people, including women and girls, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and other marginalised groups;

- Facilitating access to climate finance for adaptation through a stronger, more tailored, evidence base that also improves our understanding of what works;

- Increasing capacity in developing countries to do and use research to develop local adaptation and resilience solutions.

2.5 Our Values

In carrying out its activities under each of the strategic functions, the ARA will adhere to **four core values**:

1. The ARA will be an **inclusive, open and transparent** coalition of interested organisations. This alliance should draw upon – and draw together – existing networks and organizations working in this space, along the full chain from research through to action, including research funders, adaptation funders, research organisations, intermediary organisations, practitioners, civil society organisations, academic networks, science-policy-practice networks etc. The exact priorities, mechanisms and commitments should be co-developed.

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

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

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

3. ARA Membership Criteria, Structure and Operation

The ARA is a multi-stakeholder coalition across the research and action communities. The ARA seeks member organisations and entities from across the research-action nexus of climate adaptation.

3.1 Membership Criteria

To join the ARA, organisations and entities will be encouraged to:

1. Endorse the ARA's Theory of Change and commit to help deliver its outcomes, including by contributing to the tracking, sharing and learning of progress towards these outcomes.
2. Endorse the ARA's Principles for Climate Adaptation Action Research (currently in near-final draft — to be finalised with members by COP26) and share experiences of their practical application.
3. Commit to engage in at least one ARA activity or workstream annually, in a manner that is appropriate and feasible for the organisation / entity.
4. Volunteer for a reasonable degree of participation in the governance of the ARA (including annual meetings and periodical decision-making processes), in keeping with their respective abilities and capacities.

3.2 Governance Structure

The governance structure of the ARA — currently being co-developed by ARA partners — will be light-touch. The core governance structure will include: a Plenary Body as the highest governance body and comprising all ARA members and observers; a Steering Board as the ARA's operational decision-making body and comprising 10-15 ARA members; and a Secretariat as the operational body. In addition, ad-hoc task forces and/or committees will be established as needed to carry out the ARA's activities. The governance structure will evolve over time to respond to growing needs/changing demands as relevant.

3.3 Resources

Resources of the ARA will fall under two broad categories: core and leveraged.

Core resources are resources that will be mobilized and delivered through the ARA Secretariat. These resources will support the Secretariat itself (approximately 8-10 professional full-time international staff members) as well as the portfolio of ARA activities that are implemented centrally through the Secretariat. The ARA will seek to maximize the flow of resources to activities, such as commissioned evidence reviews and consultative processes and advocacy and outreach.

Leveraged funds are funds that will not be centrally pooled, at least initially. They will consist of funds that ARA members or other supporters may wish to expend to advance specific ARA activities or workstreams, but which need not be routed centrally through the ARA Secretariat. For example , an action research programme that is co-funded by multiple donors, under the banner of the ARA. In the future, pooled funds may be considered by ARA members.

The long-term funding model for the ARA is currently under development, and will be designed to be a light, flexible structure to enable the smooth and accountable operation of the ARA via the core and leveraged resources described above.

4. The ARA's Activities and Key Milestones

The Adaptation Research Alliance aims to launch formally at COP26. A soft launch of the ARA took place at the Global Gobeshona Conference on Locally Led Adaptation on January 23, 2021, when 33 ARA members signed the Adaptation Research Alliance Gobeshona Declaration, thereby endorsing the ARA concept and committing to co-develop the Alliance. A robust portfolio of activities to achieve the targeted outcomes is under development and is summarised in Figure 2. The activities are organized into six main workstreams and are described below. More detailed descriptions and implementation plans of the workstreams are under preparation.

1.1 Current ARA Workstreams

The ARA workstreams vary in scope, activity type and anticipated timescales but all are central to achieving short- and long-term ARA goals. Some of the workstreams will undertake pilot/proof-of-concept activities in the run-up to COP26. Each workstream is overseen by a Task Force comprised of ARA members that helps guide the planning and execution of relevant activities. A core team leads the delivery of the key activities within the respective workstreams. ARA members could engage in these workstreams in a variety of ways – from planning & guiding them through the Task Forces, to implementing and delivering them, or simply participating in specific activities.

1. *Evidence reviews and analytical backstopping*

Promoting evidence-based decision-making is a central goal of the ARA. This includes decision-making regarding investments in action research, which needs evidence regarding the benefits of action research; as well as the emerging and best practices in action research. In the initial phase of this workstream, activities will focus on strengthening this evidence base regarding action research, including benefits, iconic examples & best practices and approaches and modalities for supporting action research. In the long-term, supporting the generation, synthesis and use of evidence for adaptation actions will continue to drive this workstream. The workstream will adopt a collaborative and Southern-led approach, in keeping with the ARA values; which will help strengthen collaboration and capacity and linkages among ARA members and other actors. This should contribute towards increased relevance, uptake and evidence-informed action .

Members interested in contributing to or leading an evidence review may contact the Secretariat or, more specifically, apply to an open call for planned evidence reviews.

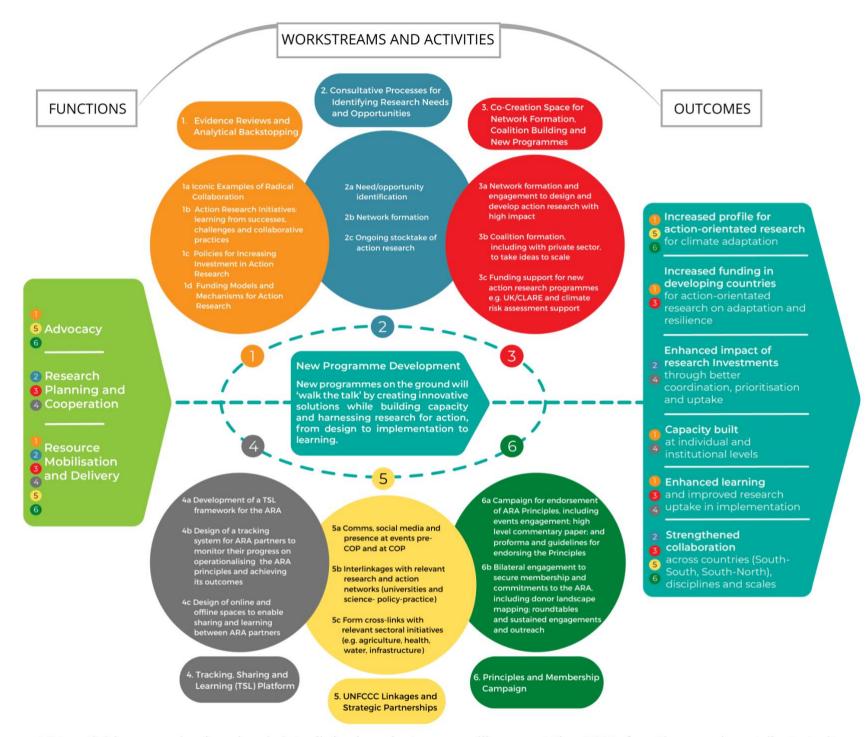## 2. Consultative processes for identifying research needs & opportunities

The first of the ARA principles emphasizes that action research needs to be demand-driven and user-centred. This Workstream directly seeks to put this principle into practice by identifying research and knowledge needs in a user-driven manner; ensuring that investments in research are effectively directed and targeted. By convening producers and users of applied research for adaptation, it will enhance the legitimacy of outcomes from research, while also creating a sense of ownership over said outcomes by diverse stakeholders. In turn, these stakeholders will be able to use the outcomes for their own purposes (e.g., advocacy), thereby enhancing credibility of research within the evolving Adaptation & Resilience agenda. The consultative processes will not only help identify needs and the demand for action research; the processes will also surface actors and organizations with the strengths and capabilities to deliver on the research needs. In this way, this Workstream will lay the base for more effective action research programmes.

Members interested in supporting this workstream can participate in the overall Workstream Task Force, or specific Topic Steering Groups), or apply for taking on the role of Delivery Leads, for carrying out the process. In the run-up to COP26, pilot consultative processes are being conducted in four Topic Areas: Food Systems, Global Health, Gender & Social Inclusion, Climate Risk Assessments in LDCs.

3. Co-creation space for network formation, coalition building and new programme development

Effective action research requires transdisciplinary and collaborative networks across the research – action landscape. Existing networks often tend to be narrow and limited to a few institutions especially in the Global South. There is a need to broaden and deepen the range of institutions and organizations that can engage effectively in funding, supporting and carrying out action research. This Workstream will develop co-creation spaces that help incubate new action research activities and programs, through modalities ranging from multi-stakeholder dialogues to seed grants and coalition and network building. These co-creation spaces could contribute towards evidence informed, societally impactful initiatives and programmes which increase climate resilience of the global south.

Members may contribute to this workstream by participating in the Workstream Task Force, or by joining an existing Co-Creation Space or proposing new thematic foci or activities for co-creation.

WORKSTREAMS AND ACTIVITIES

FUNCTIONS

Advocacy [1] [5] [6]

Research Planning and Cooperation [2] [3] [4]

Resource Mobilisation and Delivery [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

OUTCOMES

1. Evidence Reviews and Analytical Backstopping

1a Iconic Examples of Radical Collaboration

1b Action Research Initiatives: learning from successes, challenges and collaborative practices

1c Policies for Increasing Investment in Action Research

1d Funding Models and Mechanisms for Action Research

2. Consultative Processes for Identifying Research Needs and Opportunities

2a Need/opportunity identification

2b Network formation

2c Ongoing stocktake of action research

3. Co-Creation Space for Network Formation, Coalition Building and New Programmes

3a Network formation and engagement to design and develop action research with high impact

3b Coalition formation, including with private sector, to take ideas to scale

3c Funding support for new action research programmes e.g. UK/CLARE and climate risk assessment support

New Programme Development

New programmes on the ground will 'walk the talk' by creating innovative solutions while building capacity and harnessing research for action, from design to implementation to learning.

4a Development of a TSL framework for the ARA

4b Design of a tracking system for ARA partners to monitor their progress on operationalising the ARA principles and achieving its outcomes

4c Design of online and offline spaces to enable sharing and learning between ARA partners

4. Tracking, Sharing and Learning (TSL) Platform

5a Comms, social media and presence at events pre-COP and at COP

5b Interlinkages with relevant research and action networks (universities and science- policy-practice)

5c Form cross-links with relevant sectoral initiatives (e.g. agriculture, health, water, infrastructure)

5. UNFCCC Linkages and Strategic Partnerships

6a Campaign for endorsement of ARA Principles, including events engagement; high level commentary paper; and proforma and guidelines for endorsing the Principles

6b Bilateral engagement to secure membership and commitments to the ARA, including donor landscape mapping; roundtables and sustained engagements and outreach

6. Principles and Membership Campaign

OUTCOMES

Increased profile for action-orientated research for climate adaptation [1] [5] [6]

Increased funding in developing countries for action-orientated research on adaptation and resilience [1] [3]

Enhanced impact of research Investments through better coordination, prioritisation and uptake [2] [4]

Capacity built at individual and institutional levels [1] [4]

Enhanced learning and improved research uptake in implementation [1] [3] [4]

Strengthened collaboration across countries (South-South, South-North), disciplines and scales [2] [3] [5] [6]

ARA activities organised under six interlinked work streams will support the ARA's functions and contribute to its outcomes under the ARA Theory of Change. Together, these activities will yield new programmes on the ground.

4. Tracking, sharing and learning (TSL)

The TSL Workstream is core to the ARA's commitment to "enhanced learning by better engaging the research community in monitoring, evaluation and assessment activities, improved knowledge management and peer to peer networks across the research and action communities." The Workstream will collectively track Member and partners' progress on toward achieving ARA outcomes and provide a platform, with guidelines, to share and learn from distinct experiences (both positive and negative). The co-development process and the framework itself will support members to engagement actively with each other and provides the basis for long term peer to peer sharing and learning via online and offline spaces.

Interested members may express their interest in joining the Workstream Task Force as well as contribute to the current development stage of the TSL framework by contributing to the co-development of the framework through the consultations and KIIs, and/or validation and revision of the draft framework.

5. Principles & membership campaigns

A robust and diverse membership across the range of actors in the research – action landscape is essential for effective functioning – and eventual success of the ARA. In the run-up to COP26, this Workstream will focus on a campaign to drive endorsement of – and membership in the ARA. Given the importance of the ARA's principles for Climate Adaptation Action Research as an advocacy tool – and for membership in the ARA itself; the membership campaign will include a campaign for the ARA principles as an integral component. The Workstream will also include efforts for resource mobilization through targeted convenings with donors and other potential ARA supporters.

Members are invited to contribute to the campaign by sharing ARA membership information with other like-minded organizations. Members may also contribute by consolidating the list of asks for donors and to provide input on potential donor engagement and roundtables. Members can contribute to incrementally improve the principles by making them as widely accessible and applicable as possible.

6. UNFCCC linkages & Strategic Partnerships

The ARA aims to work with, and in support of, key on-going adaptation initiatives in the areas of science, policy and practice. Engagement with the UNFCCC processes and bodies, including the Conference of the Parties (COP), shall be a key activity of the Secretariat on behalf of ARA members. Furthermore, the need to mobilise and implement adaptation actions at scale requires the continued development of strategic partnerships within the "adaptation space" and beyond. This Workstream, led by the Secretariat, is an emergent process based on continued developments.

Members may contribute to this Workstream by identifying opportunities, events for engagement, co-developing key messages for events, and facilitating conversations and engagement at country- and institutional-levels with potential strategic partners.

4.2 New Programme Development

The development of new long-duration, action-orientated research programmes that develop user-centred adaptation solutions and build capacity in the global South is a core activity of the Adaptation Research Alliance. Members are encouraged to come together to form new partnerships to fund such programmes, which address the most pressing user needs and opportunities for research, facilitated by Workstreams 2 & 3 above.

4.3 How to get involved

All current and potential ARA members are invited to express their interest and participate in one or more workstreams, or contribute resources, by contacting the ARA secretariat at ara@southsouthnorth.org. For further information, please contact us by email or see the Workstream Overview documents on the ARA website:

https://southsouthnorth.org/portfolio_page/adaptation-research-alliance/

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