



The Association
of Commonwealth
Universities

Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort 2022-2025

Evaluation report

Authors

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Key Findings

The evaluation report examines the extent to which the Programme objectives, theory of change, and key outcomes for participants were achieved for the Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort 2022-25.

Overall Satisfaction with the Programme

- By the end of the Programme, all participants agreed that it met their learning and development goals and that they felt adequately supported by the delivery team in achieving these goals.
- All aspects of the training related to development and learning were rated highly, with 'collaborating with peers from other country contexts' and 'funded knowledge exchange projects (KEP)' receiving the highest scores (4.9 of 5).

Connections, Collaborations and Partnerships

- Participation in the Programme enabled each participant to form or strengthen an average of 6-7 connections, 4-5 collaborations and two partnerships with various stakeholders.
- The Programme was particularly effective at forming new connections with the private sector, strengthening existing collaborations with non-academic stakeholders across different sectors and fostering new partnerships with academics and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).
- The strength of reported connections, collaborations, and partnerships has notably improved throughout the Programme.

Co-creation, Stakeholder Engagement, and Project Management

- Confidence in knowledge co-creation increased from a moderate level to quite a high one across the cohort, with average ratings increasing from 3.1 at baseline to 4.4 (out of 5) at the end of the Programme. But in-Programme research grant recipients exhibited greater confidence in 6 out of 8 areas of knowledge co-creation
- A substantial improvement was noted in understanding and applying stakeholder mapping tools, with these ratings increasing from about 3 to a maximum of 5. Participants' confidence in engaging non-academic stakeholders rose from 3.7 to 4.7 following the involvement in activities that encouraged the co-creation of knowledge with these stakeholders. More than two-thirds of participants rated the Programme as effectively facilitating co-creation and co-production activities with non-academic stakeholders, giving a 5 out of 5 rating. In-Programme grant recipients demonstrated slightly greater confidence in engaging with both academic and non-academic stakeholders.
- A considerable enhancement to research project management skills was reported, rising from an average of 3.8 at the start to 4.8 by the project's conclusion across all categories. However, while there is a notable improvement in leading project team members, there was limited progress in managing project timelines and budgets. That said, delivering six-month funded projects substantially enhanced recipients' abilities in budget and timeline management through experiential learning.

Grant Proposal Writing

- Confidence in funding application processes increased across the board, with average ratings rising from 3.2 to 4.2. This includes 'navigating research grant applications' (from 3.1 to 4.2), 'identifying relevant funding sources and opportunities' (from 3.4 to 4.3), and 'submitting high-quality research grant applications' (from 3.1 to 4.1).
- Participants rated highly the extent to which the Programme enabled them to more effectively 'write grant applications' (4.3 out of 5). More than half (53%) of participants successfully obtained funding to carry out their research projects within the Programme.
- At the start of the Programme, only 27% of participants had engaged in grant proposal writing as Principal Investigators (PIs) in the previous year, and 47% as Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs). By the end of the programme, these figures increased to 67% for PIs and 80% for Co-PIs.

Visibility and Outputs

- Participants felt that the Climate Cohort Programme significantly enhanced their visibility as researchers, giving an average rating of 4.6 out of 5. Of these, 60% gave the highest rating of 5, while 40% gave a rating of 4.
- The average number of publications across the cohort increased from 1.9 to 2.8 by the end of the project, particularly represented by journal articles (from 5.5 to 7.1) and media pieces (from 2.5 to 5.0), indicating improved output and visibility through journal articles and media.
- Among these publications, 43% were related to the Climate Cohort Programme. The climate-related pieces experienced a significant rise from an average of 0.2 in 2024 to 2.3 in 2025, showcasing the Programme's positive effect on participants' visibility in climate-focused research.

Areas for Improvement

- The most frequently suggested area for improvement was the availability of more funding to support research-related activities and research application processes.
- Greater flexibility in scheduling activities and setting deadlines was also highlighted as important, especially given participants' additional work responsibilities.
- Nearly one-third of participants expressed a desire for a face-to-face component to better facilitate connection and collaboration.
- One-third also suggested making the mentorship component more structured to provide more personalised guidance from mentors.

Introduction

The Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort 2022-25 ('Climate Cohort') is a research capacity strengthening (RCS) programme that was run by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) with funding from British Council from August 2022 to July 2025. The purpose of the Programme was to enhance the contribution of UK universities and LMIC-based researchers from the target countries to national, regional, and international decision-making in areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Following the definition of RCS as 'enhancing the capacity of individuals and organisations to conduct, manage, share and apply research, while enabling national and sub-national research systems to effectively support research and the linkages between research and practice' (ESSENCE on Health Research and Centre for Capacity Research, 2023), the Programme can be seen to be multi-level, seeking to support RCS at individual, institutional, and systems levels, albeit to different degrees.

Specifically, the Programme directly targeted individual-level capacity strengthening, but in such a way as to indirectly support the development of institutions and systems. This was achieved through the delivery of a bespoke training and mentoring Programme for climate-focused early career researchers (ECRs) from Bangladesh, Egypt, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, and Sri Lanka, supported by UK-based universities. The ECRs participated in an initial 12-month mixed methods training involving cohort-based online synchronous classroom-style teaching and applied learning, and hybrid (online and face-to-face) collaborative asynchronous experiential learning in order to facilitate a practical, real-world problem-based learning journey to support skills, knowledge, experience, and networks enhancement in relation to climate action research.

Within the context of climate action research, this approach was intended to enable the holistic development of participants within complex subject matter which requires learning in higher levels of cognitive complexity (see for example Bloom's Taxonomy – Analyse, Evaluate, Create).¹ The core topics were research co-creation and grant proposal writing. In addition, practical elements supported experiential learning in the areas of international collaboration, inter-sectoral collaboration, and interdisciplinary research. Through focusing on these areas at the output level, the Programme expected to see a vibrant international and multidisciplinary cohort of ECRs developing both their hard and soft skills while forming connections and experiences, in order to enable them to access sustained external research funding, produce relevant evidence in their chosen subject matter, and influence climate action decision-making in a variety of contexts.

Research theme leads based at UK universities supported ECRs along their learning journey from a subject matter and research perspective. Institutional mentors supported ECRs to navigate institutional processes such as budgeting and policies, while climate knowledge brokers supported stakeholder engagement planning and activities.

The Programme was structured as follows (see also Figure 1):

1. Training in research co-creation (April-November 2023):
 - a. online workshops and applied learning elements
 - b. group-based research scoping exercise
2. Training in grant proposal writing (January-March 2024)

¹ <https://www.valamis.com/hub/blooms-taxonomy>

- a. Online workshops and applied learning elements
 - b. In-Programme semi-competitive research grant call
3. Conference travel grants to participate in climate action conferences (June 2023-December 2024)

Participants were grouped under five research themes and collaborated on applied elements and group-based activities. Group activities were designed to support participants to collaborate with non-academic stakeholders during research design processes.

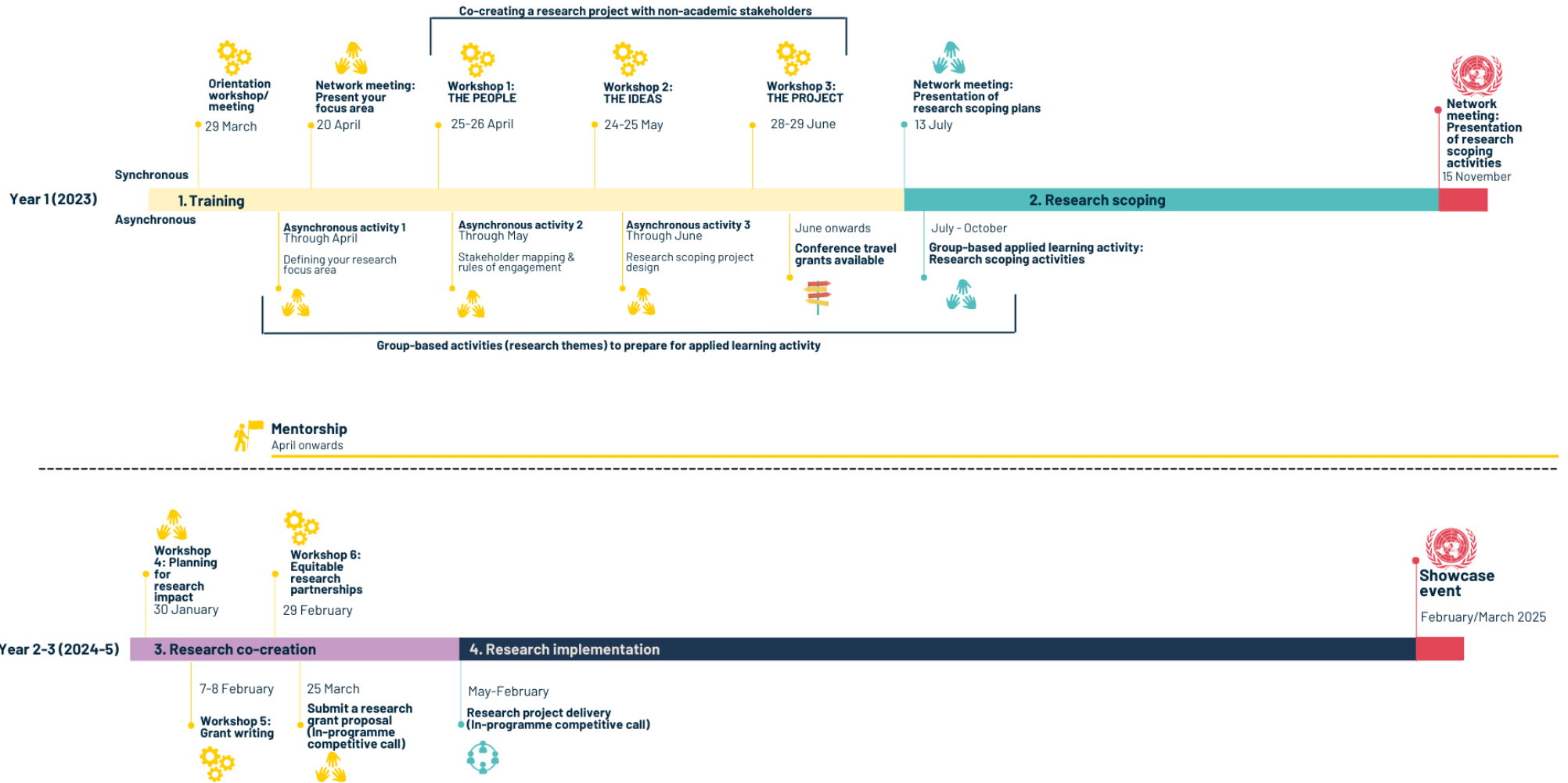
As an experiential learning approach, participants were invited to use the learning of the 12-month Programme to submit a grant proposal to an in-Programme semi-competitive grant call, structured to facilitate international, inter-sectoral, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Those that were successful received funding to deliver a 6-month pilot research study in their chosen area.

The Programme aimed to position these researchers as future leaders and experts working closely with policymakers, practitioners, and communities in the field of climate change, and to strengthen their capacity to design, secure funding for, and implement research projects that deliver social benefits.

Programme partners included the following organisations:

1. Durham University, Theme Lead (Climate Law)
2. Queen Mary, University of London, Theme Lead (Adapting to Flooding and Coastal Change)
3. SOAS, University of London, Theme Lead (Urban Resilience)
4. The University of Warwick, Theme Lead (Water Security)
5. University of Cape Town Researcher Development Academy (UCT RDA), training providers
6. University of York, Theme Lead (Digital Governance)
7. PlanAdapt, Climate Knowledge Brokers

Figure 1 – Programme Structure



Section 1 – Methodology

The evaluation methodology was developed based on the Programme’s theory of change, logframe, and core evaluation questions. The core evaluation questions are as follows:

1. To what extent were we able to achieve the objectives and theory of change of the programme:
 - a. Building an inclusive, multidisciplinary cohort of up to 20 climate-focused early career researchers from 10 selected ODA eligible countries
 - b. Facilitating collaboration between the selected researchers and UK-based HEIs for improved interdisciplinarity and diversity in international research partnerships
 - c. Strengthening the selected researchers’ skills and experience in designing and leading research projects based upon the principles of knowledge exchange and research for impact
 - d. Enhancing the selected researchers’ skills and experience in grant-personship through training and the opportunity to participate in a competitive research grant application process with the potential of winning a research grant for a 6-month research project
 - e. Enhancing the selected researchers’ visibility and engagement with the wider research community, practitioners, and policy makers within national and international climate change-focused fora, including research, science-policy and practice events
2. As an in-depth learning journey employing a mixed methods approach, what have been the key outcomes for participating individuals? How did the methods adopted influence participant learning and development?
3. To what extent were we able to connect researchers across country contexts and facilitate collaboration? What have been some of the benefits and challenges?
4. To what extent were we able to connect researchers across disciplinary boundaries and facilitate collaboration? What have been some of the benefits and challenges?
5. To what extent were we able to connect researchers with non-academic stakeholders and facilitate collaboration? What have been some of the benefits and challenges?

To address these questions, three surveys were designed in collaboration with the Programme team to document the changes or impacts the Programme has had on the skills and experience of participants. Most survey questions remained consistent across all three surveys, with only a few questions added, removed, or revised in the follow-ups to meet the Programme’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) needs.

Using Snap Surveys, these surveys were distributed to the cohort group in March 2023, May 2024, and March 2025. The response rates for these surveys are as follows:

Table 1.1 Response rates by surveys

Survey	Year	Number of People Invited	Number of Responses	Response Rate
Baseline	2023	20	20	100%
Midline	2024	18 ²	16	89%
Endline	2025	18	16	89%

However, to evaluate the consistent changes among participants, the report focuses solely on those who answered all three surveys, with 15 out of 18 participants (83%) completing all three surveys. A more detailed breakdown of response rates by demographics is as follows:

Table 1.2 Response rates by gender

Gender	Number of Responses	Number of People Invited	Response Rate
Male	11	12	92%
Female	4	6	67%

Table 1.3 Response rates by region

Region	Number of Responses	Number of People Invited	Response Rate
Africa	9	10	90%
Asia	6	8	75%

Table 1.4 Response rates by discipline

Discipline	Number of Responses	Number of People Invited	Response Rate
Interdisciplinary	7	7	100%
Social sciences	5	7	71%
Natural sciences	2	2	100%
Formal sciences	1	1	100%

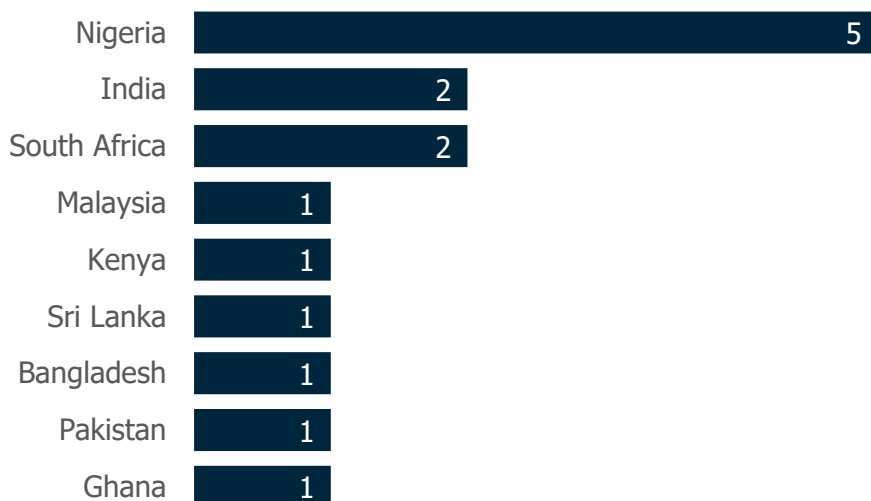
For the final evaluation, responses from these 15 participants were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic coding. The findings are presented in this report.

² In June 2023, two participants withdrew from the programme, leaving 18 participants in total.

Section 2 – Building an Inclusive and Multidisciplinary International Climate Research Cohort

A total of 15 participants from nine countries, covering four disciplines and four research areas, completed all three surveys.

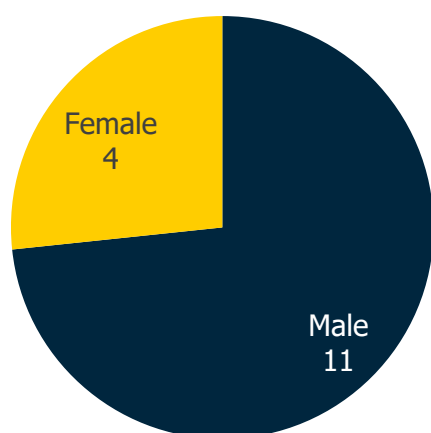
Figure 2.1 Participants by country



n=15

Geographically, respondents represented two continents – Africa 60% (9) and Asia 40% (6) and nine countries - Nigeria, India, South Africa, Ghana, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Malaysia. The gender breakdown of the respondents was 73% male (11) and 27% female (4).

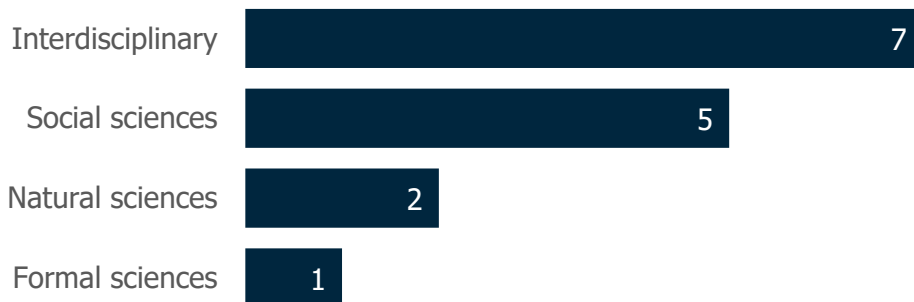
Figure 2.2 Participants by gender



n=15

The discipline breakdown was as follows: 47% of the respondents selected 'Interdisciplinary' in response to the question about their discipline, followed by 33% selecting 'Social Sciences', 13% 'Natural Sciences', and 7% 'Formal Sciences'.

Figure 2.3 Participants by discipline



n=15

The themes breakdown was as follows: 40% (6) 'Urban Adaptation and Resilience' followed by 33% (5) selecting 'Adapting to Flooding and Coastal Change', 20% (3) 'Water Security in a Changing World' and 7% (1) 'Digital Governance and Marginalised Communities'.

Figure 2.4 Participants by country, gender, discipline, and theme



n=15

Section 3 – Establishing Connections to Enable and Sustain Research Collaborations and Partnerships

The Programme aimed to assist participants in building networks to establish connections, activate collaborations, and foster long-term international research partnerships across disciplines and sectors. This was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, training sessions were designed to facilitate social interaction between participants through discussions and applied activities during online workshops, reflection sessions, and presentation sessions. Asynchronous activities focused on project-based learning in a real-world setting in the form of a research scoping exercise in collaboration with their participating peers and which engaged non-participating stakeholders. This activity facilitated active collaboration between participants and non-participants. Finally, an in-Programme research grant call was intended to facilitate more formal partnerships between the researchers' institutions, led by LMIC-based institutions and supported by UK-based institutions.

The '**Networks**' are constructed as three-pronged in the surveys, comprising three components: connections, collaborations, and partnerships.

- **Connection:** *a formal or informal relationship with an individual and/or organisation with no current live activities, yet with the potential for academic collaboration.*
- **Collaboration:** *a formal or informal relationship with an individual and/or organisation with a live activity ongoing, e.g. a research project.*
- **Partnership:** *formal relationships, set up by (for example) a Memorandum of Understanding between individuals and/or organisations that agree to work together towards particular objectives.*

Each of these prongs is interrelated and interconnected with the others, creating a pathway for building sustainable working relationships. For example, strong connections can establish a foundation for future collaborations; active collaborations can lead to formal partnerships between individuals and organisations with an agreement to work together over a long period of time.

This section examines how effectively the Programme linked researchers with academic and non-academic stakeholders, promoted collaboration, and encouraged partnerships.

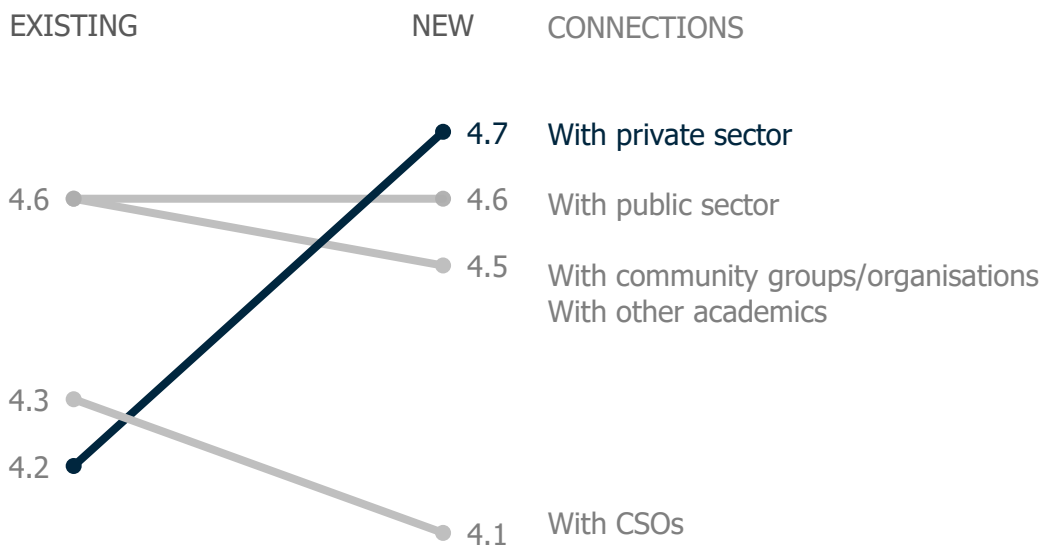
Connections: participation in the Programme enabled each participant to form or strengthen an average of 6-7 connections, primarily with academics, community groups and organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and the public sector, as well as opening up opportunities for new connections with the private sector. By the end of the Programme, connections with academic and non-academic stakeholders strengthened, with notable improvements extending beyond academia.

All 15 participants reported that the programme helped both improve existing connections and create new ones, with an average of six existing and seven new connections developed per person. Every respondent noted stronger or newly formed academic ties. A majority mentioned links that were strengthened or established with the CSOs (60% strengthened, 53% established) and community groups and organisations (60% strengthened, 67% established). About half of the participants reported forming or strengthening links with the public sector (47% each). Fewer than a third of participants reported developing (20%) or enhancing (33%) connections with the private sector.

When ranked from 1 to 5—where 1 is 'not at all' and 5 is 'to a great extent', as shown in Figure 3.1—most participants felt that the Programme was highly effective in helping them strengthen and form new connections across all sectors, with an average score of 4.5. However, it appears most effective in forming new connections with the private sector (4.7), suggesting the Programme's potential to create networking opportunities beyond academia.

Figure 3.1 – Average rating for the role of Programme in strengthening existing connections or forming new ones

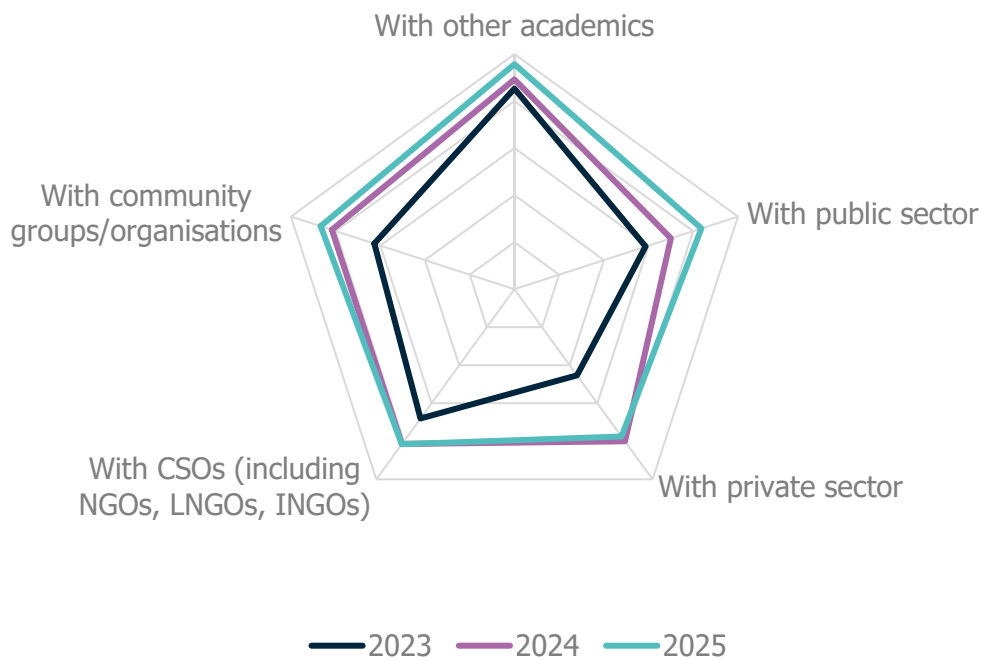
Highest rating in developing new connections with the **private sector**
Average rating: 1=not at all, 5=to a great extent



n=15, strengthening existing connections; n=15 forming new connections

By the end of the Programme, the strength of all types of connections had increased, however, as shown in Figure 3.2, when ranked by strength from 1 (the weakest) to 5 (the strongest), the most significant growth was observed in connections with the private sector (from 2.3 to 3.9), followed by connections with the public sector (from 2.9 to 4.2) and with community groups and organisations (from 3.1 to 4.3). In contrast, the strength of academic connections increased the least (from 4.3 to 4.8), which may be explained by researchers already having well-established academic networks, regardless of project participation. The Programme appeared to be particularly effective in strengthening connections outside academia.

Figure 3.2 – Average rating for the strength of connections



n=15

Collaborations: participation in the Programme enabled each participant to form or strengthen an average of 4-5 collaborations, primarily with academics, community groups and organisations, CSOs, and the public sector. It appears more effective in enhancing existing collaborations than in forming new ones. By the end of the Programme, collaborations with academic and non-academic stakeholders have both strengthened, with a notable increase in non-academic settings.

All 13 participants with ongoing collaborations reported that the Programme enhanced their efforts—averaging five strengthened collaborations each. Most (85%) noted improved academic collaborations, 62% with community groups, and 38% with both the public sector and CSOs. Collaborations with the private sector improved for only two out of 13 participants (15%).

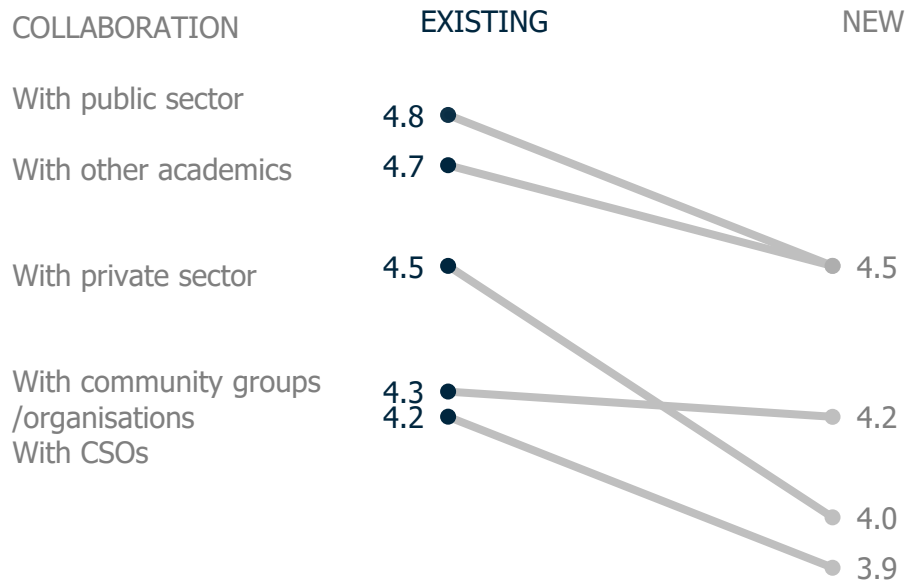
Fourteen participants reported an average of four new collaborations, mainly with academics (93%). Half cited stronger collaborations with CSOs, 43% with community groups, and fewer with the public (29%) and private sectors (21%).

When ranked from 1 to 5—where 1 is ‘not at all’ and 5 is ‘to a great extent’, as shown in Figure 3.3—most participants rated the Programme as slightly higher at enhancing existing collaborations than at initiating new ones. Moreover, they felt that their existing collaborations improved the most with the public sector (4.8) as a result of the Programme, followed by academic collaborations (4.7), private sector collaborations (4.5), community groups/organisations (4.3), and collaborations with CSOs (4.2).

Figure 3.3 – Average rating for the role of Programme in strengthening existing collaborations or forming new ones

More effective in strengthening **existing collaborations** than establishing new ones across all sectors

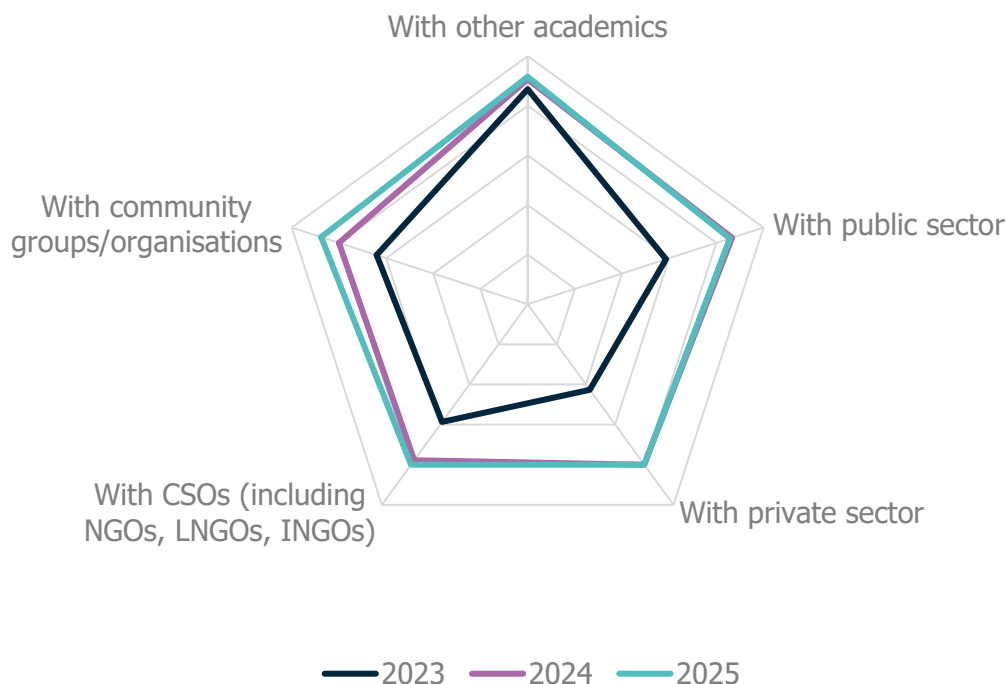
Average rating: 1 = not at all, 5 = to a great extent



n=13, strengthening existing collaborations; n=14, forming new collaborations

The strength of all types of reported collaborations was noted to have increased throughout the Programme; however, as shown in Figure 3.4, compared to academic collaborations with minimal improvements, the strength of all other types of collaborations saw a substantial increase, with the most significant growth observed in collaborations with the private sector (from 2.1 to 4.0). This was followed by the public sector (from 3.0 to 4.3), community groups and organisations (from 3.2 to 4.4), and CSOs (from 3.0 to 4.0). The Programme appeared to be particularly effective in enhancing the strength of collaborations beyond academia.

Figure 3.4 – Average rating for the strength of collaborations



n 2023=15, n 2024=15; n 2025=13

Partnerships: participation in the Programme enabled each participant to form or strengthen an average of two partnerships, particularly excelling in fostering new partnerships with academics and CSOs. However, the strength of partnerships with community groups and organisations, as well as the public and private sectors, have seen a significant increase by the end of the Programme.

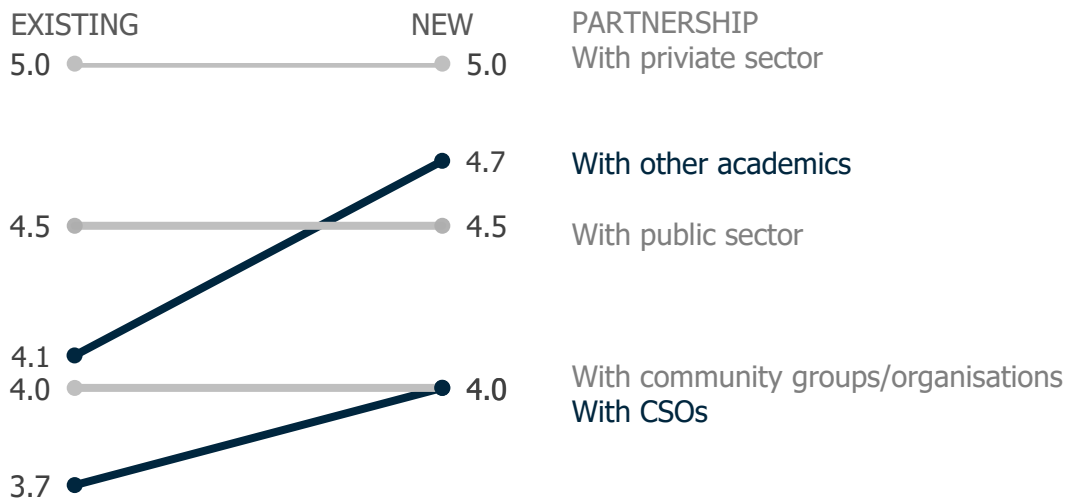
About three-quarters of participants said the Programme helped strengthen existing partnerships, and 53% formed new ones, with each participant strengthening or forming an average of two partnerships. Most of these partnerships were with academics, reported by 73–75% of these respondents, followed by CSOs (27–38%). A small portion of respondents were connected to the public or private sectors, or community groups and organisations.

When ranked from 1 to 5—where 1 is ‘not at all’ and 5 is ‘to a great extent’, as shown in Figure 3.5—the Programme was reported to contribute equally to strengthening existing partnerships with the private sector (5.0) and public sectors (4.5), as well as community groups and organisations (4.0), as it did in forming new ones. However, it seemed more effective in fostering new partnerships with other academics and CSOs.

Figure 3.5 – Average rating for the role of Programme in strengthening existing partnerships or forming new ones

More effective in promoting **new partnerships** with **academics** and **CSOs**

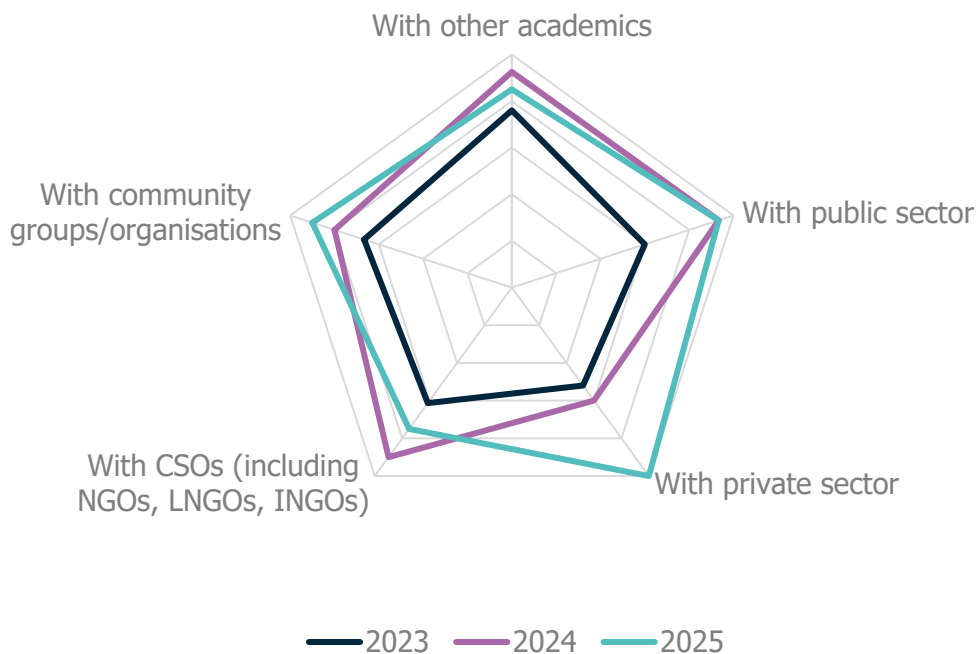
Average rating (1=not at all, 5=to a great extent)



n=11, strengthening existing partnerships; n=8, forming new partnerships

When asked to rate the strength of their partnerships, particularly in the private and public sectors, as well as community groups and organisations, they improved significantly. The most significant improvement was observed in partnerships with the private sector, which increased from 2.6 at baseline to 5.0. Similarly, the strength of partnerships with the public sector rose from 3.0 to 4.7 and with CSOs (from 3.1 to 3.8). The strength of partnerships with other academics and CSOs appears to weaken by the end of the Programme.

Figure 3.6 – Average rating for the strength of partnerships



n=15

Participants also provided free-text responses when asked to share examples of how the Climate Cohort programme helped them form or strengthen connections, collaborations, and partnerships. These responses highlighted that the Programme has been instrumental in fostering meaningful connections, collaborations, and partnerships among its participants, extending both locally and internationally. Through the programme, participants connected with colleagues from South Asia, Africa, and the UK, as well as academics from other ACU member universities:

'I met the climate cohort programme colleagues from South Asia, Africa, and get introduced with academic of UK, South Africa.' **(Participant 13, Interdisciplinary, Bangladesh)**

Regular networking through monthly meetings with theme fellows and theme leads fostered ongoing dialogue, which further solidified these connections. These interactions not only expanded their professional networks but also facilitated knowledge exchange and cultural understanding, leading to potential collaborations:

'The almost two (2) years engagement in this programme with fellows, theme (water security in a changing world) fellows and [Theme] Lead has allowed a lot of networking, collaboration and engagements through monthly meetings (Theme fellows and Lead), participation in the University of Warwick Sustainability Training School (STS) where I formed connections with some ECRs for a project.' **(Participant 19, Natural Sciences, Nigeria)**

Conferences and shared training sessions also provided further opportunities to engage with researchers from diverse institutions, broadening perspectives and opening doors for multi-country studies on climate change adaptation:

'Through the Climate Cohort programme, I attended a conference on climate change, where I met academics from a diverse range of institutions. Also, a member of my team on the Climate Cohort Programme shared information about a training on climate knowledge brokering in Ghana, which I attended. This experience also allowed me to form connections and collaborations with academics and non-academics, broadening my understanding of climate change.' **(Participant 1, Social Science, Ghana)**

Besides meeting colleagues from academia, the Programme also significantly strengthened partnerships with local governments, NGOs, and community members, particularly in areas like agriculture-based adaptation, climate resilience, and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Participants noted that these collaborations enhanced knowledge exchange on best practices, allowing them to address local climate challenges more effectively:

'In the process, community members, NGOs and government agencies were engaged to understand their contributions towards the goal. This effort resulted in connections among the researchers, community members, NGOs and public officials engaged in one form of activity or the other. From connections, relationships were developed and collaborations formed. For instance, we entered into a collaboration with the Lagos State Office of Climate Change and Circular Economy to work with residents within the University Teaching Hospital in managing waste collection to feed a biodigester developed to serve a correctional home.' **(Participant 16, Nigeria, Social Sciences)**

Some participants highlighted new partnerships established with universities in Bangladesh, India, and the UK, with aspirations to continue these relationships beyond the project's duration, reflecting the long-term impact of the cohort's networking opportunities:

'The Climate Cohort Programme helped to establish a new partnership with 3 Universities as part of the project (Bangladesh, India and UK). I hope to continue this partnership beyond this project. The project helped to navigate different contexts to address similar [climate change] problems and learn from each other. In future partnerships or collaborations, I hope we will [be] able to expand the project to multiple new contexts to have a greater influence on evidence-based policy making.'
(Participant 7, Sri Lanka, Interdisciplinary)

Other participants reported that they strengthened their partnership with local governments with a focus on Agriculture Adaptation strategies:

'My involvement in the Climate Cohort programme has helped strengthen partnerships with local government to focus on agriculture-based adaptation. It has facilitated collaboration with researchers and practitioners, enabling the exchange of ideas.' **(Participant 18, India, Interdisciplinary)**

While some discussions with new networks are still evolving, the groundwork has been laid for future formal agreements, demonstrating the Programme's role as a catalyst for sustainable partnerships. Participant responses indicate that the methods adopted have been important enablers of this. The learning journey built on the principle of social interaction involving collaborative online workshops, applied learning, and collaborative experiential learning has facilitated focused networking and semi-structured collaboration with peers over a sustained period time, enabling the forming of deeper relationships with other academics internationally and across disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, a focus on practical, real-world problem-based project learning that supported engagement with numerous non-academic stakeholders over the course of the learning journey has formed and strengthened relationships across sectoral contexts. Conference travel grants further enhanced this process of relationship-building through enabling physical engagements.

Section 4 – Enhancing Skills in Designing and Leading Co-creation Research

This section provides evidence of the extent to which the Programme has strengthened the selected researchers' skills and experience in designing and leading research projects based upon the principles of knowledge exchange and research for impact, with a focus on research co-creation, stakeholder engagement, project management, and interdisciplinary research. The programme sought to achieve this through the following activities:

1. Online workshops and collaborative applied learning activities on research co-creation
2. A funded, collaborative research co-creation scoping exercise in a real-world setting
3. A funded, collaborative research project in a real-world setting (10/18 fellows participated in this element)
4. Support from an established expert academic and professional climate knowledge brokers

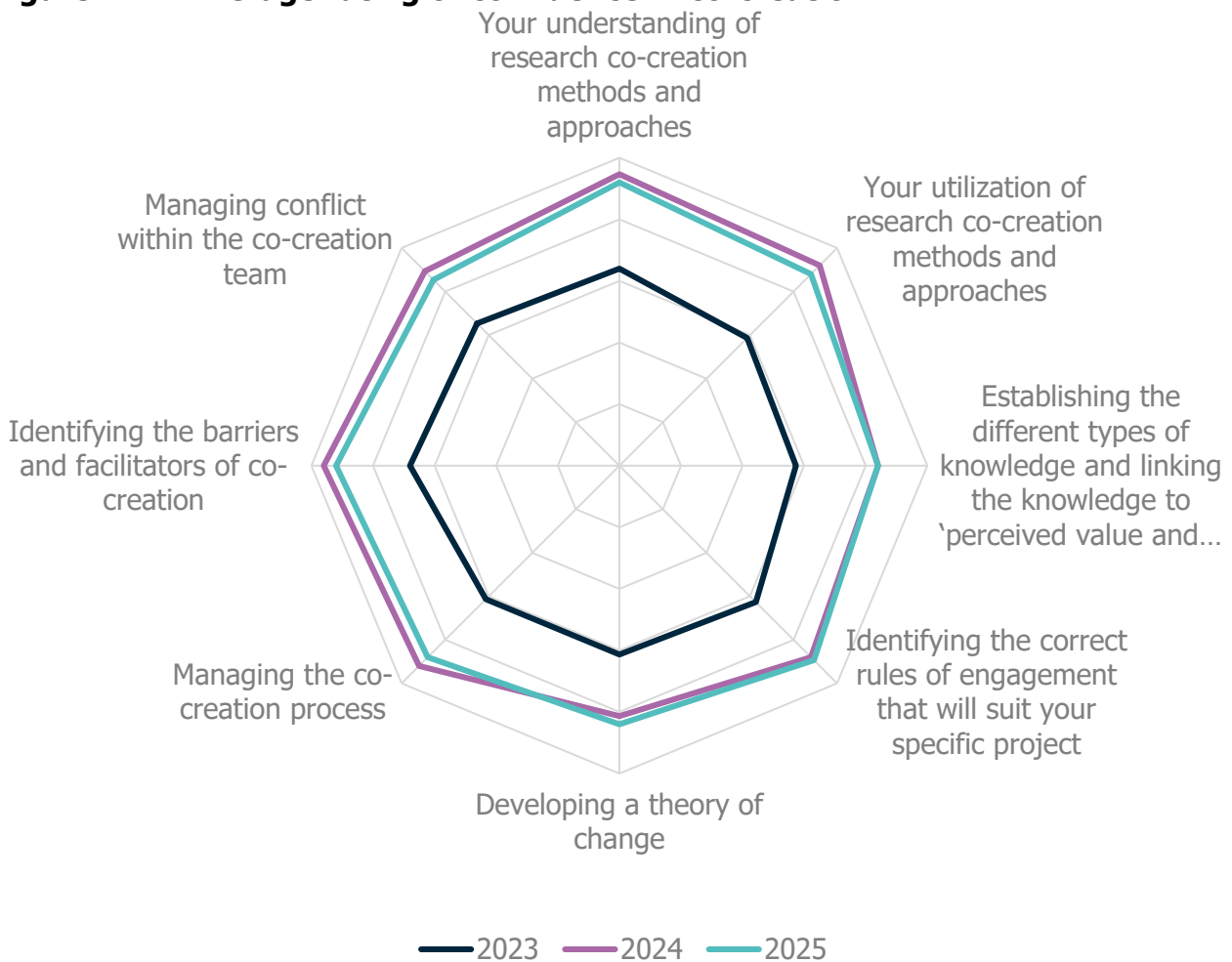
The section begins with an illustration of how participants evaluated their confidence and skills over time. It then compares the differences between participants who completed a six-month funded project within the Programme following the training and those who did not, in terms of skill enhancement and confidence. It highlights that experiential learning through delivering projects can further develop skills gained through structured learning, such as training sessions and workshops. A selection of feedback from these participants is also included to offer insights into how their project delivery experiences could serve as an effective pathway to enhance their skills and confidence.

Knowledge co-creation: confidence shifted from a 'moderate' to a 'quite high' level across all areas, but in-programme research grant recipients exhibited greater confidence in 6 out of 8 areas of knowledge co-creation.

By the conclusion of the Programme, participants felt that their 'skills and experience using the tools during the co-creation process' had improved from an average rating of 3.1 at baseline to 4.4 (out of 5) at the end of the Programme. They noted significant boosts in their confidence across all areas, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. Notably, the greatest increases were observed in 'utilisation of research co-creation methods and approaches' (from 2.9 to 4.4) and 'understanding of research co-creation methods and approaches' (from 3.2 to 4.6), suggesting the Programme's effective role in enhancing the understanding of relevant theories and methods.

In contrast, the smallest growth in confidence was recorded in 'managing conflict within the co-creation team' (from 3.3 to 4.3), reflecting the complexities and uncertainties involved in interpersonal engagement and management during knowledge co-creation in practical situations. A more detailed breakdown of ratings for each specific skill is presented in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1 – Average rating of confidence in co-creation



n=15

Despite a 'quite' high level of confidence across all areas of knowledge co-creation achieved by the end of the Programme, participants who successfully secured funding for their research projects from 2024 to 2025 demonstrated greater confidence in 6 out of 8 aspects compared to those who did not, as shown in Figure 4.2. Such a difference may be attributed to their holistic learning experience, gained through designing and leading a project from start to finish, which provided them with confidence through experiential learning. However, they exhibited lower confidence in two specific areas: 'identifying the barriers and facilitators of co-creation' and 'managing the co-creation process' than their unsuccessful counterparts. This disparity may stem from the challenges faced during project implementation, resulting in a more realistic assessment of their confidence levels.

Figure 4.2 – Average rating of confidence in co-creation between in-programme grant recipients and non-recipients

Recipients showed **higher confidence** in **6** out of 8 areas of co-creation compared to **non-recipients**

Average rating: 1=Lowest, 5=Highest

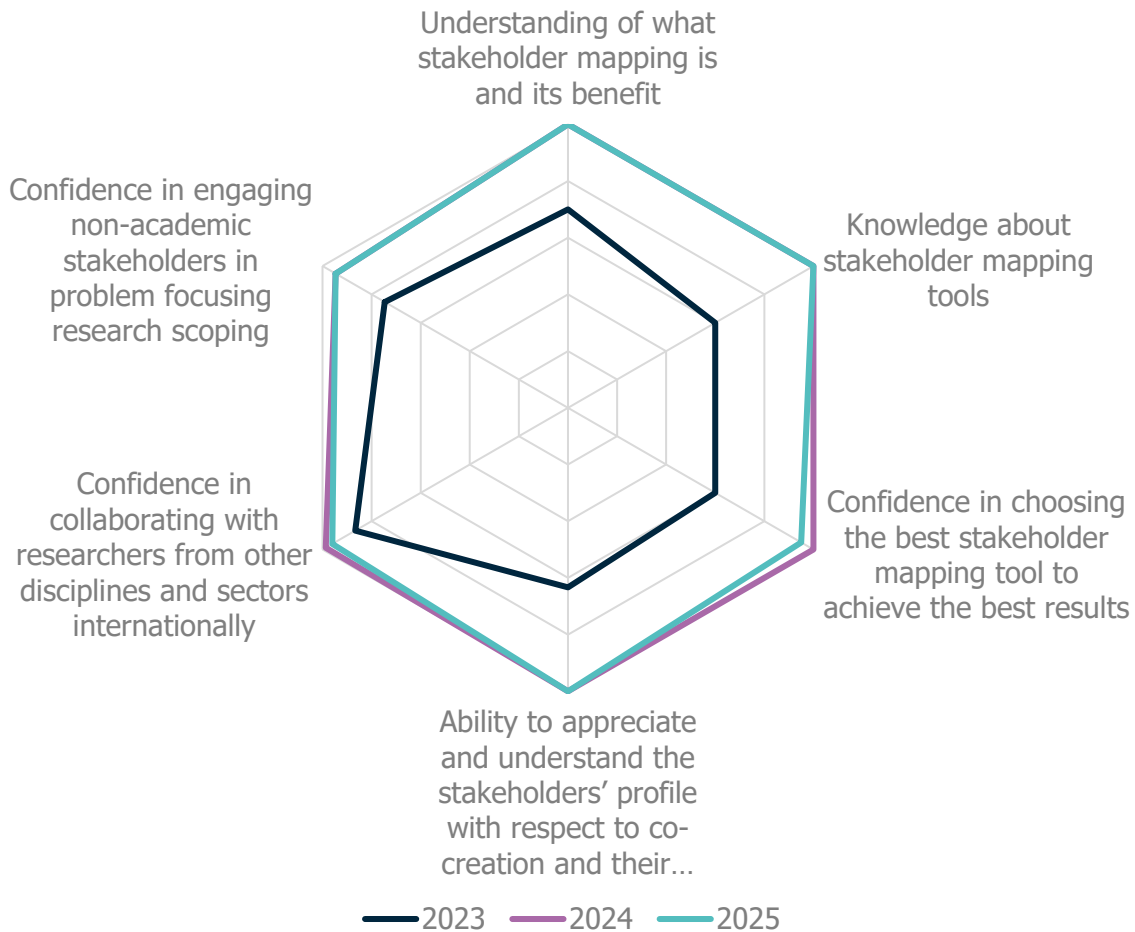


Recipients n=8; Non-recipients n=7; year=2025

Stakeholder mapping and engagement: understanding of stakeholder mapping increased significantly, but there was limited confidence boost regarding stakeholder engagement. However, in-Programme grant recipients demonstrated slightly greater confidence in engaging with both academic and non-academic stakeholders.

Participants reported considerable improvement in almost all areas of stakeholder mapping and engagement, except in one area where they already showed great confidence in engaging with researchers at the start of the Programme, with a limited increase from 4.3 to 4.8 by the end of the Programme. As shown in Figure 4.3, 'understanding of what stakeholder mapping is and its benefit', 'knowledge about stakeholder mapping tools', and 'ability to appreciate and understand the stakeholders' profile with respect to co-creation and their positionality' increased from about 3 to the maximum ranking of 5. 'Confidence in choosing the best stakeholder mapping tool to achieve the best results' improved from a rank of 3 at baseline to 4.8 at the end of the project, and 'confidence in engaging non-academic stakeholders (e.g. businesses, NGOs, local governments)' rose from 3.7 to 4.7.

Figure 4.3 – Average rating of stakeholder mapping and engagement



n=15

The modest increase in confidence levels (from 3.7 to 4.7) about engaging with non-academic stakeholders is likely related to their involvement in activities that promote co-creating knowledge with these stakeholders. Nearly all participants (93%) reported that, over the past year, they had engaged in activities designed to facilitate the co-production of knowledge, such as workshops, sandpits, roundtables, and meetings, with non-academic stakeholders.

Additionally, 67% of participants indicated that the Programme effectively facilitated co-creation and co-production activities with non-academic stakeholders, rating it 5 out of 5. The remaining 33% gave it a score of 4, demonstrating their strong belief in the Programme's influence.

However, there was a subtle difference in confidence when engaging academic and non-academic stakeholders between participants who secured the in-programme research grant and those who did not. As shown in Figure 4.4, recipients reported higher confidence in engaging both academic and non-academic stakeholders than non-recipients, suggesting that experiential learning through firsthand project delivery might boost participants' confidence in practice.

Figure 4.4 – Average rating of stakeholder mapping and engagement between in-programme grant recipients and non-recipients

Recipients showed slightly higher confidence in engaging **academic and non-academic stakeholders** than **non-recipients**

Average rating: 1=Lowest, 5=Highest

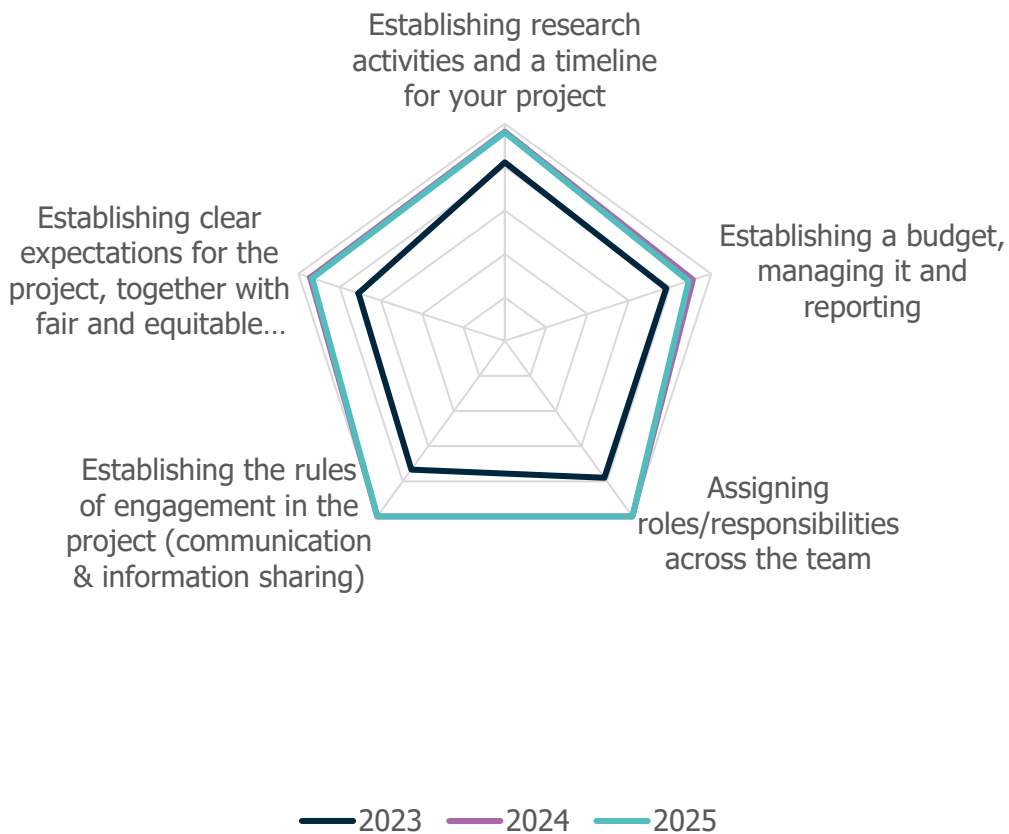


Recipients n=8; Non-recipients n=7; year=2025

Project management: strong enhancement in leading project team members, yet limited improvement in managing project timelines and budgets. However, delivering funded projects enhanced recipients' abilities in budget and timeline management through experiential learning.

Similarly, there was a significant enhancement in participants' assessments of their knowledge and skills regarding research project management, rising from an average of 3.8 at the start to 4.8 by the project's conclusion across all categories. A detailed breakdown is presented in Figure 4.5 below, showing modest improvement in managing project timelines (from 4.1 to 4.8) and budgets (from 3.9 to 4.5), while notable progress was made parti in leading project team members by defining roles and responsibilities, establishing project engagement protocols, and clarifying project expectations, rising by more than 1 point.

Figure 4.5 – Average rating of research project management



n=15

Despite modest improvements in managing project timelines and budgets across the cohort, participants who successfully secured funding and delivered their in-programme research projects displayed a greater enhancement in both areas than those who did not, as illustrated in Figure 4.6. This suggests that the immersive project experience could potentially enable participants to consolidate their skills in managing budget and time through practice.

Figure 4.6 Average rating of research project management between in-programme grant recipients and non-recipients

Recipients showed **greater improvement** in managing **project budgets** and **timelines** than **non-recipients**

Average rating: 1=Lowest, 5=Highest



Recipients n=8; Non-recipients n=7; year=2025

Designing and delivering a six-month research-to-action project within the Programme provided an effective way for participants to boost their confidence and skills in problem-solving settings.

As previously mentioned, those who received funding demonstrated greater confidence and improved skills in knowledge co-creation, stakeholder engagement, and project management compared to those who did not. Recipients shared insights on how this project delivery experience helped them apply their acquired skills to address emerging challenges and boost their confidence. For example, a participant from South Africa noted feeling more confident when engaging non-academic stakeholders after completing the project:

'Delivering this project has improved my understanding of community engagement processes. It has empowered me to build collaborative relationships that are crucial to any project ideas. This will be vital as I continue to pursue my career as a researcher in the field of climate and health in (and beyond) South Africa.'
(Participant 10, Interdisciplinary, South Africa, project of Identification of water security solutions and climate change adaptation through citizen science and co-creation in low and middle-income countries: case studies from Nigeria, India And South Africa)

Another recipient mentioned that by developing a tailored strategy to address the project's emerging challenges, they successfully divided the tasks efficiently despite a tight timeline:

'This project is very short-term. However, we managed to divide tasks efficiently and were able to achieve the objectives... This project helped us develop short-term

strategies to execute a project successfully. **(Participant 7, Interdisciplinary, Sri Lanka, project of Aligning informal community-led innovation with formal planning for urban climate resilience in the informal settlements of Mumbai)**

Other recipients noted that leading their projects strengthened their skills in a more integrated and holistic manner:

Leading the project has enhanced my ability to design studies, manage timelines, and coordinate interdisciplinary teams effectively. **(Participant 8, Interdisciplinary, India, project of Strengthening community-led innovations for climate resilience through formal planning systems)**

Additionally, recipients reported that the various training activities they received earlier in the Programme have played a vital role in designing and implementing their funded research projects:

The tools and resources learnt such as the Theory of Change, Risk Management Plan, Project Progress Reports, Monthly meetings with Theme Fellows as well as formal and informal engagement with community stakeholders helped greatly. **(Participant 19, Natural Sciences, Nigeria, Project of 'identification of water security solutions and climate change adaptation through citizen science and co-creation in low and middle-income countries: case studies from Nigeria, India and South Africa')**

The training from the Climate Cohort programme has earlier exposed me to the nitty-gritty of designing projects with the stakeholders, stakeholder mapping and handling of issues that may likely arise during design and implementation. This really facilitated a seamless design and implementation of my project, as the participants were eager to see the success of 'their project.' **(Participant 16, Social Sciences, Nigeria, Project of 'strengthening community-led innovations for climate resilience through formal planning systems')**

These hands-on project experiences allowed participants to apply the skills they had acquired in real-world scenarios actively. By designing and executing a research project, participants draw various insights and resources acquired via the training activities, put them into practice, test their techniques, refine their approaches, and gain confidence in their abilities. This immersive approach not only reinforces learning but also enables participants to gain confidence by actively addressing upcoming challenges. Ultimately, this hands-on project experience ensures that they are well-prepared to tackle challenges in their professional roles, making the transition from knowledge acquisition to action-driven research seamless and effective.

Overall, the Programme effectively enabled participants to conduct interdisciplinary research. Participants felt that the Programme effectively enabled them to 'conduct research within an interdisciplinary research team,' achieving impressive average ratings of 4.5 out of 5. This reflects the Programme's positive influence on enhancing their capabilities in interdisciplinary research.

After the Programme, participants evaluated their skills and knowledge concerning interdisciplinary research. As illustrated in Figure 4.7, every category in this domain received high ratings, with 'effective team management' and 'identifying a common research problem'

achieving the highest score of 5. 'Establishing an interdisciplinary research team' received an average rating of 4.8 from all respondents. In contrast, only 'synthesis of two or more disciplines into a single methodology' obtained a slightly lower average rating of 4.4, indicating the ongoing methodological challenges associated with conducting research across various disciplines.

Figure 4.7 – Average rating of conducting interdisciplinary research



n = 15

Section 5 – Crafting the Art of Securing Research Funding

One of the key objectives of the Programme was to enhance participants' skills in writing research proposals and increase their competitiveness in securing research grants. This was achieved through online grant writing workshops, application for a semi-competitive research grant to deliver a 6-month research project, with support from expert research management staff and established researchers in the UK, as well as home institution mentorships. This section provides evidence of the extent to which the Programme has enhanced the selected researchers' skills and experience in grant-personship.

The Programme has enhanced participants' confidence in navigating research funding and writing research proposals, with more than half (53%) of participants winning a semi-competitive research grant for a 6-month research project.

Those participants who won the six-month projects noted that including grant writing training in the Programme was a significant takeaway for them, considered 'invaluable' for designing their projects (Participant 10, Interdisciplinary, South Africa). They also appreciated the research support and mentorships from UK universities, where they gained valuable insights to refine their research proposals and secure these semi-competitive research grants:

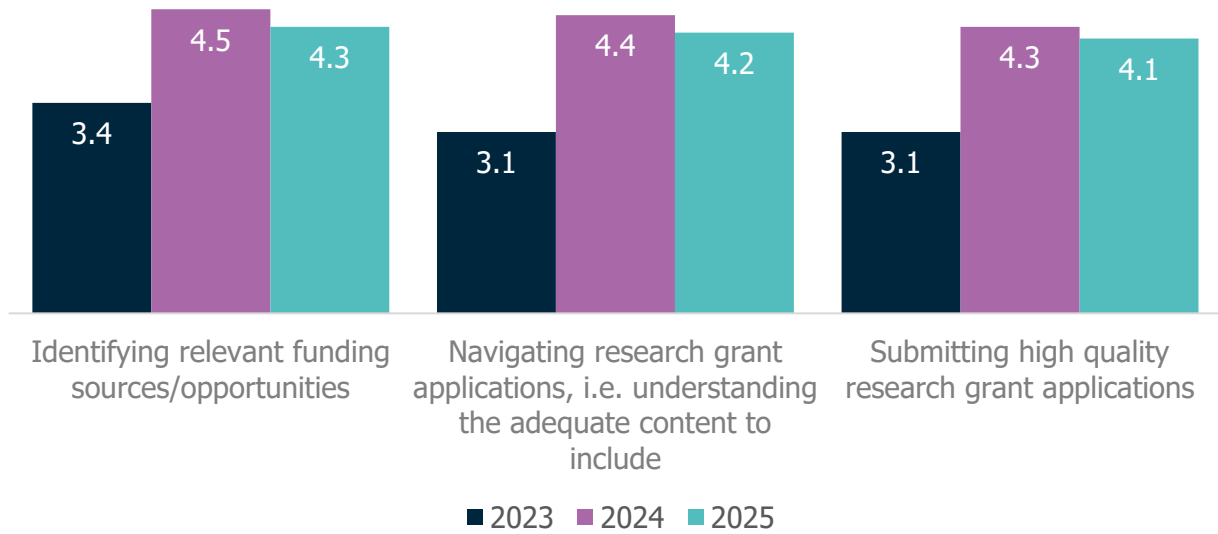
'We were supported by a UK-based academic. We benefited greatly from his comments and guidance. He read our proposals and gave us constructive feedback that shaped our work.' **(Participant 1, Social Sciences, Ghana, project of Strengthening community-led innovations for climate resilience through formal planning systems)**

'My Project Theme Lead and his Assistant were of tremendous support through sharing the U Warwick STS opportunity with us, participation in reviewing the proposals and project progress meetings with feedback.' **(Participant 19, Natural Sciences, Nigeria, project of Identification of water security solutions and climate change adaptation through citizen science and co-creation in low and middle-income countries: case studies from Nigeria, India and South Africa)**

They felt that the Programme enabled them to write grant applications more effectively, with an average score of 4.3 out of 5. Even those who did not secure the six-month grant scored 4.4, demonstrating the value of the workshop and training in enhancing participants' overall skills in grant proposal writing.

By the end of the Programme, participants reported increased confidence in key areas related to research funding and grant applications. As shown in Figure 5.1, ratings improved from 3.4 at baseline to 4.3 at the end of the Programme for 'identifying relevant funding sources and opportunities,' from 3.1 to 4.1 for 'submitting high-quality research grant applications,' and from 3.1 to 4.2 for 'navigating research grant applications,' (ranked from 1 to 5, where 1 is not confident at all and 5 is fully confident).

Figure 5.1 – Average rating of confidence in grant proposal writing



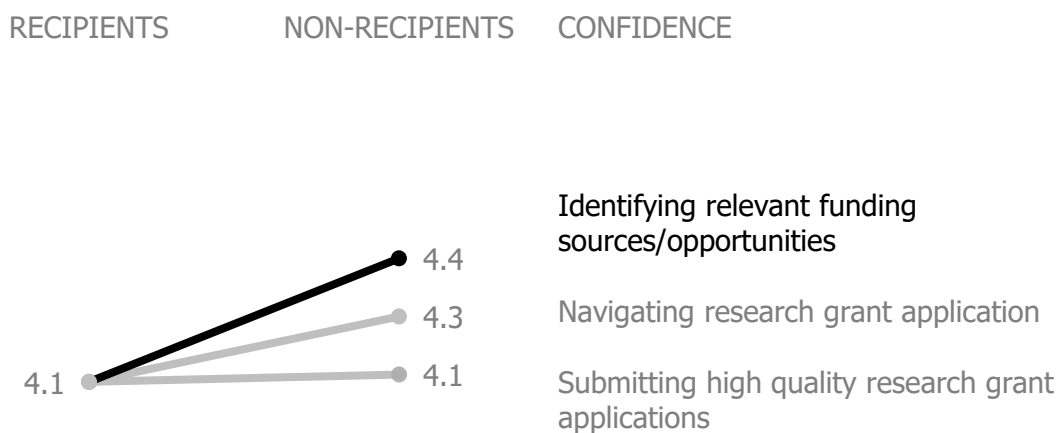
n = 15

However, as shown in Figure 5.2, non-recipients—those who did not receive six-month in-Programme funding—showed slightly greater confidence than recipients, particularly in identifying relevant funding sources and opportunities. This may be because non-recipients engaged in proactive reflection on their unsuccessful applications, noting issues like the misalignment of their research topics with grant objectives (Participant 5, Social Sciences, Pakistan) or coverage areas (Participant 17, Interdisciplinary, Nigeria). Such reflections helped them gain insights and boosted their confidence in better aligning their research proposals with upcoming funding opportunities.

Figure 5.2 – Average rating of confidence in grant proposal writing between recipients and non-recipients

Non-recipients showed **greater confidence** in assessing the **relevance of funding opportunities**

Average rating: 1=Lowest, 5=Highest

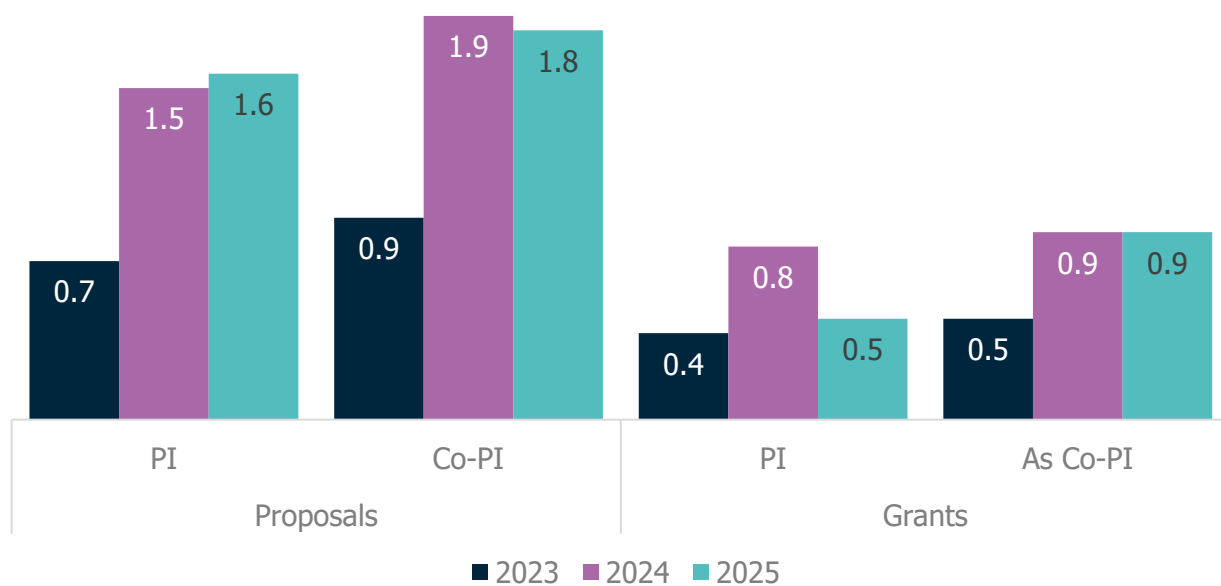


Recipients n=8; Non-recipients n=7; year = 2025

Built upon their enhanced confidence and skills in grant proposal writing, participants showed an increased involvement in developing and winning research proposals as both Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs), likely facilitated by the in-program grant call, as shown in Figure 5.3.

- The average number of proposals in which participants served as PIs rose from 0.7 in the first year to 1.6 in the final year, while those serving as Co-PIs increased from 0.9 to 1.8 over the same period.
- The average number of successful research grant applications across the cohort showed a slight increase over the project period. As PIs, participants saw their successful applications rise from 0.4 to 0.5, while as Co-PIs, the average increased from 0.5 to 0.9.

Figure 5.3 - Average number of proposals developed and won as a PI or Co-PI



n=15

The composition of partnerships within research proposals evolved throughout the Programme.

- The average number of UK universities involved grew from 0.9 to 1.2 by the project's conclusion, meaning every proposal participant has been working on since they started the Programme involves at least 1 UK-based partner university. This increase may be attributed to an eligibility criterion for applying for the in-programme grant call. Participants felt the Programme enabled them to more effectively 'collaborate internationally on research', which was rated highly at 4.5.
- The involvement of national policymakers and other public sector officials increased from 33% at baseline to 67% by the end of the project.
- Engagement with community members/organisations saw substantial growth, rising from 44% to 89%.

While engagement with 'regional/international inter-governmental bodies' and 'international NGOs' dropped from 22% and 11% to 0%. These shifts suggest a reorientation towards local and national partnerships as the project progressed.

Section 6 – Improving Research Visibility and Outputs

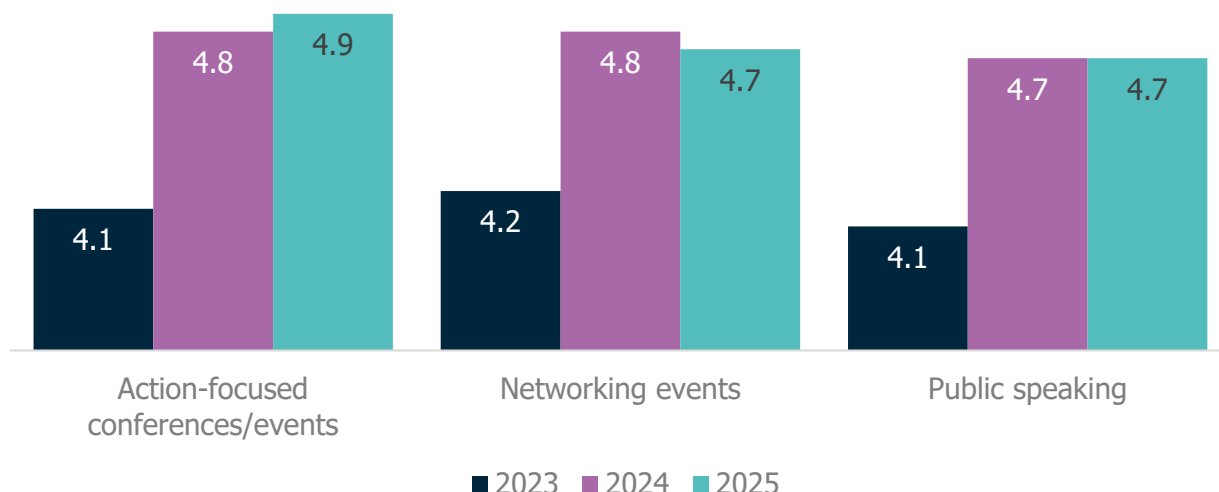
The Programme aimed to boost researchers’ visibility by funding conference attendance, featuring them on the ACU website and newsletter, and connecting them through a global researcher network. This section presents evidence of how effectively the Programme has increased the visibility and engagement of the selected researchers with the broader research community, practitioners, and policymakers in national and international climate change forums, including research, science-policy, and practical events. It also includes additional evidence of their research outputs to illustrate the platforms they used to enhance their visibility.

Participants were asked about their conference attendance, presentations, confidence in these activities, and the extent to which the Climate Cohort Programme enhanced their visibility as researchers.

While the average number of attended conferences decreased from 3.4 at the beginning of the Programme to 2.1 by its conclusion, invitations to present or contribute their research at climate change adaptation and/or mitigation events showed mixed results. International event invitations increased slightly from 1.4 to 1.6, whereas national event invitations declined from 3.1 to 2.2.

Despite fluctuations in event attendance, participants reported increased confidence in engaging with action-focused conferences and events, as well as in networking opportunities and public speaking, with an average rating rising from 4.1 at the baseline to 4.8 in the end, ranked from 1 to 5, where 1 is not confident at all and 5 is fully confident.

Figure 6.1 – Average rating on improving confidence in event participation



n=15

When asked to rank the extent to which the Programme enhanced their visibility as researchers, on a scale from 1 (not enhanced at all) to 5 (fully enhanced), participants gave an average rating of 4.6 across the cohort. Notably, 60% of respondents selected the maximum rating of 5, while the remaining 40% chose 4.

Participants were then invited to elaborate on their responses, offering overwhelmingly positive feedback. The Programme has significantly enhanced participants’ visibility as

researchers by providing opportunities to engage with global networks, collaborate with experts, and showcase their work on international platforms. Many participants reported increased recognition within academic and non-academic circles, facilitated by the Programme's activities and its support for conference participation and project implementation. These experiences not only expanded their professional networks but also led to new research collaborations, grant applications, and invitations to contribute to advisory forums and stakeholder events.

Additionally, the Programme's emphasis on public engagement and exposure, such as features on institutional websites and newsletters, further boosted their visibility. Participants also noted enhanced interaction on social media, reflecting growing interest in their research outputs. Overall, the Programme has been instrumental in elevating researchers' profiles, expanding their professional reach, and strengthening their influence in climate-related research and adaptation efforts:

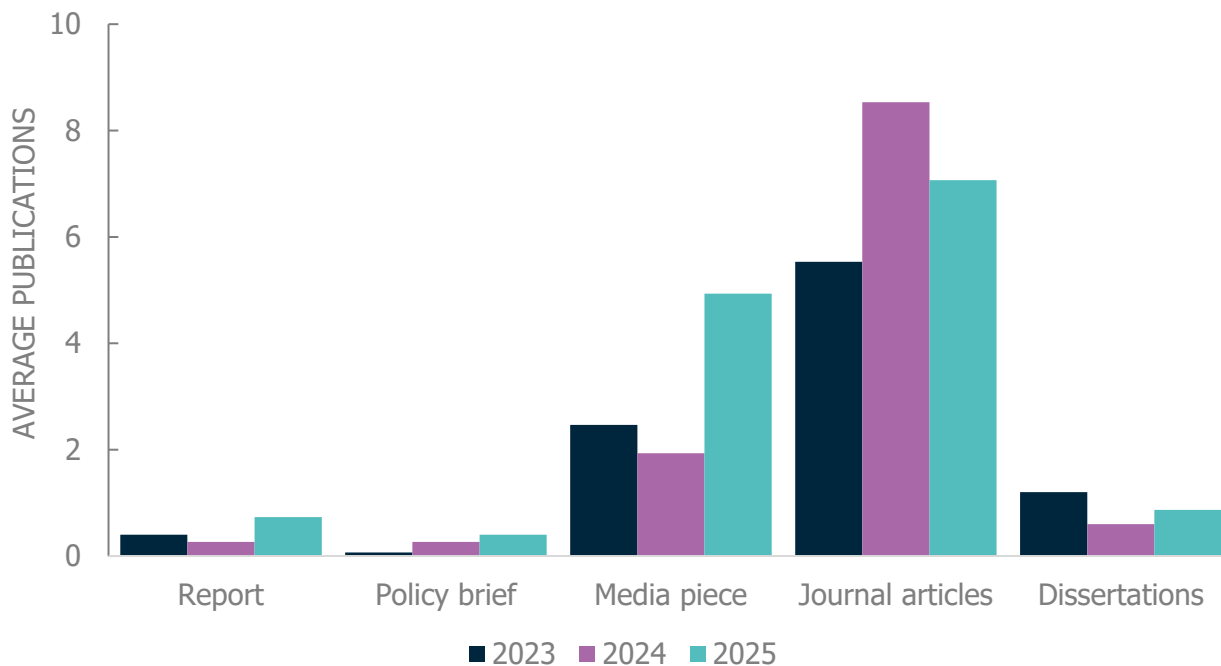
'[The] Climate Cohort Programme has significantly enhanced my visibility as a researcher by connecting me with a global network of experts, facilitating collaborations, and providing a platform to showcase my work on climate resilience and adaptation.' **(Participant 18, Interdisciplinary, India)**

'I have been able to engage with non-academic and academic stakeholders and have been invited to sit on the advisory forums at the local, provincial and national levels for disaster management centres.' **(Participant 4, Interdisciplinary, South Africa)**

'The Programme activities, especially implementing the research project, have allowed me to become active in engaging different stakeholders, especially communities. This has made me more visible to local communities and the local research community as well.' **(Participant 10, Interdisciplinary, South Africa)**

Additionally, the average number of publications across the cohort increased from 1.9 to 2.8 by the end of the Programme, particularly represented by journal articles and media pieces. As illustrated in Figure 6.2, the average number of journal articles increased from 5.5 to 7.1, while media pieces rose from 2.5 to 5.0.

Figure 6.2 – Average Number of Publications



n=15

Among these publications, climate-related pieces experienced a significant rise from an average of 0.2 in 2024 to 2.3 in 2025, showcasing the Programme's positive effect on participants' visibility in climate-focused research. Specifically, the average number of journal articles jumped from 0.3 to 3.6, and media pieces increased from 0.5 to 3.2.

Section 7 – Programme Feedback and Satisfaction

At the end of the Programme, all respondents (100%) reported that the Programme successfully met their learning and development goals. Participants also expressed that they felt adequately supported by the delivery team in achieving these goals.

All aspects of the training Programme were rated highly, reflecting strong participant satisfaction. The two components that received the most frequent maximum rating of 5 were:

- 'Collaborating with peers from other country contexts,' demonstrating the value of international cooperation.
- 'Funded Knowledge Exchange Projects (KEP), delivered between July and November 2023,' (termed research scoping exercises in this report), highlighting the impact of practical, hands-on learning experiences.

These results underline the Programme's effectiveness in fostering collaboration and supporting knowledge exchange across diverse regions.

Researchers were invited to share their overall experience in the Programme, highlighting the most valuable aspects and offering suggestions for improvement. Their reflections captured both the strengths of the Programme and thoughtful recommendations for future enhancements.

The Programme has been widely appreciated by participants for its enriching and transformative experience. Participants valued the opportunity to connect with researchers, policymakers, and practitioners across various regions, enhancing professional networks and fostering new partnerships. 87% mentioned collaboration, and more than half (53%) said that networking was one of the most important aspects of the Programme for them:

'The Climate Cohort Programme was very enriching and empowering for me as a rising academic. It has opened my eyes to see various opportunities for multi-disciplinary and sectoral collaborations geared towards research and interventions that address climate change and sustainability issues in and beyond Africa. The collaboration with other academics from other countries and institutions are the most exciting aspects for me – creating an opportunity to engage with others and learning from their wealth of knowledge while making my own inputs towards the design and execution of our collaborative projects.' **(Participant 10, Interdisciplinary, South Africa)**

Many appreciated the training sessions on grant writing, project management, research design, stakeholder engagement, and communication skills. These sessions contributed significantly to professional development and capacity building. While the third of respondents highlighted training, workshops and learning resources in general, co-creation and grant writing skills were valued most, mentioned by 27% of the respondents each:

'It has been awesome, insightful, eventful and fulfilling experience all the way. Meeting and collaborating with academics from other ACU Universities. My co-production knowledge and skills have been developed as well as my grant writing skills and these appear to be the most valuable aspect for me. The workshop periods were very hectic considering that fellows were involved in their basic jobs of teaching,

I suggest more flexible workshop timing for the next cohort. **(Participant 8, Social Sciences, Nigeria)**

Participants valued learning advanced skills, especially in designing collaborative projects with non-academic stakeholders. These were closely followed by learning about research design and interdisciplinary approach and methods:

The most valuable aspect is that I have learn an advance skill in co-creation and theory of change, which I frequently used in my current and future research activities. **(Participant 6, Formal Science, Malaysia)**

Engaging with experts from diverse fields provided fresh perspectives and innovative approaches to climate resilience and sustainability research. Exposure to high-level meetings, networking sessions, and international conferences, such as United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) events, was highlighted as pivotal for professional growth.

Areas of improvement

- Many suggested extending the programme duration and making Mentorship Programme more structured by establishing regular one-on-one mentorship sessions and ongoing guidance post-programme to ensure sustained support.
- While virtual sessions were effective, third of participants strongly recommended in-person workshops or field visits for enhanced collaboration.
- Given participants' teaching and work commitments, more flexible scheduling would improve engagement.
- Participants suggested more funding opportunities for travel, equipment, and community-based projects, alongside structured guidance on securing research grants.
- Localised case studies and region-specific discussions were suggested to contextualise global strategies effectively.
- Setting up an alumni network to sustain connections and foster future collaborations was highly recommended.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort Programme demonstrates significant achievements in fulfilling its learning and development objectives, fostering international collaboration, and enhancing participants' visibility and research capabilities. All participants reported satisfaction with the Programme's capacity to meet their learning goals, underpinned by strong support from the delivery team. High ratings were particularly evident in collaborative learning experiences and funded project-based learning, reflecting the Programme's commitment to impactful engagement.

The initiative proved instrumental in strengthening professional networks, with participants reporting notable increases in both existing and new connections across academic, civil society, public, and private sectors. Collaborative outcomes were similarly encouraging, with nearly all participants forming new partnerships, predominantly within academic circles, but also extending to civil society and community organisations. Although partnerships with the public and private sectors were comparatively less frequent, they nonetheless signify a growing bridge between research and broader societal engagement.

The development of participants' skills and understanding was a standout outcome, with substantial improvements observed in co-creation processes and stakeholder engagement. These enhancements, alongside heightened confidence in knowledge co-production and grant application capabilities, indicate that the Programme effectively equipped participants with the tools to navigate interdisciplinary and international research landscapes.

Furthermore, the Programme's impact on research outputs was evident, with participants reporting increases in research proposals, project participation, and climate-related publications. Such outcomes underscore the Programme's role in advancing participants' contributions to climate research and policy dialogue.

Areas for improvement, as highlighted by participants, include the need for additional funding for research activities, greater flexibility in scheduling, and more structured mentorship opportunities. Addressing these considerations could further enhance the Programme's effectiveness and support sustained international collaboration.

In conclusion, the Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort Programme has successfully cultivated a community of climate researchers equipped with enhanced skills, deeper connections, and greater visibility. Strengthening areas for improvement would further amplify its impact, reinforcing its role in driving collaborative climate action across the Commonwealth and beyond.

Appendix A – Testimonies

'It was all on point!' — Dr Temitope Sogbanmu

[Dr Temitope Sogbanmu](#), a senior lecturer at University of Lagos, Nigeria, joined the Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort Programme under the research theme of Water Security in a Changing World. Reflecting on her experience, Temitope described the programme as *'all on point really'*, praising its effectiveness meeting her learning and career development goals. She highlighted how the programme enhanced her skills in collaborative efforts across multiple fields within and beyond her ACU project.



'My skills in engaging in inter- and even transdisciplinary research has expanded tremendously. Within my ACU project, I engaged with highly diverse inter- and transdisciplinary teams and was able to coordinate the research of all and integrate them. I have and currently collaborate internationally especially following my participation in this programme.'

What Temitope enjoyed most was the networking engagement across disciplines and countries. Through these engagements, she built connections, activated collaborations and fostered long-term partnerships. The well-designed structure of the programme provided rich opportunities for her to meet and interact with fellow colleagues and mentors, forming connections and developing collaboration opportunities.

'The almost two (2) years engagement in this programme with fellows, theme (water security in a changing world) fellows and Lead has allowed a lot of networking, collaboration and engagements through monthly meetings (Theme fellows and Lead), participation in the University of Warwick Sustainability Training School (STS) where I formed connections with some ECRs for a project.'

In 2024, Temitope and her collaborators won a £40k in-programme research grant to [investigate climate change-related water vulnerabilities, existing adaptation strategies, and co-created solutions and adaptation plans in three low and middle-income countries \(i.e. Nigeria, India and South Africa\)](#). This opportunity allowed her to apply the skills she acquired by executing a project from beginning to end.

'The tools and resources learnt such as the Theory of Change, Risk Management Plan, Project Progress Reports, Monthly meetings with Theme Fellows as well as formal and informal engagement with community stakeholders helped greatly.'

The active research collaboration with her UK theme lead through this project led to new opportunities between the University of Lagos and University of Warwick. In 2025, Temitope developed a new research collaboration with her UK colleagues under the University of Warwick Partnership Research Fund, marking the beginning of a long-term research partnership between the two institutions.



Dr Temitope Sogbanmu alongside collaborating fellows and theme leads at the 2024 Early Career Researcher Sustainability Training School at the University of Warwick

'I have a Research Collaboration Agreement between University of Warwick and University of Lagos through the University of Warwick Partnership Research Fund with Dr Feng Mao and Dr Vangelis Pitidis.'

Participation in the programme has also greatly enhanced Temitope's visibility as a researcher. She has been invited to speak at local and international events and sessions in high-profile conferences, including the Twelfth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12) convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and hosted by the Arab Republic of Egypt in Cairo, to explore solutions and innovations to transform cities and communities for a sustainable urban future. Recently, she co-chaired a session titled '[Navigating the Science-Policy-Society Interface for Evidence-Informed Environmental Management](#)' at the Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry (SETAC) 9th World Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa in September this year (2025).

'Simple, fun, and effective trainings' — Dr Praveen Kumar

Dr Praveen Kumar is an Assistant Professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, India. His interdisciplinary research, spanning human geography and landscape ecology, explores the dynamics and interrelationships between social and ecological systems. Praveen joined the Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort Programme under the research theme of 'Urban Adaptation and Resilience'. Reflecting on what he enjoyed most about participating in the training, Praveen described the sessions as 'simple, fun, and effective' – simple because complex concepts were broken down into clear, actionable insights; fun because of the highly interactive design, diverse activities, and cross-cultural exchanges that kept participants engaged; and effective because each session offered practical tools and frameworks that could be directly applied to his research and teaching. These qualities, he noted, made the programme both engaging and impactful for his learning.



Praveen found the programme enjoyable and immensely valuable for connecting with global experts and collaborating across various disciplines on urban resilience and adaptation issues. More importantly, the programme's emphasis on co-creating knowledge with non-academic stakeholders inspired him to translate research into practice. From 2023 to 2025, Praveen actively led and participated in diverse knowledge co-creation activities with non-academic stakeholders, including workshops on urban climate resilience in Mumbai's informal settlements, Google Earth Engine sessions with global partners, and dialogues on urban vulnerability, land governance, and integrating climate change education and sustainability. These engagements, spanning collaborations with institutions in India and internationally, strengthened his capacity to translate research into practical applications, engage effectively with non-academic stakeholders and foster community-driven climate solutions, and build collaborative approaches for impactful adaptation initiatives. They also created opportunities to share his work on global platforms, including presentations at the EcoSummit 2024 Conference in China and the Asia Oceania Geosciences Society (AOGS) 2025 Conference in Singapore.



Dr Praveen Kumar presenting at the EcoSummit 2024 in Zhengzhou, China

'The programme emphasised the importance of working with non-academic stakeholders, which strengthened my ability to align community-led initiatives with formal governance..., [and] guided me in fostering stronger collaborations with local governments and communities for climate adaptation.'

With the support of his UK theme lead and adviser based at SOAS, Praveen and his collaborators secured a £38k in-programme research grant to [investigate how informal settlement communities cope with environmental change and hazards in rapidly urbanising Mumbai](#). Winning and delivering this project allowed him to refine his skills in writing competitive research proposals, managing interdisciplinary teams, and translating research findings into practical, real-world solutions and actionable policy recommendations.

'Overall, this experience has reinforced my expertise in climate resilience research, interdisciplinary collaboration, and stakeholder engagement, positioning me for future academic and applied research opportunities.'



Dr Praveen Kumar at a research dissemination workshop with a variety of academic and non-academic stakeholders in May 2025

'It has been an enriching and transformative experience.' — Dr Ephias Mugari

Dr Ephias Mugari, an early career researcher based in South Africa, joined the Commonwealth Futures Climate Research Cohort (2022–25) under the research theme of Adapting to Flooding and Coastal Change. At the time, he was a postdoctoral fellow contributing to the 4.5-year international [SAF-ADAPT](#) project (South Africa/Flanders Climate Adaptation Research and Training Partnership).



Participation in the programme has significantly boosted his visibility as an early career transdisciplinary researcher in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. Supported by the ACU Conference Attendance Grant, Ephias attended the inaugural Africa Climate Summit (ACS) in 2023, followed by the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) where he felt honoured to be [part of the ACU delegation at COP28 in Dubai](#) and a discussant in a panel discussion on navigating equitable North-South university collaborations. He described this international exposure as the most enjoyable part of the programme.



Dr Ephias Mugari at COP28 Dubai, participating in a panel discussion on navigating equitable North-South university collaborations

With his increased visibility, Ephias has now been invited to sit on the disaster management advisory forums at the local, provincial, and national levels in South Africa.

Ephias described his experience as *'enriching and transformative'*, especially in building capacity for genuine stakeholder engagement, networking across diverse fields and regions, and exchanging knowledge of climate resilience practices. One major highlight was learning and applying knowledge co-creation frameworks, which allowed him to engage more effectively with non-academic stakeholders. His research became more grounded in real-world problems, ensuring community-driven solutions in climate adaptation and disaster risk strategies.

'It enhanced my ability to engage in co-creation and co-production with non-academic stakeholders by providing valuable frameworks and collaborative approaches. It has strengthened my capacity to integrate local knowledge with scientific research, ensuring that climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies are practical and community-driven.'

The programme has also opened doors to new collaborations and partnerships to tackle climate change risk management and adaptation strategies. Through the ACU Knowledge Exchange Project, Ephias connected with other postdoctoral research fellows working in Community Engagement and Indigenous Knowledge Systems and partnered with the District Disaster Management Centre in South Africa. They co-organised and conducted workshops in flood-prone communities to identify current research needs and policy and practice gaps.

'[The programme] has reinforced partnerships with institutions focused on climate risk management and evidence-based policy development, like the Disaster Management Centre at the local, provincial, and national levels. These connections have been valuable in integrating DRR into education and building resilience in communities.'

Overall, the programme equipped Ephias with the tools and networks to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application, laying the foundation for sustainable resilience initiatives across Southern Africa.

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