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Researchers from Northumbria join £200m UKRI research hubs tackling world's toughest challenges

Northumbria University is delighted to be working with UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), colleagues around the world, and global organisations on interdisciplinary research into key global challenges.

UKRI is pioneering an ambitious new approach to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges through a £200M investment across 12 global research Hubs.

Over the next five years, the 12 interdisciplinary Hubs will work across 85 countries with governments, international agencies, partners and NGOs on the ground in developing countries and around the globe, to develop creative and sustainable solutions which help make the world, and the UK, safer, healthier and more prosperous.

Northumbria's Centre for International Development will play a key role in the UKRI GCRF Living Deltas Hub, with Professor Matt Baillie Smith and Dr Oliver Hensengerth leading the University's contribution.

Professor Baillie Smith, an expert on volunteering, activism and civil society and Director of Northumbria's Centre for International Development, said: "Northumbria University, through its Centre for International Development, is excited to participate in the GCRF Hub Living Deltas. Dr Oliver Hensengerth has a long track record in studying Mekong river governance and has led Newton Fund projects on Mekong Delta flooding.

"He is currently a co-investigator in a Southampton-led Newton NERC project studying the sustainability of food production in the Mekong Delta. We are looking forward to working with colleagues in the global South, and communities and organisations across the three deltas, to generate new understanding of the ways deltas are changing and what can be done to protect them."

Professor David Gleeson, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) added: "This participation by NU staff indicates the strength of our international development research team in addressing the challenges issued by the Global Challenge Research Fund."

UKRI GCRF Living Deltas Hub

River deltas comprise just one per cent of global landscapes yet support over half a billion people. Deltas are vital social-ecological systems and global food-baskets, but the landscapes and the livelihoods of those who rely on them are under threat from human exploitation, environmental degradation and climate change.

Focusing on three deltas in Asia, this Hub will operate on a model of equitable partnership with the delta-dwellers and the research community in

Vietnam, Bangladesh and India, working together with UK and global partners to develop new knowledge and policies. The aim is to safeguard delta futures through more resilient communities and sustainable development.

“The urgent need for the Hub is clear,” says Dr Andy Large, Reader in River Science at Newcastle University and academic lead for the new Living Deltas Hub. “As human impacts increase, the necessity of sustainable development strategies underpinned by locally-rooted knowledge becomes ever greater.”

Even median levels of sea level rise predicted by the IPCC could displace between three and 13 million people in Bangladesh by 2100. According to Professor Mashfiqu Salehin of BUET in Dhaka, “inundation and saline intrusion would have serious consequences for the most vulnerable people in the region.”

“Reduced coastal resilience because of mangrove loss in the Red River delta has had dramatic cultural effects on the lives of local communities, especially women and girls” said Dr Hue Le of Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

According to Dr Kien van Nguyen of An Giang University, Vietnam, “In the past, the Mekong delta was considered a beautiful place to live, but now all that has changed as a result of loss of heritage, environmental degradation and the growing threat of climate change.”

The GCRF Living Deltas Hub will work with delta-dwellers and policymakers to develop solutions that can help better realise the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in delta-specific contexts. “The Hub is novel as no other existing or previous international delta initiative has specifically addressed the SDGs by co-creating new natural-cultural heritage understandings of deltas”, said Dr Large. “By addressing the crucial challenges of South and SE Asian delta degradation early in the lifespan of the SDGs, the aim is to contribute to the development of SDG monitoring and planning, globally and regionally, as well as in country contexts.”

The UKRI GCRF Hubs at a glance:

- 12 Hubs with up to £20 Million each over the next five years
- Over 85 countries are engaged across the 12 Hubs

- 550 researchers are involved with a further 400 partner organisations
- Each Hub addresses multiple SDGs, with 16 SDGs addressed in total

The 12 hubs are funded through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) - which is a key component in delivering the UK AID strategy and puts UK-led research at the heart of efforts to tackle the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Northumbria's Centre for International Development

Northumbria's [Centre for International Development](#) is a dynamic group, bringing together academics, practitioners and students to promote research, consultancy, teaching, training and public engagement on issues of global poverty and inequality, the communities and individuals who experience this, and the policies, practices and approaches that seek to address it. The centre's specialist areas of focus include Governance, environmental resources and sustainability, Volunteering, activism and civil society, and Participatory design and digital civics. For more information about Northumbria's Centre for International Development, click [here](#).

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