

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE CAMBRIDGE-AFRICA ALBORADA RESEARCH FUND

(2016-2021)



“Like your children, you shouldn't really have favourite research students or projects, but this was a very moving project to be involved in”

Key Findings

The Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund has had a significant impact on research across Africa by providing vital funding and support. Since its inception, the fund has successfully catalysed further investment and facilitated numerous high-quality research projects. The following infographic highlights key statistics demonstrating the fund's success and remarkable return on investment for awards made between 2016-21.



9
joint Cambridge-Africa workshops were held

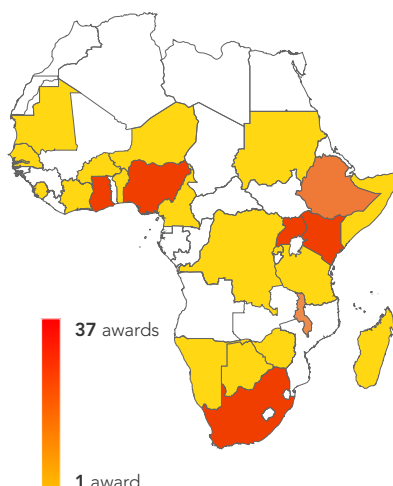


Every **£1 invested** resulted in **£26 of further funding**



ALBORADA awards by country 2016-2021

37	Ghana	2	Namibia
32	Uganda	2	Somalia
27	Kenya	2	Zimbabwe
27	Nigeria	2	Rwanda
20	South Africa	1	Burkina Faso
13	Ethiopia	1	Botswana
6	Malawi	1	Comoros
3	Benin	1	Ivory Coast
3	DRC	1	Madagascar
3	Senegal	1	Mauritania
3	Tanzania	1	Niger
2	Cameroon	1	Sierra Leone
2	Gambia	1	Sudan



41% of respondents published research



40% of respondents had publications currently in review

1. Rationale

The Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund aims to catalyse new research collaborations and strengthen existing relationships between Cambridge and Africa. The Fund makes awards to pairs of Principal Investigators (PIs), one from an African University or Research Institute and one from Cambridge to undertake collaborative research. Applicants can be from any discipline. The second phase of the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund began in 2016 after the Cambridge-Africa Programme received a generous gift of £4 million from The ALBORADA Trust. To date, 332 awards have been made, to enable Cambridge researchers to engage with African colleagues from 35 African countries.

According to the terms and conditions of the award, awardees are given 45 days to complete a final report following the closing date of the award. This report allows the Cambridge-Africa team to evaluate the success of the project and often we will feature recently completed projects on our website in blog posts. However, the information in the final report only covers immediate outcomes. In order to evaluate the longer-term impact of the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund, awardees were approached in November 2023 to complete a questionnaire to capture data on the outcomes of the research from the years following completion of their grant.

Awardees from 2016 to 2021 with grants were contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire providing further information on their award since its completion. This primarily focused on quantitative outcomes, such as number of publications and further grants received with and without their collaborator. However, other aspects considered were whether the award helped expand their research networks and if they had been involved in dissemination of research, whether this was to the public or to policymakers. This report documents the findings of this survey.

2. Response rate

There were 195 awards made between 2016 and 2021. Of the 282 awardees contacted, 101 (36%) responded. Seventeen of these responses were from co-principal investigators (PIs), i.e. both PIs of a single award, so the responses represented 84 (43%) of the 195 projects completed in the period. 40% of responses were received from the Cambridge PI and 60% from the African PI. A range of countries were represented including Universities/Research Institutes in South Africa (10%), Ghana (10%), Kenya (10%), Uganda (9%), Nigeria (7%), Malawi (5%), Ethiopia (3%), with the remainder from Senegal, Rwanda, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Botswana.

There were some potential biases in response. For example, some respondents had multiple awards between 2016 and 2021, however they only responded to the questionnaire with outcomes of their most recent project. There was some loss to follow up as the awardees based at Cambridge only provided their University of Cambridge email address, it was not possible to contact individuals if they were no longer at the university.

The number of responses varied by year of award. There were most responses from PIs of awards made in 2020 due an additional round of funding in this year 2020 to enable research relating to COVID-19 challenges. Fewer responses were received from 2021 awardees as many projects are still ongoing and fewer responses were received from 2016 and 2017 awardees who completed their projects the longest time ago.

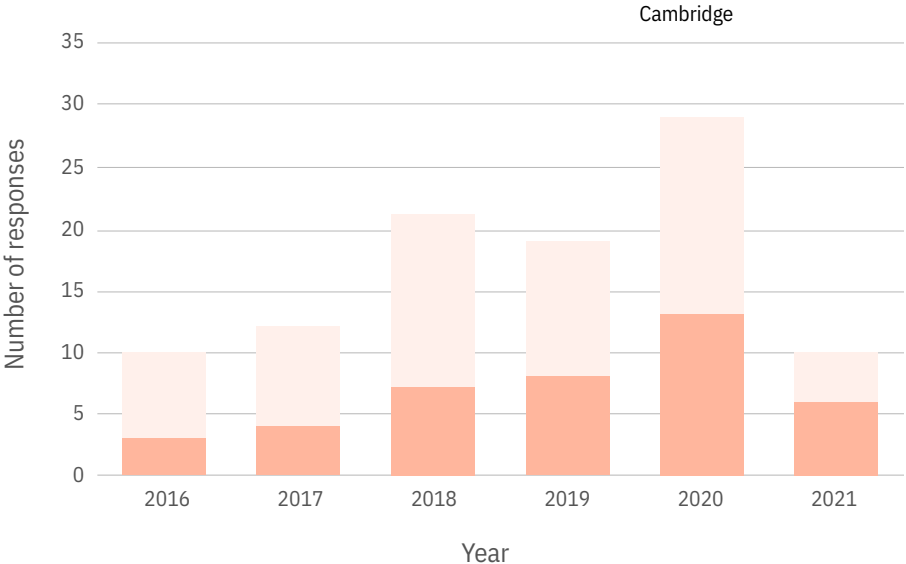


Figure 1: Number of responses by year of award by location of the respondent.

3. Catalysing further research activity

52 of the 101 respondents received further grants, either only with their collaborator (17/52), only separately but on a related topic (21/52), or both collaborative and independently (14/52). The values of the follow-on grants were provided by 36/52 (69%). For these 36 awards, a total of £32,218,792 of further funding was awarded either collaboratively for research involved both PIs (£14,991,709) or involving one of the PIs (£17,227,084). Examples of types of funding included: Government schemes (e.g. MRC, UKRI, NIH), Philanthropic Funding (e.g. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Early Career Fellowships (e.g. Royal Society and the Wellcome Trust), and 9 individuals specifically referencing the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

a. Breakdown across years

Due to the number of awards provided, the highest annual value of follow-on grants was from awards made in 2020. However, the proportion of funds returned per project was higher in 2017 as a total of £7,186,702 additional funding was achieved despite only 12 responses being from that year of the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund awards. £9,868,465 of further funding arose from the 2020 awards from 29 projects. There was little return from those awarded in 2021. This is likely to be due to researchers still being in the process of applying for further grants, since their project closed recently.

Table 1: Value of collaborative and independent grants made through follow-on grant by year of award.

Year	Responses	Collaborative	Independent	Total
2016	10	£914,043	£1,803,500	£2,717,543
2017	12	£3,560,137	£3,626,565	£7,186,702
2018	21	£2,504,083	£1,607,000	£4,111,083
2019	19	£3,078,000	£4,536,000	£7,614,000
2020	29	£4,760,446	£5,108,019	£9,868,465
2021	10	£175,000	£546,000	£721,000

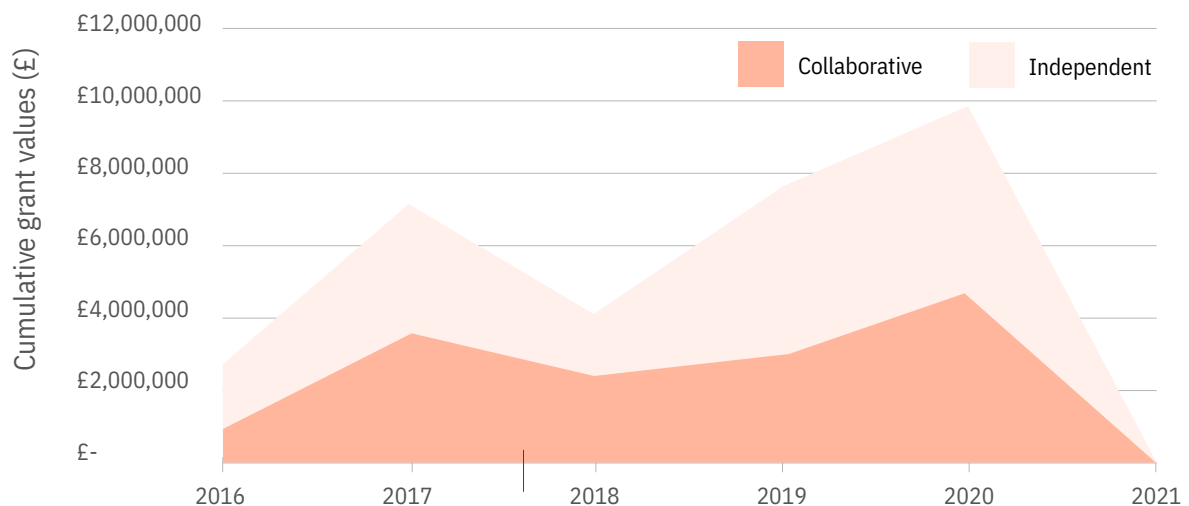


Figure 2: Graph representing the total value of follow-on grants received per year.

The overall space in the graph shows the total value with blue showing those made in collaboration and green representing awards made independent of their collaborator.

b. Breakdown between Cambridge and African PIs

The distribution of collaborative and independent grants varied between the Cambridge and African PIs, with 37% received by the Cambridge PIs and 63% by the African PI. Of the £14,991,709 from collaborative follow-on grants, 72% were awarded to the Cambridge PI, with 28% being awarded to the African PI. Of the £17,227,084 of grants awarded independently of the collaborator, 7% were awarded to the Cambridge PI, while the remaining 93% were awarded to the African PI.

A potential reason for the low rate of independent grants awarded to the Cambridge PIs is that as they are often approached by an African PI to initiate a collaboration, their focus of their research in Cambridge may not coincide with the grant. This was explained by one respondent from Cambridge that said, “Owing to the nature of the research, I would not consider it ethical to ask for funding that did not directly include the original collaborator or his team”.

Table 2: Comparison of total value of follow-on grants received by location of PI, stratified by collaborative and independent grant. Bottom section summarises these values based on whether the PI was based in Cambridge or a country on the African continent.

Country	Collaborative	Independent	Total
Benin	-	£3,786,000	£ 3,786,000
Botswana	-	-	-
Burkina Faso	-	-	-
Cambridge/UK	£10,747,748	£1,134,000	£ 11,881,748
Cameroon	£111,700	£150,000	£ 261,700
Ethiopia	£3,000,000	£350,000	£ 3,350,000
Ghana	£546,511	£6,168,018	£ 6,714,529
Kenya	£224,750	£3,141,526	£3,366,276
Malawi	-	£21,000	£21,000
Nigeria	£61,000	£335,540	£396,540
Rwanda	-	-	-
Senegal	-	-	-
South Africa	-	£563,000	£563,000
Uganda	£300,000	£1,578,000	£1,878,000
Total	£32,218,793		
Overall			
Cambridge/UK	£10,747,748	£1,134,000	£11,881,748
Total across Africa	£4,243,961	£16,093,084	£20,337,045
Total			£32,218,793

c. Return on Investment

The total of Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund awarded across all 84 projects that responded to the questionnaire was £1,220,733. The total amount of funding received as a result of the subsequent awards was £32,218,793. This represents a return of investment of 26:1.

For collaborative follow-on grants, £14,991,709 was awarded to PIs, with the lowest value of additional funding being £11,800 and the highest being £3,120,676. Meanwhile, for the grants independent from the collaboration, a total of £17,227,084 was awarded, ranging from £3,000 to £4,478,019. Across these 34 projects that specified the value of the awards, 11 received funding only collaboratively, 16 received the funding only independently, and 7 received both collaboratively and independently. If none of the projects funded between 2016-21 that either did not respond to the questionnaire or did not specify the amount received actually received no further grants, there would have been a return in investment of 12:1. This figure represents the minimum return in investment.

We also provide an additional figure which excludes projects that received further funding but did not specify the value. This is because in the above figure of 26:1, these projects will be counted as zero return, when the value is unknown. Therefore, by looking at only the 34 projects with a known financial outcome, and the 36 projects that were unsuccessful in receiving funding, there was a £32,218,793 return from an investment of £1,044,235 over 70 projects. This represents in a return of investment of 31:1

4. Other outcomes

a. Publications

Of the 101 responses, 41% of awardees were successful at publishing their research in a peer-reviewed journal with a total of 49 publications captured. 40% were still in the process of preparing a manuscript or having their publication reviewed by a journal. It is important to consider that these figures may not represent the nature of the project, as many focused on training and workshops which would not result in a publication. In some cases, the research has also contributed to book chapters, as well as conference abstracts which are publicly accessible.

b. Expansion of network

93% of awardees claimed that the award was helpful in expanding their research network. as the respondents noted that many of the grants gained independently of the collaborator included researchers met through their collaborator or while on their visits to Cambridge or on the African continent.

c. Additional factors

Other notable outcomes from this research include the dissemination of results to the public or to policymakers, integration of research into national policy, capacity building opportunities at local institutes, and production of physical products (such as enzymes for later use). Additionally, 18/84 projects included facilitating workshops, such as for research methodology or to engage with specific stakeholders.

5. Overall impression

Awardees were asked to comment on their overall impression of the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund. Of these, 89 responded with "Excellent", while 10 responded with "Good". Although there was one response for "Poor" and one for "Very Poor", the feedback from these respondents was very positive, so there may have been an error in selecting the rating category.

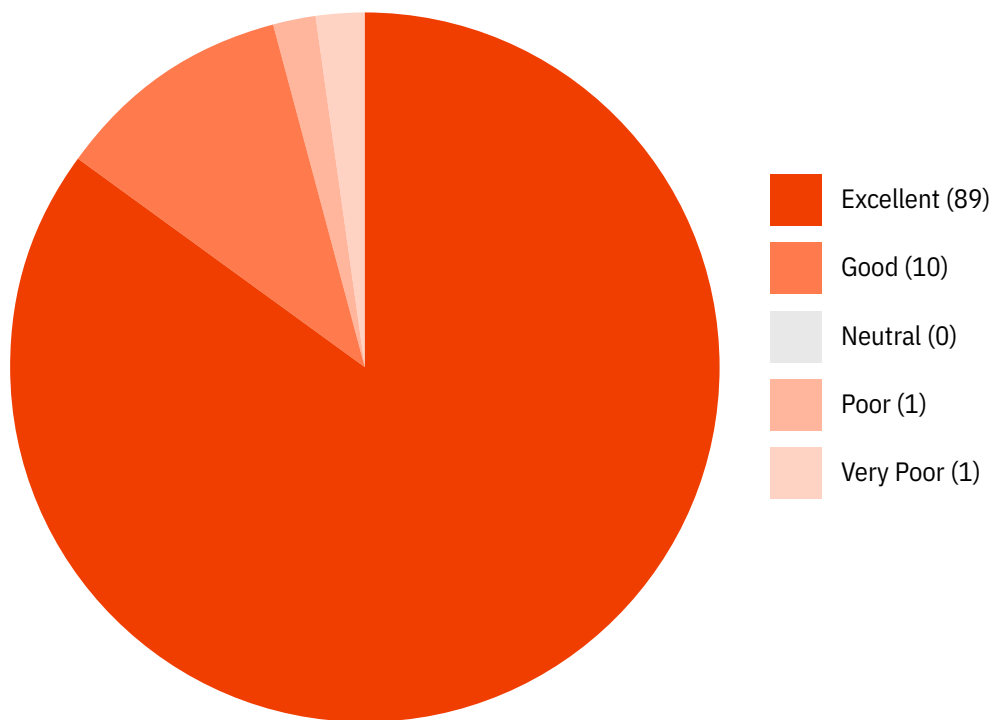


Figure 3: Pie chart representing overall impression of the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund. Excellent (89), Good (10), Neutral (0), Poor (1) and Very Poor (1).

a. Constructive criticism

Increasing value of award

Almost all the criticism towards the award was the value given. Since 2016, inflation has increased the cost of various factors, such as accommodation.

The funding amounts are a bit small, especially with the dramatic increase in accommodation costs in Cambridge, it is now quite difficult to host visitors for a meaningful period"

Funds toward publishing

Several awardees suggested providing additional funds towards publishing. However, publication costs are not considered an eligible cost in the award terms and conditions.

Timing of grant application

A couple of awardees commented on the timeline of the grant and the application. As the award is open between June and September, this is often a busy period for researchers, either due to individuals taking annual leave or due to increased field work.

"My only critique is that meetings about the award, including public presentations of results, are usually scheduled in the Summer when many UTOs are in the field (in Africa!)"

b. Positive feedback

Flexible and straightforward administration

Many awardees were pleased with the flexibility of this award, stating that it could accommodate to changing situations and provide support, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the administration for the award was not onerous and low pressured compared to other funding bodies, giving researchers more time for research.

"Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund is very supportive and flexible in case of any unforeseen problems"

Opportunities for collaboration

Several researchers were pleased with the structure and aims of the award, claiming that it is one of the few opportunities to support research collaborations, whether this involved equal leadership on a project or a larger focus on training the African collaborator and their colleagues. Several Cambridge PIs said that the award was the first collaboration they had with African researchers and has resulted in several further collaborations.

"This is one of the best grants that promotes North-South collaborations"

"Working with scholars in Africa has been the highlight of my career. It is so rewarding on so many different levels and I have been very fortunate to meet so many bright, engaging, colleagues across the continent"

Supports capacity building

There were some comments about how the award had made a great contribution to capacity building at the institution, whether this was through funding of equipment that could be used following the project, or by training of local researchers and students in new techniques. One person suggested that this should be factored in during selection of awardees, as provision of equipment can have a lasting impact for the institute and further research projects.

"The equipment component of the funding has helped improve the capacity in my department both for staff and students"

Supports career progression for PIs, researchers, and students

A few awardees commented on how the award supported career progression for them and their colleagues or students. This included the provision of funds to support fieldwork for students' degree projects, both for the African and Cambridge PIs. One person commented on how the award contributed to supporting the establishment of their research institute. Comments from the first two years included researchers that were part of the Cambridge-Africa Partnership for Research Excellence (CAPREx) initiative. Many of these researchers went into management roles within the University of Ghana and Makerere University.

"The success of this grant was part of my driving force to establish the African Centre of Excellence for Water and Environmental Research (ACEWATER)"

6. Conclusion

Continued engagement with Cambridge-Africa is high, with over a third of awardees from this period responding to the questionnaire, covering around 60% of projects in this timeframe. Overall experience with the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund was positive.

Based on this survey, the Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund has been successful in establishing lasting and impactful collaboration in research. In addition to an impressive return on investment of between 12:1 and 31:1, the awards have also been particularly helpful in strengthening career prospects and research networks.

