CO-DESIGN IN CLIMATE CHANGE & HEALTH RESEARCH

Co-design involves everyone working together from conceptualisation to design, through implementation to dissemination and communication of research findings.

As part of research examining gender norms and HIV/AIDS vulnerability, women gather to discuss these issues using participatory methodologies in the village of Bilibiza, Mozambique. Photo: Louis Leeson/LSHTM

Key messages

- Research projects need to be funded for longer periods to build and maintain relationships between researchers and stakeholders in order to develop meaningful evidence for policy
- Co-design can be locally led; funders can review need for travel, with consideration of the social and environmental costs and benefits from balancing travel and remote work
- Accept critiquing approaches in proposals
- Encourage proposals where objectives are defined by local communities
- Revise measures of success for research projects that include communities
- Provide funding mechanisms and build pathways for the translation of successful research into practice

- Co-design can be an essential condition of funding
- Co-design requires proper investment in terms of time, funding and in people
- Consider compensating communities for their time spent co-designing
- Fund projects with potential to scale up through new partnerships
- Use co-design to provide inroads to adaptation and mitigation actions in real world contexts

In climate, environment, and health adaptation research, co-design is essential to ensure that policies and interventions are feasible and acceptable. This policy brief summarises collaborative activities and lessons learned from Climate, Environment, and Health (CEH) projects funded by the Belmont Forum. The featured projects focus on worker's health, infectious disease control and early warning, nutrition, maternal health, and local community collaborations. Activities for co-design encompass a range of activities and should begin with the mapping of local stakeholders.

METHODS OF CO-DESIGN

Determining co-design needs and activities

Manage expectations and identify mutually agreeable needs and outcomes through prioritisation/ranking exercises.

Engaging with stakeholders

Organise workshops, discussions, and focus groups to introduce ideas, hear different perspectives and define priorities.

Building a shared vision

Listen and learn from local solutions. Provide a risk-free space for ideas to come forward.

Supporting local talent and ownership

Hire and train locals as interviewers, data collectors to expand their professional networks.

Co-design activities in Climate, Environment and Health (CEH) projects funded by the Belmont Forum

CCCEHN: Community collective action to respond to climate change influencing the environment health nexus

Exploring how volunteer-led, local groups organise to respond to climate change and health impacts.

Co-design activities
- Participatory development exercises
- Making YouTube video interviews with local environmental groups

CHAMNHA: Climate, heat, maternal and neonatal health in Africa

Addressing key knowledge gaps on impacts of heat on mothers and new-borns in sub-Saharan Africa.
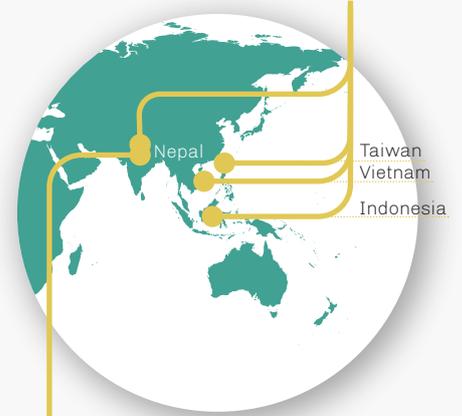
Co-design activities
- Expert workshops
- Stakeholder meetings / discussions
- Co-development of behavioural interventions

AWARD APR: Addressing Extreme Weather-Related Diarrheal Disease Risks in the Asia and Pacific Region

Mapping location-specific diarrheal disease risks with regional and local stakeholders.

Co-design activities
- Stakeholder mapping
- Training and workshops

Alaska · Trinidad & Tobago · Nicaragua · Brazil · Burkina Faso · Côte d'Ivoire · Kenya · Nepal · Taiwan · Vietnam · Indonesia

PREP: Prevention, Resilience, Efficiency, and Protection for agricultural workers in changing environments

Implementing heat interventions among sugarcane workers in Nicaragua.

Co-design activities
- Rest, Shade and Hydration intervention with agricultural industries to improve work practices

S&CC: Integrated risk mapping and targeted snail control to support schistosomiasis elimination under future climate change

Examining how climate change and land use change affect snail-borne schistosomiasis distribution.

Co-design activities
- Collaborative activities on snail tracking and parasite identification

Micro-Poll: Pollination of Nepal's Micronutrient-Rich Crops in a Changing Climate

Identifying which crops provide the most micronutrients and which insects pollinate them.

Co-design activities
- Pollinator awareness program
- Stakeholder meetings at national and local levels
- Employment of local communities

Conditions that favour collective actions between researchers and communities

- Engaging people in the early stages of project lifecycle
- Mapping and identifying key stakeholders including local groups
- Using informal connections to build relations and get buy-in (trust)
- Listening to people's needs
- Building on the local knowledge and solutions
- Remote/ virtual support to local partners
- Acknowledging and respecting diverse skills and knowledge

Challenges

- Lack of travel for fieldwork due to COVID-19 restrictions. Project staff missed out on immersion in the location and face-to-face interaction (however, this was also a benefit)
- Unrealistic expectations of project activities by local communities, particularly in terms of the interventions/responses that can be achieved by the project
- Be mindful of physical conditions (extreme heat) and other demands on participants when planning meetings

Lessons learned from the Climate, Environment and Health (CEH) projects

- Co-creating with communities builds a network of local actors and champions. Co-design processes stimulated people in the villages to do more work for themselves
- Building trust takes time. Both informal and personal relationships are as important as formal relationships
- Using technology (smartphone apps) helps engage with communities and overcome language barriers
- Utilising creative working methodologies (technology, remote working) provides alternatives to physical implementation approaches
- Remote working during COVID-19 restrictions put local champions in the lead and showed benefits of standing back
- Integrating early career researchers in implementation was successful for the projects
- Creating risk-free spaces encourages communities to experiment and innovate
- Maintaining realistic expectations about project outcomes helps implementation – don't raise expectations
- Involving practitioners in research produces acceptable, replicable, and effective evidence-based practices

References

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