



BLOG, PRAXIS, REFLECTIONS /// TUESDAY 30 JUNE 2020

Decarbonising Research

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F) supports partnerships between UK and ODA country researchers to produce cutting-edge, innovative research that addresses urgent issues and strengthens institutional capacity in the Global South. A vital component to such efforts is the creation and maintenance of strong and enduring networks. But doing so comes at a cost – the carbon emissions resulting from short and long-haul travel are a major contributor to climate change – and the costs of environmental breakdown impact most heavily on those least able to bear them. In the belief that GCRF funded research has massive potential to address global problems and seek equitable solutions, Changing the Story, in collaboration with Praxis (University of Leeds) and Global Research Network on Parliaments and People (SOAS), invited our respective networks and fellow GCRF Network+ projects to an online webinar to examine our work, partnerships and travel practices and consider the changes that researchers, Universities and the UK Research Councils must make in order to address rather than exacerbate runaway climate change.

In 2017, the Arts and Humanities Research Council awarded funds of **£9 million** to five projects under the GCRF Network+ scheme. Over the following three years the international travel required to set up and run these projects necessitated over 400 tonnes of carbon emissions.

Though UK Universities have made impressive commitments to reduce emissions and divest from fossil fuels, the carbon costs of international travel – for research, training and conferencing – has largely gone unconsidered. This blog presents a summary of the main conclusions drawn from the online discussion and a set of recommendations that Institutions and UK Research Councils can implement

to decarbonise research at every stage of the research process. At the heart of these discussions is a shared commitment that necessary changes should enable solidarity with scholars and activists in the Global South rather than undermining them.

To caveat the former, although we see changing practices and ways of working as an opportunity, we recognise that global contexts differ and opportunities are not equal. Where fewer long haul flights may work for some project teams with established global networks and partnerships, as well as provide an opportunity to shift power dynamics in favour of local partners/experts, for others, fewer long-haul flights when setting up a project present additional challenges/barriers, particularly where technological infrastructure is not in place, limiting digital connectivity between global project partners.

Furthermore, where project partners travelling overseas and spending longer in project countries provides an opportunity to support the establishment and sustenance of partnerships, personal circumstances, teaching commitments and limited professional flexibility



THE CARBON COST OF TRAVEL

We calculated the average carbon emissions per AHRC-GCRF Network Plus project for international travel taken by core teams and Co-Investigators.

85 TONS

ON AVERAGE PER PROJECT

*excludes domestic travel

BY COMPARISON:

1.6 TONS

Annual carbon emissions per capita in Colombia

0.3 TONS

Annual carbon emissions per capita in Ethiopia

5.1 TONS

0.47 TONS



ensure that this is not an option for every project partner. So with that in mind, what steps can researchers, institutions and research councils take to decarbonise research?

1. Sector Wide Awareness about the Carbon Footprint of Research

To raise awareness of the carbon footprint of each individual project, we recommend that projects should calculate the carbon footprint of research including domestic and international travel at the proposal stage as a requirement set by UK

Research . Furthermore, we recommend that GCRF projects should submit a list of all domestic and international flights taken and calculate the total carbon emissions of travel as part of their annual report to the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

2. Offsetting

We recommend UK Research Councils recognise Carbon Offsetting as a legitimate cost to be claimed as an expense, following the recommendations for offsetting schemes provided by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and World Wildlife Fund www.goldstandard.org

We also recommend UK Research Councils make allowances for carbon offsetting into project's budgets at the proposal stage.

3. We recommend that UK Research Councils prioritise the funding of projects that outline how the impact of their project on climate change has been considered and consequently adapted to minimise carbon emissions. We recommend that UK Research Councils prioritise the funding of proposals where projects are carbon neutral.

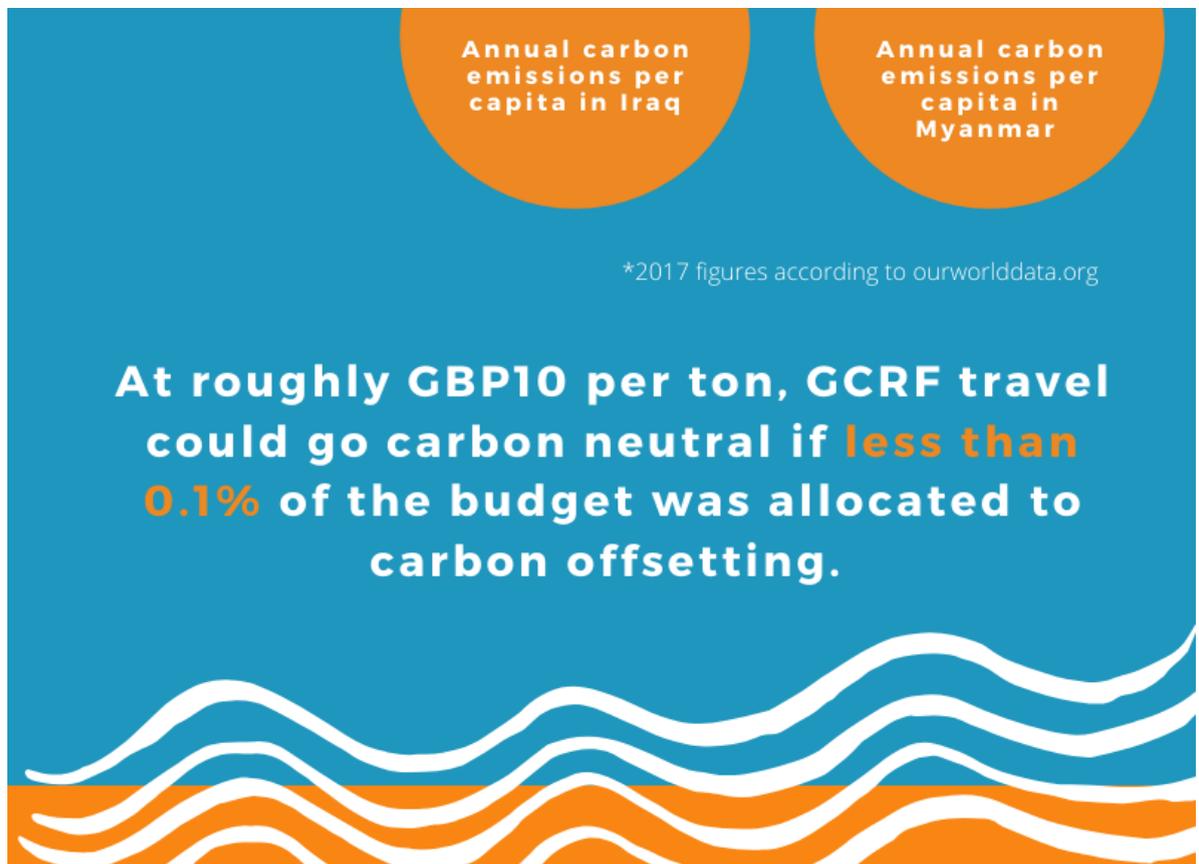
4. We recommend that UK Research Councils allow for budget flexibility, recognising that country contexts are different. In particular, we recommend a flexible budget for digital software and equipment to enhance connectivity and that UK Research Councils make allowances in the budget to support technological infrastructure at the proposal stage.

Next Steps

If we all look carefully at our choices, and the effects they are having, and report them in accountable ways, then we have the potential to make a difference. Where researchers and projects are thinking about how they can individually and innovatively reduce emissions we want to see change at the institutional level. We welcome further recommendations and ask you to send them to changingthestory@leeds.ac.uk.

We will submit recommendations to UK Research Councils for comment including the Arts and Humanities Research Council Advisory Board.

If you are interested in continuing the conversation about decarbonising research, please contact changingthestory@leeds.ac.uk and/or @Changing_Story_ to register your interest. We hope this is the first of many conversations reflecting on the role and accountability of



research projects and UK Research Councils in response to the climate change emergency.

TAGS: CLIMATE CHANGE DECARBONISING RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT OFFSETTING RESEARCH

