

# Experiences in transnational alignments and multilateral research funding

## Case study: The Belmont Forum



***A key International Network of Funders  
of Environmental Research***

- The Belmont Forum gathers the world's **major and emerging funders** of global environmental change research, and international science councils
- **Australia/CSIRO**
- **Brazil/FAPESP**
- **Canada/NSERC**
- **China/NSFC**
- **European Commission/DG R&I**
- **France/CNRS&ANR, co-chair**
- **Germany/DFG&BMBF**
- **India/MoES**
- **Italy/CNR**
- **Japan/MEXT&JST**
- **South Africa/NRF, co-chair**
- **Sweden/SSEESS**
- **United Kingdom/NERC**
- **United States/NSF**
- *International Council for Science (ICSU)*
- *International Social Sciences Council (ISSC)*

# Multilateral Funding Activities Collaborative Research Actions, CRAs

- Instruments: networking, strategic activities, research projects (3 yrs)
  
- Process:
  - joint theme finding and definition through scoping workshops of funders and scientists
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  - joint decisions on calls
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  - joint thematic calls, managed by Theme Project Office and Group of Program Coordinators
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  - joint two-step, pre- and full proposal selection, external written reviews, Panel of Experts for final assessment
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  - joint recommendations for funding: GPC, PoE
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  - separate, but synchronized final decision taking and funding, no common pot
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  - joint announcement of funding decisions
  - ↓
  - joint start of projects
  - ↓
  - joint workshops and output

- Principles:
  - scientific quality as prime criterion
  - thematic fit: global change, sustainability research, Future Earth oriented, actionable knowledge
  - innovative approaches through new partnerships: integration of natural and social sciences, engagement with stakeholders
  - Scientists from at least 3 countries
  - leveraging existing investments, added value through international cooperation
  - open to any funders
  - à la carte contributions of funders (cash / in-kind)
  - alignments with other international activities possible (G8, JPI, ERA-nets, ...)

## Funding Activities So Far

- 2012:        Freshwater Security (with G8 HORCS)  
              Coastal Vulnerability (with G8 HORCS and FP7)
  
- 2013:        Food Security (with JPI FACCE)  
              E-Infrastructure and Data Management (strategic activity)
  
- 2014:        Arctic  
              Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (Networking)
  
- [2015/16:    Climate Predictability, Climate Services  
              Mountains as Sentinels of Global Change]



- CRAs on **Freshwater Security** and **Coastal Vulnerability**, joint with **G8HORCs**, aligned with FP7 and NSERC
- **130 pre-proposals**, involving more than **1000 partners** from **~ 50 countries** (high number of partners from non-BF member countries, coming on board with their own funding)
- **53 full proposals**
- **13 funded projects, 20 M€ total**
- **Medium size projects, 1-2 M€, 2-3-year**



## Challenges, Experiences, Lessons Learned

- Overall response from the scientific community positive, funding period for broad themes too short
- integration of natural and social sciences and stakeholder engagement weak in the proposal stage, stronger in the operational phase
- structural problems of funders: several do not fund social sciences, internal structures of funders can be an obstacle
- diversity of funding agencies, funding cultures and practices a source of creativity, but challenging: minimum of joint rules (e.g. proposal format), national funding rules valid, some harmonization under way
- complexity of funding mechanism: lengthy (1,5 yrs), very labour-intensive, misunderstandings in the scientific community
- theme finding process: balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches and competitive selection of themes challenging
- selection process: good experiences with joint reviewing and assessments, no ranking but grading, depending on the international geometry of the proposals it is difficult to fit recommended proposals to available, nationally committed funds.



- synchronization of final decisions and beginning of cash flow challenging (reliability of partners)
- coordination of funded projects, scientific results and joint delivery has to be organised and funding for that provided
- Alignment with other international funding activities feasible, joint calls more challenging
- rotating management of calls requires repetitive learning in participating agencies and good tool handbooks but many contribute to revising one's own procedures.