Memorandum of Understanding for the Belmont Forum Collaborative Research Actions

between

- The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), Australia
- São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), Brazil
- Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), Canada
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Canada
- Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR), France
- Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), Germany
- Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India (MoES), India
- Japan Science and Technology Agency (JST), Japan
- National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), United Kingdom
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), United Kingdom
- National Science Foundation (NSF), USA

Referred to hereinafter as "the Partner Organizations"

Purpose

Earth System science has provided society with a valuable, basic understanding of the environment and human society as interconnected systems; namely, how humans are changing the global environment, and how these changes may affect human well-being. To be most valuable, this knowledge must be provided on time and space scales that enable effective decision-making and support equitable economic and social development. To describe this need the Belmont Forum has established the ‘Belmont Challenge’ - “To deliver knowledge needed for action to mitigate and adapt to detrimental environmental change and extreme hazardous events”.

This requires:

- Information on the state of the environment, through enhanced observing systems;
- Assessments of risks, impacts and vulnerabilities, through regional and decadal analysis and prediction;
- Enhanced environmental information service providers to users;
- Inter- and transdisciplinary research which takes account of coupled natural, social and economic systems;
- Effective integration and coordination mechanisms, to address interdependencies and marshal the necessary resources.

To help take forward these challenges the Belmont Forum has joined together with ICSU, ISSC, UNEP, UNESCO and UNU to develop a 10-year initiative which aims to deliver knowledge to enable societies to meet their sustainable development goals in the coming decades – Future Earth. The Belmont Forum Collaborative Research Actions can be seen to support part of this initiative by promoting examples of innovative types of research.
This Memorandum of Understanding, between the Belmont Forum Partner Organizations, outlines an arrangement to support international collaborative research through joint calls for funding in support of such relevant initiatives.

Definitions

- **“Belmont Forum”** is an informal high level group of the world’s major and emerging funders of global environmental change research and international science councils. It aims to accelerate delivery of the international environmental research most urgently needed to remove critical barriers to sustainability by aligning and mobilising international resources.
- **“Call”** is the overarching term for the process undertaken to fund proposals from the research community to address a Collaborative Research Action.
- **“Collaborative Research Actions”** are mechanisms to deliver international collaboration. Their principles are that they will:
  - Address the Belmont Challenge priorities (i.e. societally relevant global environmental change challenges)
  - Lever Belmont Forum member’s existing investments through international added value, where appropriate
  - Bring together new partnerships of natural scientists, social scientists, and users
  - Allow Partner Organizations to fund their own eligible communities – there will be no requirement for ‘common pot’ and funding across borders.
- **“External Reviewer”** is an external expert that provides a written peer review of a proposal.
- **“Group of Program Co-ordinators” (GPC)** is responsible for the practical implementation of the Call. It is composed of one mandated representative from each Partner Organization participating in the Call, who provides overall responsibility for their Organization’s involvement in the Call.
- **“Implementation Plan”** is the detailed documentation to support each Call that specifies the Partner Organizations involved, their financial contributions and the process for that Call.
- **“National Contact Point” (NCP)** represents a Partner Organization and can be contacted by applicants and the Program Office to give information on or explain the Call procedures as well as national rules and procedures.
- **“Panel of Experts”** is a committee of experts that reviews and ranks proposals.
- **“Partner Organization”** is a funding organization that may participate in a Call in support of a Belmont Forum Collaborative Research Action
- **“Theme Program Office”** is established by one of the Partner Organizations’ Head Offices which, for the entire period of one Call, is entrusted by the Partner Organizations to prepare, publish, and manage one particular Call in cooperation and consultation with the Group of Program Coordinators.

The Partner Organizations therefore agree as follows:

I. General objective

1. The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is to establish the procedures for Calls for proposals for the trans-national Belmont Forum Collaborative Research Actions on societally relevant global environmental change challenges. The Partner Organizations agree to define themes on a periodic basis, disseminate the Call and establish the application, review and funding procedures for each Call.
2. This memorandum is intended to support a number of Calls for Collaborative Research Actions and on a Call by Call basis each Partner Organization will decide whether it wishes to participate. Agreement to this memorandum places no onus on a Partner Organization to participate in every Call.

3. This memorandum is a mutual statement of intention among the Partner Organizations. It is not intended to be, and shall not constitute in any way, a legal agreement, or impose any legal obligation on any Partner Organization. However, the Partner Organizations agree to make every reasonable effort to fulfill the intentions herein within their budget constraints.

4. The Partner Organizations shall attempt to resolve any dispute arising out of or relating to this MoU through negotiations between senior executives of the Partner Organizations.

5. Each Call will be supported by a separate Implementation Plan, which will provide details on the Partner Organizations involved in that Call and their level of contribution.

II. Procedures

1. Funding Model

1.1 The Partner Organizations agree on launching Calls on a periodic basis using a model of a joint call and evaluation but national funding, with no requirement for funding across borders. National funding may be in the form of a monetary contribution to a Call or 'in-kind' contribution such as access to staff time and resources or through enabling scientists' participation outside of the Call.

1.2 The funding contribution and national restrictions for each Partner Organization will be detailed in the relevant Implementation Plan of that CRA. The Partner Organizations contributions are subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

1.3 The Belmont Forum is aiming to fund as many of the highest ranked proposals as possible. Funding gaps may arise in the ranking when one of the Partner Organizations runs out of money. The Belmont Forum intends to deal with these gaps through the four levels of flexibility:
   • a Partner Organization does not have to spend all the money/resource that has been provisionally reserved if there are not enough good proposals to fund the national teams
   • some Partner Organizations may be able to come up with extra money/resources to fund good proposals
   • some Partner Organizations may be able to fund foreign teams
   • some Partner Organizations may be able to fund foreign teams via subcontracting.

1.4 If a Partner Organization cannot confirm the funding of its research teams two months after the GPC made its decision on funding recommendation, a procedure for re-evaluation may be launched, for resolution by remaining Partner Organizations. If more than one Partner Organization cannot confirm funding the proposal will not be funded.

2. Proposal types

2.1 Depending on the thematic priorities and maturity of interdisciplinary communities complementary types of support may be used to attract and build-up international and innovative teams to tackle the Belmont Challenge. Four complementary types of support are envisaged, but the type(s) of proposals invited will depend on the nature of the Call:
Belmont Forum

- Workshops for brainstorming innovative topics/approaches
- Small clustering and foresight grants (6-12 months duration)
- Pilot projects (2 years)
- Full projects (3-4 years)

3. Management of the Call

3.1 Where a Call includes more than one Theme, each Theme within the Call may be effectively managed as a separate Call to spread the administrative burden, with separate Theme Program Offices, Group of Program Coordinators and Panel of Experts. Co-ordination will be provided between the management of each Theme.

3.2 The Partner Organizations agree on the creation of a joint Group of Program Coordinators for each Call, composed of one mandated representative from each Partner Organization participating in the Call. The Group of Program Coordinators will be responsible for the practical implementation of the Call.

3.3 A Theme Program Office will be chosen by the Partner Organizations involved in each Call, and will cover any reasonable costs associated with its activities. The Theme Program Office will assist the GPC in its tasks and coordinate the Call process with involvement of staff from Partner Organizations.

3.4 Each participating Partner Organization will indicate a national contact point (person) (NCP), whom the applicants can approach to enable an effective implementation of the Call. They will advise on the national regulations with particular attention to the eligibility criteria of the funding agency.

4. Defining the topic and disseminating the Call

4.1 The Partner Organizations will decide on the Theme(s) for each Call and this will be detailed in the relevant Implementation Plan.

4.2 Each Call will be announced on the Belmont Forum website, together with the Call description and access to application forms, results of the Call and acknowledgement of the membership of the Panel of Experts. Relevant documents will be available for download. The Partner Organizations will publicise the funding opportunity through their usual networks and channels, and provide a link to the Belmont Forum website.

4.3 Public information will be in English. Each Partner will be responsible for the translation in other languages, if needed.

5. Application procedure

5.1 The Partner Organizations agree on the following common eligibility and proposal requirements:
   a. The language of the applications is English;
   b. The work involves research groups from across a minimum of three countries participating within the Call;
c. Projects including research groups from countries not participating to that Call are eligible, but no funding should be required from Participating Organizations for those groups;
d. Eligibility of research groups is according to the national criteria of the Partner Organizations (national requirements will be detailed in the specific Call Implementation Plan);
e. Eligibility of budget items is according to the national rules of the Partner Organizations;
f. All applications include both a natural and social/economic science element, and
g. All applications demonstrate engagement with relevant research users – policy makers, regulators, NGOs, communities or industry.

6. Review and evaluation procedure

6.1 Review Process
6.1.1 The Theme Program Office will lead the external peer review.

6.1.2 Each proposal should ideally be peer-reviewed by three External Reviewers, and no less than two, none of whom may be members of the Panel of Experts. Smaller activities e.g. workshops and foresight/clustering grants may go straight to the Panel of Experts for review and not undergo the external review process.

6.1.3 International external reviewers are selected from nominations collected from the Partner Organizations’ authorized staff, staff from other Partner Organizations and from the members of the Panel of Experts. In addition, the applicants may suggest reviewers and may also indicate whether there are specific individuals who should not be used.

6.1.4 A standard review form and assessment criteria will be developed for each Call.

6.2 Panel of Experts
6.2.1 The GPC will assemble a Panel of Experts that comprises two members nominated by each Partner Organization as well as one Chair and one Vice-Chair, the latter two ideally from a country that is not a Partner Organization.

6.2.2 Collectively, the Panel of Experts should cover all (sub) disciplines necessary to review the proposals and be composed of an appropriate representation of scientific and relevant research users – policy makers, regulators, NGOs, communities or industry.

6.2.3 The Panel of Experts will convene to review and rank proposals, taking into account the assessment criteria and the reviews obtained from 3 External Reviewers where relevant. Selection criteria are specified in the Implementation Plan for the relevant Call. If a two stage process is used the Panel of Experts will also convene to review the Pre-proposals.

6.3 Final decision
6.3.1 The Group of Program Coordinators decides on which projects to recommend for national funding, and which projects will be rejected. Formal funding decisions are made by the individual Partner Organizations and are subject to the policies and guidelines of the Partner Organizations.
6.3.2 The Partner Organizations will synchronize communication to applicants on the result of the selection process. In particular no oral or written information will be given before the notification by the Program Office.

6.4 **Evaluation costs**

6.4.1 Travel, accommodation and meal costs for attending the Panel of Experts meetings will be covered by the Partner Organizations for their two nominated members.

6.5 **Anonymity of reviewers**

6.5.1 The Partner Organizations will ensure that External Referees remain anonymous.

6.6 **Conflict of interest, Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure policy and guidelines**

6.6.1 The Partner Organizations agree to ensure that conflict of interest situations are properly managed and confidentiality and non-disclosure policies and guidelines are in place and followed. Guidelines will be developed and will apply to the Group of Program Coordinators, Panel of Experts and External Referees.

7. **Grant Administration**

7.1 Once the lead applicants have been notified by the Program Office of the funding decisions, the successful applicants will be contacted by their national funding organization regarding the award process.

7.2 Every Partner Organization finances and administers the awards made by their respective funding organizations.

7.3 The research carried out by each country under this Initiative will adhere to all the applicable laws and regulations including research ethics, participation of human subjects, etc. in the respective country.

7.4 Each applicant on a project will be responsible for complying with its funding organization's intellectual property rights requirements and applicants on projects will work out any necessary intellectual property rights agreements among themselves before funds are awarded.

8. **Monitoring and evaluation / dissemination of results**

8.1 Funded projects are required to report on research progress, results and financial aspects according to the administrative rules of the relevant funding organization.

8.2 Dissemination of project results (outputs, outcomes) is the responsibility of the applicants involved in the funded projects. Plans for dissemination of the results will form part of the proposals and be included in the evaluation procedure.
III. Duration of the Memorandum of Understanding

1. This Memorandum of Understanding shall be effective as of the date of the last signature and shall remain in force for at least five years and until the last final project report from a Call under this MoU is approved.

2. This MoU may be amended or modified by mutual written agreement of the signatories or their replacements.

3. A Partner Organization may withdraw from the MoU through written correspondence to all signatories.

4. Additional Partner Organizations may become a party to this MoU in order to participate in a CRA Call. However, no additional party shall become a Partner Organization unless that party has entered into a deed of adherence to this MoU, whereby such party agrees to be bound by this MoU as if that party has been named herein as a Partner Organization. All Partner Organizations will be informed when a new party is added to the MoU.

5. This MoU may be executed in any number of counterparts, each of which, when signed, dated and delivered, shall be deemed an original and which together shall constitute one and the same document.

We, the undersigned, do hereby agree to the terms and conditions specified in this Memorandum of Understanding in conjunction with the relevant Implementation Plans developed for each Call.

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