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# British Council 'Golden Thread' Culture and Development Programme Evaluation

Summary Report

December 2016

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# Foreword

The British Council was founded to create a “friendly knowledge and understanding” between the people of the UK and the wider world. We use the cultural resources of the UK such as art, sport, education, science, culture, language, innovation and creativity to make a positive contribution to the people, institutions and governments of the countries we work with. This creates opportunities, builds connections and engenders trust, so that we make a lasting difference to the security, prosperity and influence of the UK.

For the British Council, Culture is an enabler and driver of sustainable development, a way of engaging communities in shaping our shared future and supporting open, inclusive and stable societies. Artistic and cultural approaches empower diverse groups to participate in cross-cultural dialogue, creative and collective problem-solving, and capacity building. Culture also provides tools and spaces for creative expression and gives voice for individuals to raise awareness, build solidarity and encourage change.

Our Culture and Development agenda draws on the strengths of UK Arts and Creativity sector and uniquely combines it with British Council’s work in education, society and language, responding at scale to the global challenges of social and economic development. This approach is born out of an absolute commitment to mutuality, honest and equal collaboration, long-term engagement and a deep understanding and appreciation of the local context. Our programmes employ the arts and culture to explore contentious ideas and contested truths and to safely connect with the past to explore alternative futures and to generate new opportunities. They encourage engagement and a strong sense of cultural identity at an individual and a community level.

This is designed to strengthen individual resilience, encourage community engagement, support policy development and protect vital cultural heritage.

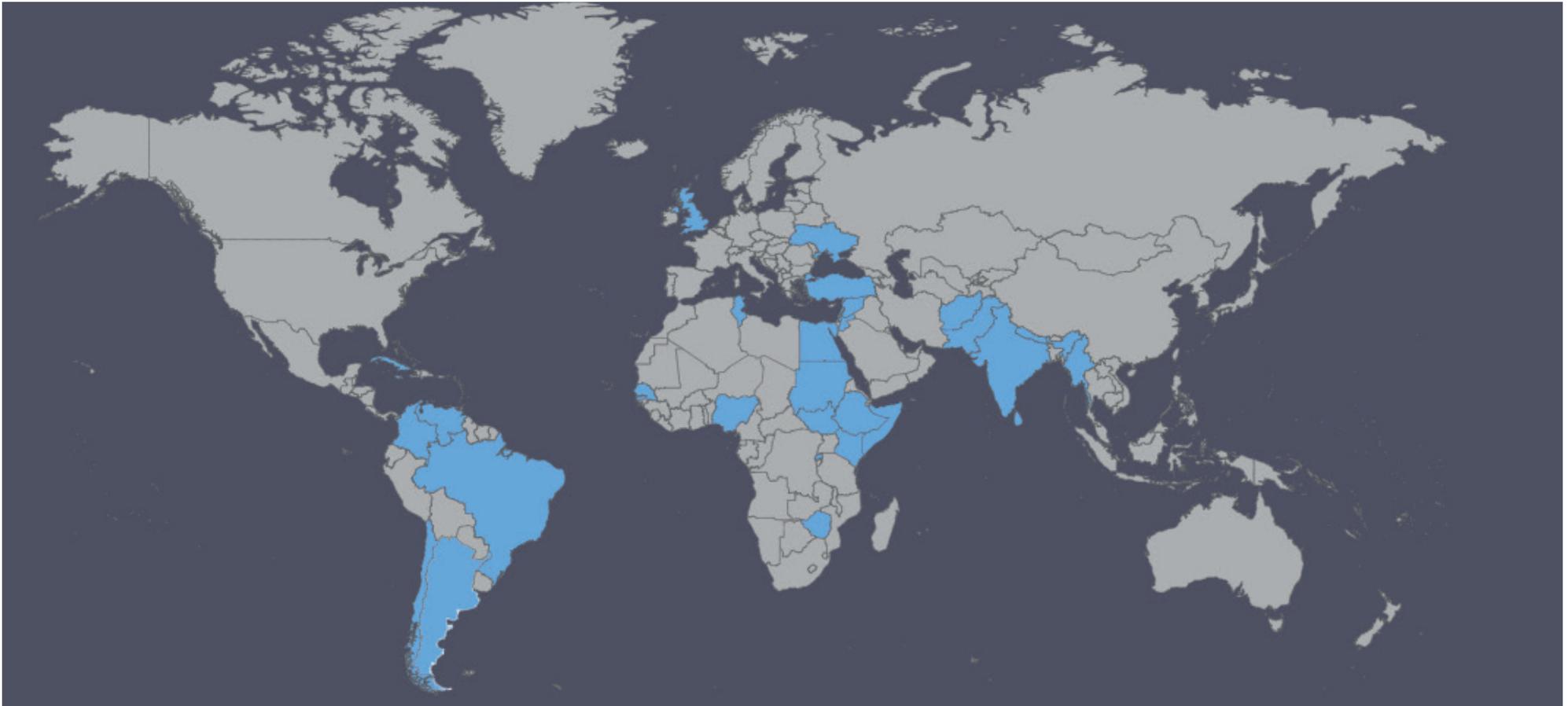
In June, the British Council released its Arts Strategy including five central pillars: 1) Sharing UK Arts with the World; 2) Policy and Research; 3) Arts for Social Change; 4) Capacity Building and 5) Fostering Collaboration and Networks. These pillars further reinforce the British Council’s work in the field of Culture and Development, as this programme covers all five areas, and in particular arts for social change.

Last financial year (2015-16), the British Council was awarded funding through the Golden Thread Official Development Assistance programme for two Culture and Development flagship programmes, ‘Artists in Recovery’ and ‘Voices and Spaces for Social Change’. These programmes are made up of a number of one year pilot projects in different countries across the British Council global network.

This document is a report and evaluation of our Culture and Development response to ‘Golden Thread’. It explores the impact and the change effected at individual, community, and organisational level of the pilot projects and sets the programmes in an international development context. By doing so, the report reflects the long term and large scale ambition of our Culture and Development work, which aims to make a lasting difference for positive social change globally.

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[www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development](http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/culture-development)



Countries reached as part of the Culture and Development Golden Thread programme:

**Americas** – Jamaica, Cuba, Venezuela; **Middle East North Africa** – Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, Palestine; **Sub Saharan Africa** – Nigeria, Zimbabwe; **South Asia** – Sri Lanka, Afghanistan; **East Asia** – Burma; **Active Citizens and Arts** – Ethiopia, South Sudan, Sudan, Jordan; **World Stages** – Somalia, Egypt, Pakistan, Ukraine; **World Voice** – India, Nepal, Hong Kong, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and all four UK nations.

Average amounts spent per programme and/or region:

Artists in Recovery £500,000

Voices and Spaces for Social Change £1,210,000

- Americas £135,000
- Middle East North Africa £135,000
- Sub Saharan Africa £135,000
- South Asia £110,000
- East Asia £150,000
- Active Citizens and Arts £160,000
- World Voice £385,000

**TOTAL: £1,710,000 + additional costs (incl. staff, M&E etc.) = £2,000,000**

## 1.1 Introduction

This report explores the impact of the British Council 'Golden Thread' Programme. The programme funded 14 projects in 2015/16 taking place in Official Development Assistance (ODA) priority countries around the world and was funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Each project used arts and creativity to bring about change at the individual, community and societal level.

This summary report is intended to give readers an understanding of the diverse ways in which Culture and Development projects are achieving social impact, as well as where further research and evaluation is required.

## 1.2 The place of culture in international development

This work has taken place at a crucial time in international development. The UN Millennium Development Goals have recently been replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals, setting out a new set of aims and priorities for global international development across three levels: economic, social and environmental.

This change in goals is happening at a time of acute humanitarian crises in many global contexts. Over 60 million people are displaced worldwide due to conflict, disaster or persecution – more than at any time since the Second World War. The fact that migration is largely caused by conflict and failures of development is prompting discussion over ways to improve development and counter conflict within and between states.

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1. UN, MDGs Summary, 2015
  2. UN System Task Team, 'Culture: a driver and enabler of sustainable development', 2012.

Despite some gains, huge challenges persist. Inequality is dramatic and progress has been uneven. Progress has tended to bypass women and those who are lowest on the economic ladder or are disadvantaged because of their age, disability or ethnicity. Disparities between rural and urban areas remain pronounced. Progress requires political will to tackle root causes and integrate the economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions of sustainable development.

The role of culture within global development has been increasingly recognised but remains misunderstood and undervalued. Development interventions that are responsive to the cultural context and advance a human-centred approach to development are more effective and more likely to yield sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes. Despite this, culture is largely absent from the SDGs despite pressure from a number of sources for its inclusion on a par with economic, social and environmental factors. There remains a lack of theoretical or practical tools to fully understand or utilise the role of culture in development.

Campaign groups and organisations working at the cross-roads of culture and development propose that cultural aspects be included in national development plans and that culture be included in implementation plans for SDGs even where it has not been included in goals or targets. For this to work, the narrative on culture and sustainable development should be strengthened with evidence-based research and indicators.

Culture can be used in development to enhance governance, economic development, sustainability and social cohesion. It can promote the participation of women, children and marginalised groups. Key to mainstreaming culture is the development of quantitative and qualitative indicators. These cannot simply lead to the economisation of culture but must demonstrate the value of culture to development programmes and the cultural value created by these programmes. It is within this context that the British Council Golden Thread Programme took place.

## 1.3 The programme objectives

The programme was based on six objectives; these were:

1. Support open, inclusive, stable societies through innovative arts and cultural approaches to sustainable development
2. Create new safe spaces, or facilitate access to existing safe spaces so artists can perform or exhibit their work
3. Provide opportunities for artists to develop their creative practice in and/or beyond conflicted territories
4. Build capacity at the individual, community and policy maker level to support social cohesion, freedom of expression, inclusive institutions and improved social and economic well-being
5. Engage UK creative practitioners and cultural organisations in project delivery helping to establish the UK as a leader in delivering cultural impact in developing countries
6. Strengthen artists, individuals and communities' sense of well-being through creative activity

These objectives were drawn from the overall British Council Culture and Development Theory of Change which sets out the logic for how different project approaches can lead to lasting impact for individuals, communities and societies. Each project also involved a UK-based cultural organisation or artist(s).

Project	Brief Description
<b>Active Citizens and Arts, Global</b>	Using arts and cultural approaches to increase self-determination and active citizenship across diverse populations.
<b>Artists in Recovery, Middle East North Africa</b>	Focusing on artists displaced by the Syrian conflict, this project was made up of several strands seeking to support their training and development, as well as engaging others displaced by the conflict in creative activities.
<b>Say It Through Breakdancing, Tunisia</b>	Engaging young men in breakdancing as a way of telling their stories and developing their skills in street dance as an expressive form.
<b>Camara Chica, Cuba and Venezuela</b>	Building capacity in education and community settings to support young people in filmmaking and visual storytelling.
<b>Creative Collaboration, Egypt</b>	Working with a number of Egyptian artists, this project sought to explore and promote 'safe' spaces for artistic practice and collaboration and deepen understanding of how the arts can be linked to social impact.
<b>Choir of London, Palestine-UK</b>	Singing and performance project with young Palestinian musicians who came for a residency with UK-based musicians and music organisations.
<b>Human Drama, Myanmar</b>	A forum theatre project focusing on training actors to engage communities in performances about social justice.
<b>Acting Together, Nigeria</b>	Working with community and arts organisations in Nigeria to increase understanding of how artistic approaches can be used in community development and conflict resolution.
<b>Run Free, Jamaica</b>	A parkour project allowing a group of young men in Jamaica to devise a performance and share their perspectives with the community through creative movement.

Project	Brief Description
<b>Dance for Reconciliation, Sri Lanka</b>	Training and performance project for eight dance organisations in Sri Lanka to integrate disabled and non-disabled dancers and explore how dance can address social issues.
<b>Turquoise Mountain, Afghanistan</b>	Working with Afghan artisans to develop their craft skills and export to international markets.
<b>World Stages, Global</b>	A cultural exchange project involving eight UK-based theatres providing residencies and exchanges with theatre artists across the world.
<b>World Voice, Global</b>	A teacher training and schools-based project seeking to train educators in how to use song and international repertoire to promote cross-subject learning and enhance freedom of expression.
<b>Hip Hop Shakespeare, Zimbabwe</b>	An 11-day training programme on the creative and cultural industries and how culture relates to society, personal and professional development.



Active Citizens and Arts © 3D Dan Tsu

## 1.4 Core findings

The core findings here are presented according to two objectives from the British Council Culture and Development Theory of Change. These objectives encompass many aspects of the programme specific objectives outlined above and highlight the main areas in which this programme has had an impact.

### Culture and Development Objective 1 - Human rights and freedoms are realised, including diversity and freedom of expression

The Golden Thread programme has enabled human rights to be realised, including the promotion of diversity and freedom of expression, in a number of important ways. The programme supported projects which challenged accepted cultural norms (Human Drama), promoted and enabled freedom of expression and self-determination (Run Free, Say it Through Breakdancing, World Stages) and encouraged participation from women, girls and other groups often under-represented in cultural and community activities (Turquoise Mountain, Dance for Reconciliation). The programme contributed to the realisation of human rights including equality, freedom from discrimination, freedom of opinion and information, education, and participation in the cultural life of communities.

The programme encouraged and enabled **freedom of expression**. For example, Say it Through Breakdancing helped participants to share thoughts and ideas, working collaboratively to shape the training and performative aspects of the project:

“ As an artist and as a person with an opinion this project has created a safe space to express myself, as an artist, as a person, as a young man. We talked about the problems affecting our societies today and used our dance to explain them. (Say it Through Breakdancing participant)

World Stages enabled artists to **exchange ideas and perspectives** in a way that would not be happening otherwise:

“ I wrote this play. I was not seeking to be controversial; I was hoping to make a significant difference in my country. The experience of this production has taught me caution, has taught me brevity above all, has taught me to value my writing. Not to share it when I feel the time is not right, when my gut feeling tells me the collaborative partnership is not right. I am not afraid to stir the hornets' nest. This work led to a documentary, has led to success beyond my imagination and all I can do is stand on the side lines because I was naïve enough to just want my work out there. This piece of work has above all freed me from self-censorship, it's the duty of others to censor me, to block my works, it's my duty to write as I feel, be true to my inner voice all the time. (World Stages Participant)

**Wellbeing** has been promoted in projects by linking activities to concepts of self-efficacy, self-awareness and self-expression. Individuals have been helped to feel useful (in a particular arts field, or in general), after which they are motivated to continue activities and are enabled to do so through supportive structures. There are several examples of this process across projects:

“ I am discovering that I actually have more capacity than what I thought, particularly in terms of energy but especially in developing human relationships. (Say it through Breakdancing participant)

“ I know that arts can be used as a way of reflecting thoughts without any words. Sometimes I'm afraid that people won't get what I'm saying, but since I've done this workshop I know people can understand things based on their own way of taking meaning from something I create, I don't have to make it really obvious. (Active Citizens Participant)

The Golden Thread programme has enabled **diversity of expression** as well as freedom of expression. Project designs have engaged people in creative processes that have allowed them to explore their self and social identities and reconfigure the way they interact with the world. A diverse range of cultures have participated in projects. The inclusive nature of project designs has enabled targeting people marginalised, or at risk of being marginalised, in their societies.

“ Photography has a thousand words, it says things that you can't say in words and people can make sense of it in ways they cannot with words. I have been able to see and meet people from all over Jordan and explore their lives. Their lives are very different from my life in the capital city. In this workshop we have found a way to communicate with each other and found out we are the same, not different. Using art we can see things in a different perspective. We understand each other's society. (Active Citizens participant, Jordan)

An attempt was made to use a quantitative, survey-based, approach to measure the creative and psycho-social development of participants across projects, however this proved to be difficult to implement across the majority of projects. A brief example from the Say it Through Breakdancing project (figure 1) indicates the potential of such an approach for future evaluation designs.

**Say it Through Breakdancing Survey (n=10)**

I regularly have the opportunity to meet new people	4.7
I can share my work with others whose opinions I respect	4.7
I am learning news things about other people	4.6
I am connected to the community of dancers who I value	4.6
I am in contact with people with similar interests as me	4.4
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	4.3
I am learning new things about the world	4.2
I've been feeling close to other people	4.1
I currently feel able to engage in the dance practise I would like to	4
I have been able to make up my own mind about things	4
I have been thinking clearly	3.8
I am happy with my current level of breakdancing ability	3.7
I have been dealing with problems well	3.6
I have been feeling relaxed	3.5

**Figure 1. Indicative participant survey results (1= Strongly Disagree and 5= Strongly Agree) - Say it through Breakdancing (Tunisia)**

These quantitative findings, albeit from just the ten participants taking part in the Say it Through Breakdancing project and therefore limited in terms of representativeness, indicate the aspects of learning and wellbeing most highly scored by participants (the numbers represent average scores for the whole group which could range from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree).

The findings suggest that the project has enabled participants to meet new people, engage in an emerging community of practice and pick up new skills and knowledge (the higher scores at the top of the chart), lower scores were observed for subjective wellbeing (e.g. feeling relaxed, dealing with problems well or thinking clearly), which could indicate the impact of this project is higher in social outcomes and knowledge/skill outcomes than in subjective wellbeing. This may be expected given the broad range of complicating factors in these young participants lives that could affect their wellbeing. This also therefore suggests that projects should be realistic about what areas of development they can actually influence and establish the best ways to measure impact using a range of methods appropriate to the groups and contexts in which they are operating.

### **Culture and Development Objective 2 – Communities and institutions support creative, open, inclusive societies.**

The Golden Thread programme includes projects which have explicitly built the capacity of people and communities to support cohesion, inclusive institutions and improved social and economic wellbeing. Projects have been designed and implemented to achieve the most positive impacts during the life of projects and once the project has ended.

The 'master trainers' model in the World Voice project, where they 'train the trainers' to ensure sustainability through master trainers remaining in the countries in which they work, has seen that 57% of teachers trained once continue to use the methodology when back in their own classroom, but 95% of those trained twice (by the master trainers) use singing in their classrooms on a regular basis. More informally, participants taking part in Golden Thread projects have indicated how they will apply the learning beyond their immediate interactions:

“ The most important thing for me was working with the children, it was a real challenge because I had never done it before. Now my communication with children is much improved, and I feel prepared to go on teaching them and learning from them. (Participant, Camara Chica).

“ These kids are not only learning how to dance, we help them to think independently, gain new perspective. And this can create a chain effect, because they can influence their own communities, talk to their friends and their families. (Say it Through Breakdancing tutor)

A number of projects explicitly support **social cohesion** and seek to create an environment in which social cohesion can thrive and develop. For example, Acting Together in Nigeria worked with civil society, community and arts organisations to build their capacity in the use of theatre and dance as a mechanism for peace building and conflict management. It subsequently supported them to produce performances in public spaces to challenge divisive ideas and encourage dialogue as a means of resolving differences and managing conflict. A similar model was also used in the Hip Hop Shakespeare project in Zimbabwe where participants exchanged ideas and learned about how arts and culture can be used to address a whole range of social issues in an intensive 11-day training programme.

The Human Drama Project in Myanmar equipped people from poor economic backgrounds with technical, teamwork and leadership skills, helping them develop from shy and introverted individuals to community leaders. The 14 performers in Human Drama's troupe used real stories to engage the target communities in the play. As is the practice in forum theatre, at the end of each play, they encouraged the audience members to contribute their opinion to the second round of the play as a solution to the relevant social problem. Over the year, the troupe conducted 14 workshops with a total of 395 active participants from total audiences of 5,806.

The Human Drama project evaluation report shows an increase in people's awareness of social issues, willingness to discuss them and act upon them:

- 90% of respondents found learning through the representations really useful for themselves and community as a whole and admitted they had not received such information before.
- 80% of the audience expressed their willingness to take part in dispute resolution process in real life and showed increased awareness of communal resources such as neighbours, friends, fellow residents and accessible NGOs.

Golden Thread projects have promoted **social and economic wellbeing** through organisational development, strengthening the capacity of organisations on the ground to continue work beyond the initial funding period and developing practitioners to change the way they work in future. The value of increasing **international networks** was also highlighted by projects. For example, Run Free Jamaica established a committed community of practice, enabling participants to keep developing their skills after the project finished. The Turquoise Mountain project focused on developing artisans' business management skills, equipping them to set themselves up as individual traders and small businesses in their own right and connecting them to international markets.

Across each of these examples we have seen how the creative projects have explicitly sought to have an onward impact beyond individual change towards social change through the arts and culture. Projects have brought people together, taught people new skills and provided platforms for people to express themselves freely. In doing so, they have contributed to more open, creative and inclusive societies. In some cases this has been at a very local level, in others, the embedding of practice will likely yield future and larger-scale impacts.

## 1.5 Conclusions and recommendations

While obtaining reliable data from such a broad portfolio of projects taking place across the programme and across the globe was challenging, the findings reported here show some clear areas where creative and cultural activity has had a positive impact on individuals and communities.

Aligning this with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, we can see that there are some areas where creative and cultural projects can add clear value to these goals. The findings summarised here suggest that this may particularly relate to:

- Creating inclusive, equitable and quality education and learning opportunities across the life-course (Goal 4)
- Contributing to the growth in employment, particularly enhancing skills and learning in the creative and cultural industries (Goal 8)
- Improving health and wellbeing, particularly through improvements in self-efficacy, and increasing social capital in communities (Goal 3)
- More peaceful and inclusive cities and societies, particularly in bringing diverse and divided communities together and enabling safe spaces for people to communicate ideas and new forms of expression (Goal 11)



As highlighted in the opening section, there is a need to greatly improve the methods and measures by which cultural projects are establishing and demonstrating impact and change. This will be especially prescient to demonstrate progress towards the goals above, which each have clear targets and indicators. The intended evaluation framework for this project was not applied in all contexts, for a variety of reasons. We therefore suggest a number of ways to improve evaluation practice in future funding and work of this type:

- Further direct contact with projects at the beginning of the funding period to establish what is practical and achievable in terms of evaluation methodology
- A clear and overarching evaluation framework within which all work can sit, and agreement to evaluation terms as part of the funding agreement and established before funding is agreed
- Overarching tools based on programme objectives that individual projects can adapt to their context (this was attempted but logistics and project variances prevented it from being applied across the portfolio). It is suggested that these would include measures of participants' creative and psycho-social development as appropriate.
- Online/smartphone surveys through Survey Monkey or Typeform – which can include submission of photo, video and web links as data and evidence of progress for participants, practitioners and organisations.
- Longitudinal funding that will allow impacts to be measured beyond a one-year (or less) funding period.



Turquoise Mountain © British Council

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