

British Council

Evaluation of Sub-Saharan Africa Arts

2018-21 Impact report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report provides a summary evaluation for the British Council Sub-Saharan Africa Arts programme for the period 2018-2021. It provides findings for three clusters within the region (East, Southern and West) which includes activity across 18 countries. It has been conducted in two phases. This first phase includes an analysis of impact and learning for the first two years of a three-year regional strategy (2018-20), with the second phase focussed on the year 2020-21. This latter year has also been significantly affected by the global Covid-19 pandemic.

The report is based on a document review of all evaluations carried out across the clusters in the two-year period, along with interviews conducted with British Council teams in each cluster and a range of participants and partners involved during this period (n=27), and a short survey with participants involved in 2020-21 delivery (n=31).

While the context and activity in each country in Sub-Saharan Africa is different, and the three clusters have been run relatively independently from each other, this report presents findings that are representative at the regional level; although clearly this implies that not all findings will be equally applicable to each cluster or country context.

Intended impact 1: The creative economies of the UK, and SSA are strengthened through investment and collaboration.

- Positive impacts are reported on developing creative economies at country and cluster levels as a result of British Council programmes
- British Council was regularly identified as an essential organisation delivering these focused programmes at scale and with clarity of purpose
- Alongside financial support, the British Council is recognised as playing a crucial role in supporting the cultural and creative industries with governments across the region.

- Creative economy programmes should be made relevant and bespoke to the country context and would benefit from being delivered over longer periods of time
- Longer-term and facilitated knowledge exchange programmes would also be appreciated (within country, between countries in the region and with the UK)
- Allow local ownership and co-creation with facilitating and delivery partners and participants whenever possible. Be open about when and why this is not possible
- Aim to work more regularly in partnership with other cultural relations organisations and foundations to 'streamline' the offers
- Ease bureaucracy for partner organisations as much as possible and/or enable British Council staff to provide additional support to organisations as needed
- Now that digital delivery has been shown to be possible, opportunities to engage with participants outside of cities are seen as particularly important.

Intended impact 2: Cultural professionals and artists develop their knowledge, artistic practice, skills and networks contributing to greater prosperity.

- There was clear and consistent reporting of improved sector-specific and transferable skills with stronger results apparently emerging in the second year (2019-2020), which would also indicate the programme becoming more embedded and coherent
- Some initial findings showing that participants were engaging in cascading knowledge and skills to their peers and communities
- Strong findings across the region that British Council programmes are expanding participants active professional networks

- The challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic helped cultural professionals increase their resilience and adaptability, making them more able to respond to the changing context.
- More formal support for networks could be provided after immediate project activity (e.g. digital or physical 'coffee house' discussion spaces)
- Across the region there is a need to find a balance between supporting the potential of 'close contacts' over time (which is having very strong and significant impact) and enabling new and representative individuals into this 'close contact' group

Intended impact 3: Arts and cultural organisations in the UK and SSA raise their profile, showcase UK and SSA arts and increase the economic value of their partnerships contributing towards UK's influence and attraction in the world.

- There were several examples of African artists reporting reaching new audiences across the region and in the UK
- Social media was highlighted as a very effective and important way for this to happen, and it was suggested the British Council could further build from their existing support in this area.
- The switch to digital brought about by the pandemic gave stakeholders increased opportunities, including developing partnerships and accessing markets, that helped raise their profile further.
- The British Council staff teams were identified as very well connected, approachable and informed. Their developmental role was much appreciated, and they have been able to build trust with stakeholders through long term relationships. They know when and how to respond to ensure connections (within the region and with the UK) can have maximum value
- However, to continue to maximise these opportunities it is important that British Council staff have the capacity to be strategic, to build networks and

connections and to support stakeholders into evolving opportunities. This cannot happen if they are always in 'delivery mode'

- Alongside this, stakeholders have a desire to see the British Council reaching more people in greater depth, providing support structures and opportunities that go beyond the perceived elite in a given country.

Intended impact 4: The UK's international reputation is enhanced through experiences of arts and culture, contributing to our cultural relations and soft power approaches.

- Participants report clear increased knowledge of the cultural sectors in their own and neighbouring countries, although evidence is more mixed around improved knowledge or understanding of the UK. This is much clearer among those who have been on visits to the UK and those who have been associated with the British Council for a number of years
- There is a generally positive perception of the British Council and that its Arts programme is needed and relevant. This positive regard is potentially then associated with the UK by extension (e.g., a number of respondents indicated the British Council is more 'switched on' than some other funders and organisations), although this would require further research
- Stakeholders welcome increased opportunities for bilateral exchange, and are keen to explore how UK based stakeholders can learn from those across SSA.
- There is also an appetite for the British Council to increasing its role as an enable and catalyst across the region, creating greater opportunities for skills and knowledge sharing.
- Some stakeholders reported that they would appreciate greater clarity on overarching objectives and how this relates to programme requirements. Linked to this, there was a sense that the British Council was not always being clear, open and transparent about what it is hoping to achieve via programmes, and a clearer 'voice' along these lines would be welcomed.

This may also then serve to increase trust in the UK overall and, by extension, improved reputation.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

- The majority of delivery pivoted to online delivery. This had benefits, particularly around increasing the reach of the British Council into parts of the region where it would not normally engage, however there were limitations around internet accessibility in some areas.
- In general partners and participants appreciated the British Council's flexible approach to delivery throughout the pandemic.
- With resourcing and budget being impacted by the pandemic, the British Council was less able to deliver activities in the region. Relationship management has been vital to maintaining its presence and ensuring that the hard work carried out by teams across the region is not lost.

Conclusions

Overall, the British Council Arts strategy for the Sub-Saharan Africa region has been well received. It is considered as needed and relevant in most country contexts and has been regarded as a welcome shift from previous approaches.

The cluster model has largely been reported as beneficial by staff and stakeholders, particularly for increasing knowledge of neighbouring countries and contexts. However, it was also noted that more thinking may be required on how to balance a strategy and expected impacts between large countries and associated investments (e.g., South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria) and smaller countries.

The identity of the British Council as respected 'partners and co-creators' rather than 'funders' was very welcomed, and attempts should be made to enable localised co-creation and ownership of programmes wherever possible. The 'cut and paste' implementation of externally designed programmes was generally not supported.

British Council teams across the region should be supported to take a more strategic role, developing new contacts and supporting existing contacts wherever possible.

There were significant impacts across the region as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with nearly all physical activity delivered by the Arts team forced to stop. This necessitated a complete overhaul of a core aspect of the British Council's delivery approach in the region.

Although it is too soon to know the true impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, initial indications are that the pivot to online delivery has been successful and there is a continued role for the British Council across the region as a partner and funder. However, looking to the future it is likely that travel restrictions will remain problematic, especially whilst there are global vaccine disparities. This could impact on the gains that have been achieved by the British Council from 2018-20, and, longer term may impact on the immediate successes realised by the move to digital in 2020-21. Working collaboratively across the region and enabling countries to make country-context specific adaptations to the global arts strategy and core delivery model can help to mitigate this and support a more Afro-centric delivery model in the coming years.

1. Introduction

1.1 Programme context

This report summarises findings relating to the impact of the British Council Arts programme across the Sub-Saharan Africa region for the period 2018-2021.

The programme takes place across three clusters of countries: the East Africa cluster of Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda; the South Africa cluster of Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe; and the West Africa cluster of Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

The scale of the British Council Arts programme varied from country to country within each of the clusters, based on a combination of the respective scale of the British Council's intervention in that country and the overall population of the country. For example, within the West Africa cluster the volume of activity was considerably larger in Nigeria given the significantly higher population of this country, whilst in East Africa most activity was centred on Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda.

The British Council Arts programme is organised around four intended impacts (relating to longer term change over 3-5 years) and four intended outcomes where shorter- and medium-term changes are expected to be observed. This 'Theory of Change' is shared across the Sub-Saharan Africa region and is informed by the overarching British Council Arts Strategy. An abridged version of the programme Theory of Change can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 1 - Impact model for the Sub-Saharan Africa Arts Programme

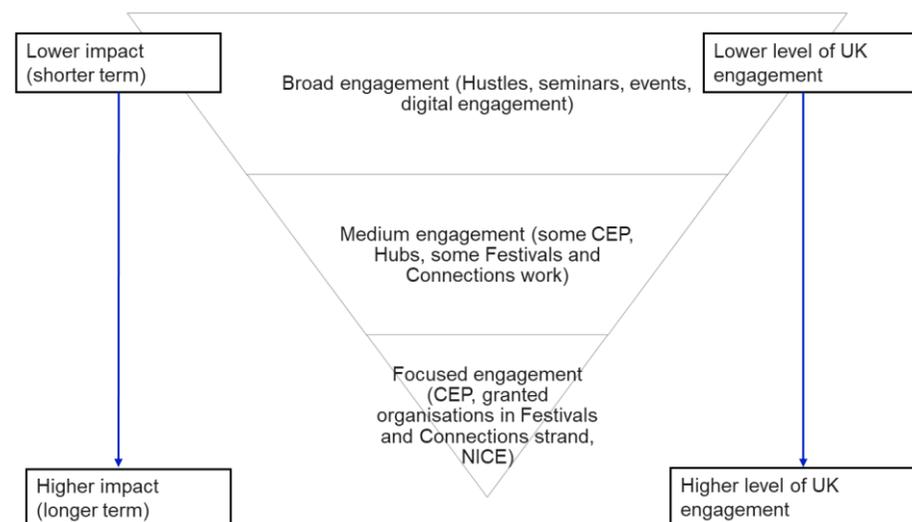


Figure 1 shows the 'impact model' for the Sub-Saharan Africa Arts programme. It indicates that activities are divided between 'broad' engagement with lower intended impacts for participants and lower levels of UK engagement, which tends to occur in one-off events and seminars; and more 'focused' engagement for a lower number of individuals where higher professional impact and higher levels of engagement with the UK are intended (e.g., grants and exchange programmes). The balance of activities in any given year should be considered against this model to ensure balance and shared impact expectations across the Arts teams.

For the purposes of this report most findings are presented at the cluster level, although there are individual country profiles provided in Section 6, outlining the key outputs realised in each country as well as key reflections from staff and stakeholders in those countries.

Figure 2 - Abridged Sub-Saharan Africa Arts Theory of Change



1.2 Our approach

A full methodology is provided in the Appendix. To summarise, we took a four-stage approach to generate data and findings for this report:

- Document review of monitoring and evaluation data collected by each cluster as part of the programme for each year, including standalone evaluations for clusters for 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- Detailed consultation with the country teams in each of the three clusters
- In-depth qualitative interviews with participants and partners of the 2018-21 programme (n=27)
- Short online survey for 2020-21 participants across the region (n=31¹)

This report builds on the initial report submitted in March 2021, which focussed solely on activity from 2018-20.

Within the context of the three years covered by this report, we recognise that 2020-21 is an especially unique delivery year. The majority of planned activity was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and individual countries' specific restrictions and responses to the pandemic. Alongside this, there was a specific impact on the British Council's own strategy and operation, with ramifications for both resourcing and delivery throughout the region.

To that end we have generally separated out 2020-21 from 2018-20 in this report, to recognise the specific challenges that the teams were encountering. Alongside this we have provided an additional focus in chapter 3 around the impact of Covid-19 in the region. This enables us to consider the strengths and opportunities that the British Council were able to respond to, as well as exploring where changes that were forced by the pandemic can have lasting benefits for the British Council's operations in the region.

Given the update to the British Council's global arts strategy since the historic delivery in 2018-20, the (hopefully) anomalous year of delivery in 2020-21, and

the changing approach to cluster working in the region moving forwards, we finish our report with a series of aggregated recommendations. These seek to provide the Arts team with realistic and pragmatic recommendations for the future that can work in tandem with the revised approach to monitoring and evaluation that will begin in 2021-22 for the next three years.

¹ Quantitative analysis from the survey data has not been included given the very low sample that was achieved.

2. Cluster and Regional Outputs 2018-21

	East	South	West	Region (Total)
<i>2018-2019 output data</i>				
British Council Investment	£593,000	£356,711		£949,711 (excl. West)
Number of grants awarded		33		33 (excl. West)
Number of events provided (including training, seminars, conferences, showcases)	40	41		81 (excl. West)
Face to face participants and attendees (includes online and in person attendees)	1,941	87,826		89,767 (excl. West)
<i>2019-2020 output data</i>				
British Council Investment	£294,000	£1,283,710	£832,000	£2,409,710
Number of grants awarded	59	36	37	132
Number of events provided (including training, seminars, conferences, showcases)	86	26	95	207
Face to face participants and attendees (includes online and in person attendees)	6,249	20,046	144,132	170,427
<i>2020-2021 output data</i>				
British Council Investment	£72,974	£173,350	£25,000	£271,324
Number of grants awarded	13	7	4	24
Number of events provided (including training, seminars, conferences, showcases)	47	28	47	122
Face to face participants and attendees (includes online and in person attendees)	78,700	98,908	42,916	220,524

Source: British Council country teams, collated by BOP Consulting

3. Summary of findings for the Sub Saharan Africa Region

3.1 Intended impact 1: The creative economies of the UK, and SSA are strengthened through investment and collaboration.

Summary

- Positive impacts are reported on developing creative economies at country and cluster levels as a result of British Council programmes
- British Council was regularly identified as an essential organisation delivering these focused programmes at scale and with clarity of purpose
- Alongside financial support, the British Council recognised as playing a crucial role in supporting the cultural and creative industries with governments across the region.
- Creative economy programmes should be made relevant and bespoke to the country context and would benefit from being delivered over longer periods of time
- Longer-term and facilitated knowledge exchange programmes would also be appreciated (within country, between country in the region and with the UK)
- Allow local ownership and co-creation with facilitating and delivery partners and participants whenever possible. Be open about when and why this is not possible
- Aim to work more regularly in partnership with other cultural relations organisations and foundations to 'streamline' the offers

- Ease bureaucracy for partner organisations as much as possible and/or enable British Council staff to provide additional support to organisations as needed
- Now that digital delivery has been shown to be possible, opportunities to engage with participants outside of cities are seen as particularly important.

Findings from the document review

It is clear from the documentation reviewed that the British Council's activities have an impact on the creative economies across Sub-Saharan Africa. The skills, knowledge, and expertise gained by participants, their increased access to collaborations, and their increased income from participating in the British Council's programmes all contribute to the strengthening of the creative economies in participants' respective countries from the micro-level upwards.

Across the East Africa cluster, the 2019/20 evaluation reported that participants were benefiting from new work, increased income, expanded audience and client bases, and more resilient and sustainable livelihoods and businesses. For example, in Rwanda, six months after participating in the Creative Enterprise Programme over a third (36%) of participants reported an increase in turnover.

In the Southern cluster, post event surveys with participants in the Creative Economy programme suggested that it enabled participants to acquire skills that will help them to build their business and promote their work in ways that will result in increased income.

From the documents reviewed there is less clarity about the extent to which the British Council's activity is directly strengthening the creative economy of the UK. However, participants note increased favourability to the UK and positive benefits from cultural exchange with UK partners, including the increased access to collaborations that are provided by the British Council. For example, in the West Arts Africa evaluation, it was noted that participants who had worked in another context found the experience beneficial to their business

knowledge and felt that they had significantly improved their understanding and appreciation of the exchange country. This 'first stage' impact has wider implications in strengthening the creative economy in the UK, enhancing perceptions of the UK as a positive place to work and collaborate and encouraging increased partnership working between the UK and Sub-Saharan Africa over time, although longitudinal data is required to explore whether this will materialise into long-term impacts.

Findings from 2018-20 interviews

A dominant theme from the interviews was how the British Council Arts programme has contributed to changing perceptions of the creative economy, why it is important to fund, and how 'the Arts' is not just a 'hobby for the privileged'. This was recognised as a deliberate shift in strategy and tone from how some previous British Council Arts work had been presented and received in the region. Looking ahead, it was highlighted that this progress should be maintained and built from in the future.

“ 10 years ago it wasn't clear what its purpose was. Now it is much clearer; a focus on arts, young people and creative industries has really helped them clarify their aims, and the focus on connection building has really demonstrated their value. Connecting to UK and with neighbouring countries has been really important and this connection role across clusters is really innovative and welcomed. British Council has built trust through this change in approach. [There seems] another shift happening now towards a developmental approach – less about providing lots and lots of projects and more about making a longer-term difference. (Stakeholder)

The (Nesta and variants) Creative Enterprise Programme was identified as a useful vehicle for this change, but it was reported by each cluster how it must be made focused and relevant to each country context and that three-days is not long enough for the needs of most participants. It has been useful to introduce

cohorts to concepts and approaches, but now should be considered as laying the foundations to be built from.

“ We looked at the tools and methods that they were using, that Nesta recommended, and applied them to the realities of the [country] context – lack of credit, lack of financial base, lack of government support/subsidy – dilapidated infrastructure. In a UK context the Creative Economy is considered as a core strand of the economy, this isn't the case in Africa – culture and heritage is funded through donations from the west and is often very traditional. This is not a favourable environment for creatives. But this recognition of the contemporary sector wasn't really present in the Nesta CEP Programme. (Stakeholder)

Hub development projects (including Connect Hubs and other, grant-based, interventions) were also identified as contributing useful skills, knowledge, and resources. Although it was raised how this can be made more Africa-centric without losing the links to the UK. Rather than short courses for either emerging creative professionals or hubs it was suggested that mentoring, seed-funding, and long-term commitments will lead to stronger impacts, as well as the opportunity for those benefiting from these interventions to cascade learning among their peers and other emerging professionals.

Respondents indicated that, useful as exchange experiences are, there needs to be greater and more facilitated ongoing exchange opportunities provided beyond the limited project period in order to maximise the ideas catalysed by these shorter-term projects.

“ They [British Council] don't always understand the gap between the creative sectors in Africa and in the UK – we need more focused attention on knowledge transfer. Can't just assume that exposure alone to other contexts will work to change or develop practice. We need sustained exchange of practice and support

to replicate some of the [UK] infrastructure in Africa.
(Stakeholder)

The role of the British Council as funder or a partner was also identified as relevant in how they contribute to the creative economy in a country. In this sense 'investment' and 'collaboration' are two quite distinct approaches which carry divergent, but overlapping, expectations. Several respondents felt there has been a lack of clarity around how much decision making, and programme design are being 'handed over' in contracts.

“ They [British Council] are sometimes flexible, sometimes not. There are limits to what can be achieved from a pre-set strategy and not co-created with participants and partners. A well-intentioned global/regional strategy but made up by UK/British companies and the British Council. There are obvious limits to this. British Council will say 'our strategy is X' and we need 'outputs xxx' – can you design us a programme? And we can work in this way. We recognise this level of compromise. They know that we are the experts in this [country] context. There is some level of co-creation, but sometimes tension and push back, although generally this leads to compromise and adaptation. (Stakeholder)

“ The term 'partnership' needs to be unpacked. Are we a service provider, or a partner? Not always clear and power division here is not clear – are we co-creating or are we doing what you want? 'Yes we are co-creating as long as it gets us this'. This is not a problem, this just needs to be clear from the beginning. When it's one thing, and then changes halfway through, this is what causes problems. Need to be clear about parameters and how much is down to us. (Stakeholder)

It was also highlighted that many young cultural professionals across the region often experience employment insecurity and that the support infrastructure also changes rapidly. A number of respondents felt British Council could do more to work with other large cultural relations organisations, foundations and private sector investors to maintain a year-round offer in creative economy, although this should also be aligning with parallel sectors wherever possible (e.g., digital and technology, education, sustainability).

Another limiting factor around sector development was how the British Council bureaucracy and funding process can be limiting and difficult for partner organisations. Examples included narrow budget field definitions, the requirement for organisations to pay up front (in some cases becoming overdrawn and facing associated fees), and late payments being received. Partnership funding arrangements (i.e., between the British Council and other foundations and institutions) was suggested as another possible option to secure investment in the creative economies in the region even when British Council funds are not available.

Findings from 2020-21 interviews

The support provided by the British Council was recognised as being critical in both a financial and advocacy sense, particularly as many stakeholders reported that this type of support is typically not offered by local organisations or governments. The engagement and willingness of the British Council to invest time and money into the cultural and creative industries is considered to be essential in demonstrating the value of the sector to government.

The provision of financial support to those working in the sector was also recognised as being critical beyond the immediate financial gain, as it demonstrates support for the sector, and belief in its value and contributions. This investment and support was described as playing a catalysing role for creative businesses and entrepreneurs in the region, driving them to test and progress their ideas.

“ One major thing is the support. We don't have this locally – most of the support for the creative industry comes from international partners, it's sad but better than nothing. It helps with trying to

demonstrate the need to the government that they help with development and innovation etc... It's important for an organisation to say that they are invested in creating creative businesses, in creating opportunities for you to export your talent or knowledge – once you have that support it's like having someone to drive what you do. Speaking on behalf of the community, we need that. (Stakeholder)

“ By providing some funding [the British Council] can drive the ideas. The financial support is not always to cover everything but just to demonstrate investment and support and to push us. (Stakeholder)

Over the last 3-5 years it was noted that there has been a shift towards working increasingly as a community across the regions and British Council clusters. Stakeholders reflected on the value of this increased connectedness, which has enabled greater sharing and as a result an awareness of the similarity between the challenges faced by their counterparts across the clusters, and how they can all benefit from working together to solve these challenges collectively.

“ Most of the challenges that are being faced by the creative industries in West Africa, are the same as in East Africa, and similar to Southern Africa, but if we don't have these conversations as a network, we will just recycle the same problems. Now we are engaging with each other, we can work out what we can solve collectively and what can we resolve within our context.

With regards to the dispersal of activities, it was also noted that there can typically be a tendency for activity to be concentrated in select geographies, namely cities. That said, a number of stakeholders referenced the British Council's presence elsewhere in the country and region, and their ability to engage participants in these areas, as being particularly important:

“ There are few similar programmes in Nigeria, and the British Council are able to have a presence in northern Nigeria, which blows my mind about the British Council – and to have people actually be interested in their programmes.

Building on reflections from 2018-2020, exchange was highlighted as a valuable element of the British Council offer, but one which requires careful consideration to ensure it responds to the individual needs of those engaged, rather than taking a more generic approach towards exchange more broadly.

“ Exchange needs to be considered carefully. It shouldn't be lost, but it needs to be made very bespoke to respond to individual needs.

3.2 Intended impact 2: Cultural professionals and artists develop their knowledge, artistic practice, skills and networks contributing to greater prosperity.

Summary

- There was clear and consistent reporting of improved sector-specific and transferable skills with stronger results apparently emerging in the second year (2019-2020), which would also indicate the programme becoming more embedded and coherent
- Some initial findings showing that participants were engaging in cascading knowledge and skills to their peers and communities
- Strong findings across the region that British Council programmes are expanding participants active professional networks
- The challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic helped cultural professionals increase their resilience and adaptability, making them more able to respond to the changing context.
- More formal support for networks could be provided after immediate project activity (e.g. digital or physical 'coffee house' discussion spaces)
- Across the region there is a need to find a balance between supporting the potential of 'close contacts' over time (which is having very strong and significant impact) and enabling new and representative individuals into this 'close contact' group

Findings from the document review

There is a strong sense across SSA that participants gain new knowledge and skills through their involvement in British Council programmes. Through the development of both sector specific and broader business skills, participants

similarly report strong impacts with regards to their confidence, which in turn has enabled them to expand their networks.

Skills highlighted as being developed by participants were comprised of both sector specific skills such as storytelling in film, and transferable skills such as collaboration, teamwork, idea development and broader communication skills. The 2019/20 East Africa Arts Evaluation Report indicates that the programmes delivered during this period were recognised as being particularly effective in supporting the development of new business and communication skills, with 90% of participants reporting that they developed either new or enhanced business skills (of which 59% were new skills), and 92% reporting that they developed new or enhanced communication skills (of which 51% were new skills). This is a significant increase on 2018/19 which reported figures for the development of new skills were 53% and 46% respectively.

Through the development of such skills, the 2019/20 West Africa Arts Evaluation Report indicated that participants ultimately become more motivated in their pursuit of their career goals as well as committing to their learning journeys. British Council projects were recognised as increasing ambition and motivation to progress among participants. In addition to this there are some examples of participants demonstrating an increased desire to share the learnings gained through their participation with their wider community.

Nurturing connections is recognised as being at the heart of the Sub-Saharan Arts programme, across all strands of delivery. A survey of participants in East Africa in 2019/20 found that 93% of respondents gained new contacts through their engagement in British Council supported activity, and 74% established new collaborations and partnerships with those connections established. Similarly, high levels of agreement were also recorded in the West, with 74% of respondents to the end of year survey stating that they have met people through their participation who have become useful members of their professional network.

In Southern Africa, evidence was also highlighted of creative entrepreneurs engaged in British Council programming as being equipped with the skills, confidence and opportunity to develop and engage in meaningful, established partnerships that contribute towards the development of their business, with one

participant commenting that they “have connected with people that will help [them] push [their] business to the next level”, and several others highlighting potential future opportunities for regional and international collaboration. Similar potential for future collaborations was also highlighted by participants in the NICE programme in the West cluster:

“ I have developed strong business relationships and generated leads; all of which are likely to lead to future collaborations.

Findings from the 2018-2020 interviews

While useful for developing knowledge and skills, some respondents indicated that they felt the Creative Enterprise Programme could have been extended over a longer period to enhance its impact. Staff in the Southern Cluster indicated that they felt they had achieved significantly stronger impacts with the Connect Hubs programme precisely because they were able to offer support over a longer time frame and really foster a mutual community of practice among participants.

The stakeholders we spoke to described significantly expanding their networks and knowledge of the Sub-Saharan Africa and UK contexts. This included challenging preconceptions around perceived ‘distance’ (physical and symbolic) and recognising how easy it was to maintain connections digitally via email, text and in some cases video calls. Strong networking was described with the UK but also with cluster-level and regional peers.

“ I feel I really achieved a stronger network. I travelled with colleagues from East and Southern Africa – built networks with them, as well making connections in the UK. Experiencing different areas across the UK and how that affected different approaches to running a hub too. (Stakeholder)

Although it was also suggested that the British Council could take a more formal approach to supporting networks and partnerships at the country, cluster and region levels after projects or grants have finished to ensure that those who are meeting via projects and exchanges are being ‘nudged’ towards keeping in

touch and sharing learning when useful.

An issue that was raised in several conversations was how to balance breadth and depth of impact; the need to bring in large numbers of participants (i.e., those engaging in active learning and development as well as more ‘passive’ audience members), and the need to support specific individuals to maximise their potential, often becoming valuable ‘British Council allies and advocates’ in the process.

It was clear from those we spoke to that prolonged relationships with individuals over several years has led to many significant and transformative experiences for those involved. These long-term relationships are also valuable for building the profile and reputation of the British Council and maintaining lasting and meaningful relationships with UK cultural professionals.

“ The British Council team has a real openness to sharing opportunities. I have also been working with DICE team recently – this feels like a very global platform. These networks have exposed me to a huge amount of knowledge sharing, but also building my own global profile. I’ve had huge leaps forward in my own career because of my association with the British Council. (Stakeholder)

That said, these same individuals highlighted how they felt that the ‘close cohort’ of the British Council participants had to be open to new members who could equally benefit from sustained support over time and that British Council should strive for a balance between supporting the potential of these ‘close contacts’ while also ensuring that the group is diverse and representative of the creative talent in a given country.

Linked to this was an observation that the British Council has not always been the most effective it could be in communicating with diverse and representative participants or audience cohorts and are limited by ‘old school’ and outdated communication platforms, especially the website.

“ A big gap for the British Council is that they [young creatives] don't know what is where – they can't or don't access information online – they can come to the centre and see things in a physical space – we can reach them via the radio show and our social media – [but British Council] need to be flexible to get the people who most need it involved, and the most exciting young people involved. Everyone's using Telegram for formal and informal communication, we need to be flexible and responsive, and it doesn't feel like British Council are up to date with this. (Stakeholder)

Findings from 2020-21 interviews

Over the course of a challenging year, stakeholders who partnered with the British Council to deliver programmes described gaining increased resilience as they were forced to respond to a fast-evolving global context. Together with the British Council, stakeholders described needing to adapt programme delivery on several occasions to respond to changing circumstances and restrictions, as well as being upskilled in new tools and methods of delivery to 'push projects forward...but in a different way'.

“ My team and I were pushed to engage with the digital tools and think about how we are able to equip ourselves. Based on the conversations and programmes we've had since Covid-19 we have implemented the use of other platforms and also programme and project tools like Miro. We are pushing our projects forward still but in a different way – it's ongoing, it's a process we are learning because things change all the time and new things are coming out every day. (Stakeholder)

British Council partners responding to these situations highlighted the support provided by the teams throughout this process and the programme delivery itself as being hugely valuable, referencing the expertise and hands on nature of members of the team in ensuring that impact was being created and the programmes were able to go ahead. Through working with the British Council

teams, stakeholders also highlighted having been supported with regards to monitoring and evaluation, and as a result learning how to understand and measure the reach of their programmes, enabling future impact.

“ [British Council] supported on the M&E side, and we have now learnt how to measure the reach of our programme. We can implement so much because we know how to understand, measure and approach this now. (Stakeholder)

One stakeholder described their engagement with the British Council as 'pushing [them] as a hub leader', as well as with regards to the development of other transferable skills such as public speaking and presenting. Through working with and representing an established, wide-reaching organisation like the British Council, they described being encouraged to progress and develop. The provision of new opportunities through this relationship was described as resulting in a growth in confidence and them being platformed within the wider sector allowing for further development of their network.

“ I'm naturally a shy person but based on the engagement I've had with the British Council – it's elevated me, put me on a pedestal. (Stakeholder)

Those participating in British Council programming referenced an elevation in their skills and knowledge, both in a theoretical and practical sense, and while many described building their networks as a result of their involvement with the British Council, there was a sense that this could go further. As in previous years, participants highlighted a desire for continued engagement with their cohort following the conclusion of trainings, with it being suggested that this could take place through a quarterly Zoom call or in-person meet up hosted by the British Council so as to encourage greater participation.

3.3 Intended impact 3: Arts and cultural organisations in the UK and SSA raise their profile, showcase UK and SSA arts and increase the economic value of their partnerships contributing towards UK's influence and attraction in the world.

Summary

- There were several examples of African artists reporting reaching new audiences across the region and in the UK
- Social media was highlighted as a very effective and important way for this to happen, and it was suggested the British Council could further build from their existing support in this area
- The switch to digital brought about by the pandemic gave stakeholders increased opportunities, including developing partnerships and accessing markets, that helped raise their profile further
- The British Council staff teams were identified as very well connected, approachable and informed. Their developmental role was much appreciated, and they have been able to build trust with stakeholders through long term relationships. They know when and how to respond to ensure connections (within the region and with the UK) can have maximum value
- However, to continue to maximise these opportunities it is important that British Council staff have the capacity to be strategic, to build networks and connections and to support stakeholders into evolving opportunities. This cannot happen if they are always in 'delivery mode'
- Alongside this, stakeholders have a desire to see the British Council reaching more people in greater depth, providing support structures and opportunities that go beyond the perceived elite in a given country.

Findings from the document review

The Sub-Saharan Africa Arts programme seeks to enable the cultural professionals it engages with increased opportunities to showcase their work, enabling them to reach new and bigger audiences and markets. While it is noted in the West Arts Programme 2019/20 Evaluation that there is not a great deal of data available in relation to audience development, it is acknowledged that British Council programmes successfully provide some participants with increased exposure and a greater understanding of their potential audience:

“ [The programme] provides a platform for exposure through a robust arts focused programme that clearly meets people's needs.

“ I typically promote myself through social media, and through attending events, but this gave me a bigger platform to share my work and ideas, and to understand more about what audiences are interested in.

Participants were also reported to have gained increased exposure among new audiences both regionally and internationally through their involvement in British Council programming, with 63% of respondents to the East Africa Arts end of year survey in 2019/20 reporting that they have reached new audiences across East Africa as a result of British Council support. Further from this, respondents were found to have also engaged audiences further afield, with 57% reaching new audiences across sub-Saharan Africa and 39% having taken work to the UK.

It is also important to note that not all new audiences have been engaged 'in-person', with social media being recognised to have acted an important tool by which participants are able to reach new audiences across local, regional and international scales. In 2020, Southern Africa Arts DigiPoems initiative demonstrated the scale by which new audiences can be engaged through utilising several social media platforms, with 16,863 people reported as being engaged through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and 7,629 views received on YouTube and other forms of social media.

Social media was also noted as being a valuable tool for participants whose work might otherwise be only physically accessible by one audience, providing a means by which their work could reach greater audiences located further afield:

“ We had an exhibition in a gallery in Glasgow, that ran from November to December 2019 taking our work to a UK audience. Through social media, our work was viewed by audiences in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Somalia, South Africa, to name a few. There were also articles written about our project on both print and online media like True Love, Times Select, TWYG and This is Africa.

Findings from the 2018-20 interviews

It was broadly held that the 2018-2020 period had been something of a ‘golden era’ for the regional Arts Strategy with several staff members across clusters indicating that they felt they could identify connections activity that was focused on the mutual needs and potential of those involved. It was also stated that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic felt like a massive blow to the momentum that was starting to build across these grants and projects.

Each country team that we spoke to could describe projects they felt had contributed to an improved profile in the UK for artists, sectors, and in some cases the country itself (e.g., the exchange programme between Zambia and Scotland, including exchange between ministers and young people from each country).

At both the cluster, region and international level some participants would have liked more time to connect with local creative peers, it was felt that some of the opportunities were quite rushed and did not provide the chance to fully understand the other contexts or make meaningful connections which could lead to increased co-working or market development. Greater flexibility on the length of time for projects and activities, as well as well-researched opportunities for how best to connect with professionals in the new environments would be welcomed.

As indicated above, several stakeholders that we spoke to mentioned the value of having long term involvement from the British Council; building relationships with British Council staff teams and international contacts (in the UK and elsewhere) by extension. This relationship building and development of trust between individuals was described as essential for sustained profile building to take place and ‘something that happens beyond just one-off projects’.

British Council were described as acting as the ‘glue’ between countries (UK and in-region); having an in-depth understanding of their partners’ needs and making introductions or ‘nudges’ towards programmes and opportunities that are well suited to these needs. This was particularly reported by those who have been associated with the British Council over several years who often described their involvement as ‘transformative’.

These same stakeholders said they would welcome more capacity being built into country teams who they felt were often over-burdened with delivery tasks and did not always have enough time and headspace to think more strategically and facilitate the type of inclusive conversations that could achieve longer term impacts for all those involved.

We had very little data from the interviews relating to the economic value generated by partnerships.

Findings from 2020-21 interviews

The substantive shift to delivery in an online environment that took place in 2020-2021 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic was highlighted as a challenge, however one that appears to have provided many stakeholders with new opportunities to form partnerships, gain access to markets and increased exposure in an international context.

“ Exposure and exchange are important on various scales. It has a way of taking the cap off the mind so that people realise there is another way to do things, that element is key – you can teach people to prepare for a global business, to think beyond Ghana and their community, that their clients can be anywhere, but if they aren’t exposed, they can’t see that. (Stakeholder)

Though in some instances travel restrictions prevented in-person showcasing and networking opportunities from going ahead as planned, alternative digital means ensured that the significant impact of these elements of programming were not lost during this period, and arguably have enabled participants and their work to gain increased exposure, resulting in the receipt of international enquiries and interest.

“ The key benefits from the cohort were the confidence that was developed, and that they were able to showcase to an international market through the films. As a result, they received enquiries from around the world, showcased in magazines, and so we realised it was an impact – they had renewed or increased confidence in their brand. (Stakeholder)

Although access to partnerships on a global scale has become increasingly accessible for some, others recognised a need for the British Council to go even further in this to reach ‘more people in greater depth’, ensuring that the international communities and partnerships established are not reserved for the ‘elite’.

“ I feel like I’m one of the few people who has benefited from the British Council to such an extent. I would like to see more South African artists connecting to global partners – doing more of what they are currently doing, but reaching more people in greater depth. The ‘close’ cohort are well established, but we can’t make this the ‘closed’ cohort. So much of it is about being in a room with similar people from around the world and sharing our method and best practice – it feels quite elite in some ways – so they need to cast the net a bit wider to ensure this doesn’t become stale and narrow. (Stakeholder)

As in the 2018-2020 period, little of the data collected from interviews reflecting on 2020-2021 related to the economic value generated by partnerships.

3.4 Intended impact 4: The UK's international reputation is enhanced through experiences of arts and culture, contributing to our cultural relations and soft power approaches.

Summary

- Participants report clear increased knowledge of the cultural sectors in their own and neighbouring countries, although evidence is more mixed around improved knowledge or understanding of the UK. This is much clearer among those who have been on visits to the UK and those who have been associated with the British Council for a number of years
- There is a generally positive perception of the British Council and that its Arts programme is needed and relevant. This positive regard is potentially then associated with the UK by extension (e.g., a number of respondents indicated the British Council is more 'switched on' than some other funders and organisations), although this would require further research
- Stakeholders welcome increased opportunities for bilateral exchange, and are keen to explore how UK based stakeholders can learn from those across SSA.
- There is also an appetite for the British Council to increasing its role as an enable and catalyst across the region, creating greater opportunities for skills and knowledge sharing.
- Some stakeholders reported that they would appreciate greater clarity on overarching objectives and how this relates to programme requirements. Linked to this, there was a sense that the British Council was not always being clear, open and transparent about what it is hoping to achieve via programmes, and a clearer 'voice' along these lines would be welcomed. This may also then serve to increase trust in the UK overall and, by extension, improved reputation.

Findings from the document review

There is an indication that participants across the clusters and programmes become increasingly aware of the UK's role and efforts in supporting the arts and cultural sectors through their participation in British Council programming. This improved knowledge and awareness was highlighted by the Southern Africa Arts report as fostering interest and enthusiasm among participants, particularly in terms of possibilities for future collaboration.

The end of project report for the NICE programme in the West cluster also demonstrated this improved knowledge of the UK, indicating that at baseline 21% of participants stated that they had knowledge of the UK's support for the film and fashion sectors prior to learning about the NICE programme. Following their engagement with the programme, this figure increased to 92.4% of participants, with one participant stating:

“ Noticed that [the UK] are committed to promoting enterprise development in Nigeria. The way the program is structured makes it clear that they are trying to promote collaboration between creatives in UK and NG and have a clear interest in developing Nigerian creative industry.

Broadly speaking, participants appear to consistently indicate an increase in understanding and awareness of creative and cultural industries contexts following their engagement with the British Council Arts programmes, however this statement more heavily applies to the region and/or cluster in which participants are based, rather than the UK. Although there is a general appreciation that the British Council is providing these programmes, which, by extension can create positive regard for the UK.

The East Africa Arts Evaluation Report for 2019/20 indicates that 90% of respondents to the end of year survey have an increased knowledge of the creative sector across East Africa, and 84% have greater knowledge of the creative sector across Sub-Saharan Africa. The strength of the knowledge and connections developed regionally was however highlighted in reporting as potentially having impacted upon knowledge of the UK sector. This statement referred to a drop in participants who were reported as having stated they had

an increased knowledge of the UK sector, with 49% of respondents reporting this in the 2019/20 period, compared to 56% of East Africa year end survey respondents in 2018/19.

Similar reflections were made in the West Africa Arts report of the same period (2019/20), with respondents reporting very high levels of improved understanding of another cultural context, however when asked to specify a location the majority reported either their home country or another nearby location, with only a small proportion listing the UK (around 2%).

Local and regional networks are of vital significance for developing collaboration, accessing new opportunities, and gaining an increased understanding of surrounding markets, and as a result can provide a platform from which to establish greater international working. However, as indicated in the West Africa Arts Evaluation for 2019/20, if improved understanding of the international cultural sector(s), or the UK sector in particular, is a goal of the programme, the content and approach should be reviewed accordingly.

Findings from the 2018-20 interviews

Many stakeholders described how they had a new and improved perception of the UK, specifically the cultural sector and UK based cultural professionals and creatives, i.e., those they are being connected with. One stakeholder suggested that it felt like the British Council were 'seeking to find common ground to build on' and several stakeholders explicitly mentioned cultural relations and mutuality as clear goals and achievements of their involvement.

Some discomfort was reported from UK partners on how difficult it is to bring African artists to the UK and that some of the existing visa and mobility restrictions did not feel mutual and this may be damaging to the UK's reputation as accessible for business and collaboration.

From a strategic perspective it was queried why a UK partner was often a condition of funding and programme development. While the British Council was praised for largely having local staff teams with relevant experience and strong networks, it was suggested that the organisational aims regarding the UK were not always transparent and clear.

“ The UK partner element can feel a bit forced. You can have a great work proposal that ticks all the local and regional boxes and then the UK partner doesn't really make sense. This can be frustrating (although I haven't had a horrible experience). What does the insistence of British Council for a UK partner imply? Are you doing this to develop the country and the organisation or are you doing to build UK markets? By not being clearer on this they are negatively affecting trust. One of the big points of difference with British Council is that they employ local people – this is such a big difference – but there's still not always transparency – we're second guessing why certain aspects are being insisted upon. (Stakeholder)

More generally it was suggested that the British Council itself was often seen to be 'voiceless' and this in turn increased suspicion that there are ulterior motives in certain activities. This was particularly raised in relation to potential partnerships with other organisations where co-funded or developed projects could clearly meet the needs of a place or a sector but may not be considered 'in the UK interest'. Further clarity from the British Council on its agenda for Africa, and how this relates to the UK government agenda would be welcomed.

Stakeholders suggested that the UK will be thought of more positively if seen to be thoughtful and considerate in how it is communicating its purpose and being genuinely open to co-creation and partnership, recognising local knowledge and supporting full local ownership and agency within projects wherever possible.

Findings from 2020-21 interviews

The British Council was highlighted as being key with regards to the expertise it provides, acting as a convener and enabler of knowledge transfer in the region. Knowledge transfer opportunities were described as vital for stakeholders, creating space to reflect on what has worked well in the UK previously that can relate to what stakeholders are delivering in-country now, what could be adapted, and what can be learnt from. This is further enabled through connecting hub managers with stakeholders and partners in the UK to delve into

this further. In doing this, the British Council was seen to enable knowledge transfer between the UK and SSA, however there is a perception that this can go even further by ensuring that ample opportunities are available to allow stakeholders in the UK to learn from those across SSA.

The UK is upheld as having a 'strong cultural and creative industries policy' from which much learning can be garnered in the region, where a lack of a 'policy backbone' was described as challenging at times. Hub leaders referenced particular challenges with regards to participants not knowing how to safeguard their work and ideas, and so see an opportunity for the British Council to share expertise with regards to this area.

As a significant presence in the region, there was a request that the British Council go further in playing a 'convening and catalysing' role across the region, with particular emphasis placed on exchange of skills and knowledge. It was suggested that this could be achieved through relatively little financial investment, with the British Council acting largely as an enabler, leveraging its positioning and networks to assemble relevant parties and encourage knowledge and skills exchange.

“ The British Council represents one of the oldest, biggest and deepest traditions of creative work across all sectors. My request is that they see a role [for themselves] of convening and catalysing ecosystems like ours through exchange of skills and knowledge. It is low-hanging fruit and can have a really high impact for little investment by bringing together mutual expertise to make the most from existing sources. (Stakeholder)

Conversely, one participant reflected that the British Council model is perceived as being 'quite colonial' and questioned how the British Council will evolve and seek to remain relevant within a changing context that they perceive is increasingly afro-centric rather than euro-centric.

“ Governments are changing, people are, changing, so how does the British Council remain relevant?... Need to change the

position of the cultural sector in terms of infrastructure and outputs... it's about jobs and connections to markets, skills and knowledge. It's about access to information and who can support your creative work from across SSA and globally; networks of support. People don't know what's happening in UK. (Stakeholder)

Similarly to previous years, communication with the British Council was highlighted as being challenging at times. In addition to this, clarity around subjects such as Brexit and any potential resulting changes with regards to the role of the British Council in the region were highlighted as being important points of communication.

3.5 Impact of Covid-19 across the region

Summary

- The majority of delivery pivoted to online delivery. This had benefits, particularly around increasing the reach of the British Council into parts of the region where it would not normally engage, however there were limitations around internet accessibility in some areas.
- In general partners and participants appreciated the British Council's flexible approach to delivery throughout the pandemic.
- With resourcing and budget being impacted by the pandemic, the British Council was less able to deliver activities in the region. Relationship management has been vital to maintaining its presence and ensuring that the hard work carried out by teams across the region is not lost.

The Covid-19 pandemic began to take hold globally just before the start of 2020-21. It brought sizeable changes to the region as individual countries sought to respond to the threat of pandemic within their own borders, including through significant restrictions on movement and gathering. This in turn had a significant impact on the British Council, forcing them to cancel classes – and with it revenue sources – and explore alternative mechanisms for delivery across the region.

At the time of writing the pandemic is still ongoing, and the future continues to be uncertain. To that end, reflections on the impact are based on current circumstances, and lessons for the future recognise that long term stability and “normality” may still be some way off.

3.5.1 The British Council's response to the pandemic

The pivot to online delivery

The biggest shift in the British Council's operations during 2020-21 was a move to online delivery. Where previous delivery in the region was either majority or entirely face to face, restrictions on movement meant that all delivery had to be online in the first instance, with some countries moving to a hybrid model as their individual country context changed.

Across interviews, staff reflected that the shift online increased opportunities for engaging varied speakers as, without the cost of flights and expenses, budgets could be stretched further. This was felt to have worked particularly well for the Creative Hustle and Connect Hubs programmes.

Alongside this, staff were very positive about the Platformer initiative which was initially launched in the Southern cluster before being rolled out across the region. Platformer provided a sharing opportunity for alumni and participants from across the British Council's work, giving them a greater reach and platform for their own work.

Moving online also increased the British Council's reach, engaging a greater number of participants and providing opportunities for cross-country and cross-region participation in ways that would not have otherwise been possible. However, staff also recognised the limitations associated with digital engagement, including the barriers presented in areas where access to technology is not equitable or affordable.

“ We were set up in a really strong way and it was easy to adapt. Contracts were in place, partners knew what was expected, so it was all about ‘how do we shift this’. Other colleagues didn't have this across the region so this meant some good work was lost. (Kenya)

“ We've always said we can't do digital here but we can, it's a pain, but we can and it proves that if you put your mind to it and

invest heavily on hideously expensive that it is possible (Sierra Leone)

- “ I like that we welcomed and embraced digital but a lot more needs to be done about what that means, how we embrace it effectively (Ghana)
- “ All the things around reach, how accessible they are, that’s a blessing. But in terms of accessibility there are also people who are cut out of internet coverage and the technology bracket who may not find it very accessible to get on our programmes virtually. (Nigeria)
- “ The Creative Enterprise project was delivered online, with Malawi and Mozambique. Normally this would mean lots of flights and venues organisation. We managed to get bigger figures than normal and were able to respond positively to needs of participants and partners.(Zambia)

Relationship retention

Staff recognised the importance of maintaining existing relationships during the period of uncertainty created by the pandemic. Across countries effort was put into making sure that, having spent time developing relationships, the pandemic did not undo the work that had been achieved. This included relationships with alumni – for example through the Platformer initiative – who have not always been kept engaged to the same level as active participants.

There were challenges related to this, particularly in light of the traditional perception of the British Council as a funder of unlimited resource. Staff spoke of the need to manage expectations and redefine what relationships looked like in the changing context of the pandemic. In general it was felt that this had been successful.

- “ Personal relationships are key. We need to be really well connected into the sector, working with the right people (Ethiopia)
- “ It was a tough year, we had to make tough decisions about what could be maintained. The year before we had designed a three-year programme to 2021, we had built relationships and expectations with partners. A lot of this was lost (Zimbabwe)
- “ Covid became a strategic shock. When there is no money, how do we communicate our role and value? (South Africa)
- “ We’ve been more creative in trying to engage more with alumni which we didn’t necessarily do before (Senegal)

Resourcing implications

Across the British Council there were significant impacts on the resources that were available in 2020-21. Some of this was related to a drop in the budget that was available for work, however staff also spoke of the significant impact on staffing brought about the pandemic through a combination of redundancies and natural churn.

Staff also noted that these implications were being felt to varying extents by other notable funders in the region, the majority of which also originate in European nations (e.g. Goethe Institute, Institut Français), and reflected that the impact of the covid-19 pandemic was likely to impact on ODA spend for some time.

- “ The size of our programme reduced quite sizably, the funding that was available reduced, but probably It wasn’t a negative impact, it was a reduction in scale and scope of the programming in the cluster in 2020 (Nigeria)

“ The clear negative shift would be that even though its COVID-19 related, we've reduced the team drastically (Ghana)

“ The really frustrating thing was reorganising budgets. Relationships that had been developed for 3-4 years had their planned activity cancelled and it was devastating (Mauritius)

“ It's still not clear what the financial year ahead looks like – especially for face to face provision. We need to have a much clearer sense of which are the digital models to maintain and expand. (Uganda)

3.5.2 Impact of the pandemic on participants and partners

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on partners was varied based on both in-country political context and the approach to delivery taken by the British Council in country.

Whilst these changes meant that participants' and partners' experience of the British Council's programmes was significantly different to a 'usual' year, there were common themes that emerged in interviews across the region..

Flexibility of the British Council

Partners spoke highly of the perceived flexibility that they had experienced from the British Council during the pandemic. Examples given included opportunities to redevelop programmes, change delivery mechanisms, and alter the criteria for grant giving.

By providing flexibility across different contexts, partners felt able to meet the challenges created by the pandemic. It also increased their favourability towards the British Council, seeing the Council as being a collaborative partner within the region.

“ The grant process, that had to change knowing that most creative businesses were the ones heavily affected by the

pandemic. We had an initial idea of doing two grants, but instead, we gave tiered grants (Kenya)

“ The speed with which they reacted was good (Nigeria)

Innovation and promotion

As part of their response to the pandemic, the British Council took a range of new approaches to delivery, including increasing the level of showcasing and promotion that they do within the region and exploring avenues for innovation when resourcing levels varied.

Partners and participants valued these opportunities, and felt that they were good displays of support by the British Council when other forms of support – particularly funding – were not in its gift to give.

“ There was a shift when the pandemic hit towards BC being a source of opportunity for showcasing and promoting and supporting the sector. It changed the relationship from being a funder to being part of the cultural community, promoting support services etc. This was responsive and positive. (South Africa)

Challenges of engaging online

Whilst participants and partners acknowledged that they were grateful that any delivery could happen, there were a range of challenges raised in relation to online delivery.

For some respondents the programmes were more difficult to engage with when delivered online. In particular, respondents felt that it was more difficult to build relationships with other participants when they weren't in the same space. Additionally, being online for long periods of time made it harder to feel engaged with the content, especially when “screen fatigue” set in.

Partners reflected that the move to online wasn't as simple as replicating face to face activity online, and instead needed consideration about how best to deliver

programmes. Alongside this, partners recognised the access challenges that online activity presented for some participants, particularly in areas with less established digital infrastructure and greater costs for the internet..

- “ It was better than not having anything, [and was] informative and interactive in certain ways. Its not as effective as face to face and [lacked] the relationships that get built from time spent getting to chat with other participants and getting to form collaborations. (Uganda)
- “ The reality of virtual fatigue is very real – and one of the things Covid-19 has taught us is that nothing can substitute physical connection, even though we’ve moved online like nothing has changed.(Ghana)
- “ Digital inclusion is a big part of this – affordability. It feels like lots of quick fixes and tech/digital solutions will be directed to and consumed by those who are most privileged, which will only make the rich richer and the poor poorer. (Namibia)
- “ The challenge is that we can’t just copy and paste everything over (M&E included) onto Zoom – this doesn’t mean your participants will follow (Zimbabwe)

Increased opportunities from engaging online

In spite of the challenges partners and participants generally reflected positively on engaging online, and noted a range of increased opportunities created by the shift to digital delivery.

In particular, there was a sense that the move to online delivery enabled a far greater cohort to engage with the British Council’s programme, and that this could stretch beyond the usual reach of the Council.

As well as reaching physically more people, the changed approach meant that, for some programmes, participants could participate flexibly, working around other commitments in their lives. This added flexibility meant that more of the programme could be attended by more participants, creating greater impact overall.

An unexpected impact of online delivery was that, unlike standard programmes, participants could learn from peers in other countries across the region. This fostered additional learning and skills exchange between participants, and inspired new approaches to working.

- “ I was able to participate in more programmes (Kenya)
- “ It was very flexible and allowed me to attend all the lessons (Zambia)
- “ It gave me the image and comparison of my work with others from neighbouring countries. I explored how others in my field work which inspired new services, improving mine, and I networked with many hubs so as to learn from them and for their support in terms of skills and practices. (Uganda)

Partners also spoke highly of the opportunities provided by online delivery, praising both the increased reach achieved and the greater opportunities for reaching a wider range of collaborators than would be possible if activity was to be delivered face to face.

- “ It gave us the chance to incorporate both online and physical events which helped us reach more people so I would say the impact was rather positive than negative. (Ethiopia)
- “ From our 2020 virtual festival experience we saw over 1.2 million people from four continents participate, and we were able

to reach out to 80 collaborators who provides content for streaming during the festival. (Kenya)

“ It enabled us deliver on activities, which otherwise would have been impossible under the current situation. For example, using Zoom, we were able to shares experiences with Fountain Abbeys in the UK. (Uganda)

3.5.3 Learning opportunities from the pandemic

Across the conversations with staff, partners, and participants, there are some key learning opportunities presented by the British Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Access to the internet is likely to be a significant barrier for participants in countries with reduced internet infrastructure. Exploring mechanisms for redistributing travel bursaries as internet access cards can help to mitigate some of these issues.
- Longer term there is an appetite from partners and participants to get back to face to face experiences, particularly for networking and to mitigate “Zoom fatigue”. However, this is balanced with a recognition that online delivery enables greater accessibility and reach. Exploring opportunities for hybrid delivery models can support a wider range of needs.
- Partners and staff valued the opportunity to be innovative in approach and respond to changing circumstances. Greater flexibility in delivery, and enabling countries to respond to their in-country context alongside the wider aims of the region can support further development.
- Relationship management is a key component to the British Council's continued success in the region, and ensuring that partners and participants are clearly communicated with can help to maintain relationships through periods of stress.

4. Key learning at the cluster levels

4.1 East Africa Arts

4.1.1 Key learning 2018-2020

- The cluster-level East Africa Arts programme was well regarded, well-informed and its strategic focus and aims understood by a broad range of stakeholders.
- Changing strategies and funding models at the cluster or regional level can be damaging to important country-level relationships once projects have been approved for development. Avoid this whenever possible.
- Do not lose momentum from supporting ‘core’ suppliers, partners and participants who British Council has developed strongly in 2018-2020.
- Ensure there is adequate resource for ‘centrally developed’ programmes (i.e., at global or regional levels) to be made bespoke to each country context.
- Take time to learn from ‘pinch points’ or adaptation needs when rolling out or scaling programmes. Use skilled intermediaries and delivery partners wherever possible to ensure British Council staff time is available for strategic development.
- This will also allow for learning to be more easily shared across country, cluster and regional levels (building from the work that has already begun in this regard).
- Change the approach to promotion and marketing of projects and opportunities. The current media and social media channels are not the way young people in the region access and share information.

4.1.2 Key learning 2020-21

- The opportunities provided for stakeholder platforming were largely successful and provided creatives with the chance to reach international markets. Continuing to provide these platforming opportunities will help to generate positive sentiment for the British Council.
- The clear communication that the British Council provided across partnership working helped to establish successful working relationships. Stakeholders are keen to see this used as a handbook for future working.
- There continues to be a need to support skills development in the region, with a desire that the pandemic not lead to lost momentum in delivering this.
- The increased flexibility demonstrated by the British Council during the pandemic is seen as a strength, and there is an appetite from stakeholders to continue working in this way as the situation across the cluster stabilises.
- However, where flexibility does happen, there needs to be consideration of how to adapt to the individual needs of participants and specific country context. Stakeholders welcome a more bespoke approach to programme development rather than a generic ‘top down’ approach.

4.2 Southern Arts

4.2.1 Key learning 2018-2020

- Clarity around the three strands and focus on 18-35 age group was broadly welcomed by British Council teams, their networks, and the stakeholders we spoke to.
- The shift to a cluster level strategy appears to have made the practice across country teams more inclusive, and the increased connections and understanding across countries has led to strong cross-country working for teams and participants.
- Positioning the Arts programme within an impact framework of mutual development and benefit (i.e., not just seeking positive UK cultural relations) has transformed the reputation of the British Council across the cluster.
- This has extended to a difference in how the teams operate and are perceived as 'partners developing work' rather than just 'funders of projects', although some tensions around this are still reported by stakeholders.
- The REF reporting systems, particularly Level 2, are not fit for purpose in representing these changes, and a focus on audience numbers does not accurately reflect the impact achieved in the 2018-2020 period.
- Smaller 'cool' countries in the cluster have benefited from collaboration with the Southern cluster to communicate the strategy to partners and co-develop projects across the cluster. Innovative approaches to build from this momentum (e.g., small grants schemes) would be welcomed.

4.2.2 Key learning 2020-21

- The showcasing initiatives designed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic were well received across the cluster, with the Platformer initiative being particularly highly regarded. There was a positive perception that by shifting from predominantly funding to predominantly showcasing and supporting the sector, the British Council could become more of a part of the cultural community in the cluster
- There were challenges with the move to digital delivery in place of face to face, however generally it was felt that the move had been largely successful. Moving forward, consideration of factors such as screen fatigue should be built in to make sure that participants remain engaged..
- 'Cool' countries in particular appreciated the ability to be able to engage with activity across the cluster with the move to online, particularly in light of established perceptions that activity in the cluster is usually focussed towards the larger countries.
- Relationship management is key; staff valued the impetus to maintain networks, and felt that this was particularly pertinent in light of the decreased activity, including cancelling programmes that had been a long time in the planning
- The ability to design in-country context with reflection on global arts strategy was welcomed; mechanisms to continue to facilitate this, particularly as for some countries a greater level of country by country adaptation is welcomed.

4.3 West Africa Arts

4.3.1 Key learning 2018-2020

- The West Arts programme was well regarded and well received within the cluster with clear and strong impacts being reported, particularly among the focused Creative Enterprise programmes (e.g., NICE and Lagos Film Lab).
- Participants and stakeholders indicated that they would like more support for networking and collaboration (with the British Council and with each other) beyond project delivery timeframes.
- There is a need to find a balance between supporting ‘the usual suspects’, which can often deepen existing links with the UK and within the cluster, as well as being open to new talent and individuals/organisations with strong potential.
- A more strategic and long-term approach to establishing connections with UK professionals and organisations would be welcomed, beyond ‘short-term projects with limited KPIs, mutual and co-created outcomes between West Africa and the UK would be appreciated.
- How the British Council positions itself in the region, and is perceived, should be regularly considered and reviewed. The power dynamics of a funding relationship was also raised as something that the British Council should consider carefully to ensure that they are being proportionate and not overly dominant in funding relationships (insisting on banners, reporting of audience numbers etc).

4.3.2 Key learning 2020-21

- As with other clusters, the pandemic caused a significant impact on the ability of the cluster to deliver activities. Stakeholders and partners felt that there was a smooth and effective transfer to online delivery, and there was an appreciation of the speed of transition. Smaller countries also valued the opportunity to link in to programming across the cluster that may otherwise have been inaccessible.
- However the lack of internet connectivity and suitable technology in more rural parts of the cluster and in the smaller countries within the cluster is keenly felt. Providing opportunities to support participants with data access in these areas can help ensure accessibility of the British Council’s programmes.
- Whilst financial support has been less possible over the last year, there is benefit to be realised from the wider showcasing support that the cluster can provide. Continuing to provide this advocacy support can help creative businesses in the region find a platform nationally and internationally.
- Resourcing has been a challenge for the majority of the cluster during this year, particularly in relation to staffing. Mechanisms to ensure fluid data transfer can help to mitigate similar situations in the future.
- Some stakeholder across the region have noted the male dominated nature of the sector. Increasing the proportion of female trainers delivering British Council programmes can help to break this cycle and support new and emerging female-run businesses.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

Overall, the British Council Arts strategy for the Sub-Saharan Africa region has been well received. It is considered as needed and relevant in most country contexts and has been regarded as a welcome shift from previous approaches.

The cluster model has largely been reported as beneficial by staff and stakeholders, particularly for increasing knowledge of neighbouring countries and contexts. However, it was also noted that more thinking may be required on how to balance a strategy and expected impacts between large countries and associated investments (e.g. South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria) and smaller countries.

The identity of the British Council as respected 'partners and co-creators' rather than 'funders' was very welcomed, and attempts should be made to enable localised co-creation and ownership of programmes wherever possible. The 'cut and paste' implementation of externally designed programmes was generally not supported.

British Council teams across the region should be supported to take a more strategic role, developing new contacts and supporting existing contacts, wherever possible.

There were significant impacts across the region as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with nearly all physical activity delivered by the Arts team forced to stop. This necessitated a complete overhaul of a core aspect of the British Council's delivery approach in the region.

Although it is too soon to know the true impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, initial indications are that the pivot to online delivery has been successful and there is a continued role for the British Council across the region as a partner and funder. However, looking to the future it is likely that travel restrictions will remain problematic, especially whilst there are global vaccine disparities. This could impact on the gains that have been achieved by the British Council from 2018-20, and, longer term may impact on the immediate successes realised by

the move to digital in 2020-21. Working collaboratively across the region and enabling countries to make country-context specific adaptations to the global arts strategy and core delivery model can help to mitigate this and support a more Afro-centric delivery model in the coming years.

5.2 Recommendations for the future

This report has been produced at a time when the British Council's approach in the Sub-Saharan Africa region is changing, moving away from the cluster model from 2018-20 and towards a focus on activity at country and regional levels. Alongside this, the Council has recently updated its global arts strategy which has impacts on the work that will be delivered in region.

Looking to the future, we suggest that the following recommendations can help to strengthen the British Council's activity in the region. These have been grouped into two key areas: recommendations for delivery; and recommendations for monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations for delivery

- Online delivery enables participants based across the region to engage with the British Council's programmes. This extends the reach beyond the urban areas where the British Council usually operates and provides increased opportunities for engagement. Even if face to face delivery returns in full, exploring opportunities for hybrid delivery will continue to develop this reach.
- Conversely, the digital infrastructure in parts of the region is significantly lacking, with access to technology reduced and the cost of internet high. Providing opportunities to support digital access – for example by rechannelling travel bursaries into paying for data cards – can help to mitigate this.
- Country teams have worked hard to develop collaborative partnerships across the region. Continuing to deliver in tandem with established organisations and communities in countries can help to strengthen the

British Council's soft power in the region and reduce any perception of the British Council as "top down" or "UK-centric".

- At a point when capacity in the region is diminished, opportunities to collaborate with in-country and international partners (e.g. Goethe Institute and Institut Français) can help to produce programming that is greater than the sum of its parts.
- Showcasing opportunities for current participants and alumni have been well received across the region. Continuing to provide opportunities for alumni to promote their activity can increase the positive sentiment towards the British Council, and also provide a platform for advocacy for the British Council's work in the region.

Recommendations for monitoring and evaluation

- Moving forward, ensuring that there is a consistent approach taken to M&E across the region can support the development of benchmarks and help identify opportunity areas for the British Council.
- For data collection to be successful, there needs to be buy-in from staff across the region. Including countries in the development of new approaches to M&E should help to create this buy-in.
- There have been impacts regionally from staffing changes. Establishing a clear approach to knowledge retention can help to mitigate these impacts both for country teams and across the wider arts team, especially at points where resourcing may be stretched more than usual.

6. Country Profiles

6.1 Country profile: South Africa

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment	£356,711 ²	£472,600	£83,350
Grants	18	16	7
Events	19	6	4
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)	42,687	6,945	23,567

Staff reflections

2018 was when South Africa started working much more at a cluster level. The Theory of Change focusing on Creative Economy, Connections and Festivals did provide a degree of clarity, but it also felt that the 'impact focus' shifted to the cluster level across each of these strands which took some adaptation.

It made sense that South Africa had a strong role in the cluster and were able to work with Zimbabwe and the other 'cool' countries to share their experience of how they had worked previously. There was clear mutual value too in establishing a more geographically inclusive programme and deepening knowledge of the cultural sector ecosystems across and within the cluster countries. However it was also noted that working 'at scale' across the cluster also increased workload and it was not always possible to follow-up with potential new contacts and networks.

² Finance is for the entire cluster

“ [British Council] South Africa can be quite navel gazing, being able to work with other countries in So Creative was a real culture shift and things were firing on all cylinders - but this meant that connections were not always followed up as much as they could be and therefore impact possibly not as great as it could be.

Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies (DICE) became 'officially' part of the South Africa Arts strand in 2019, which felt complementary based on how it had been strategically aligned with existing work in the country by that point. The cluster level impacts of the arts strategy also meant that DICE in South Africa could share this approach with other DICE countries globally and reflect the unique opportunities and advantages of this way of working (i.e., within and beyond the country).

The Festival S project was also identified as particularly impactful in creating meaningful connections across the cluster with UK festival professionals. It seemed like this project was really challenging preconceptions and 'creating a network at scale'. As with many other projects the potential longer-term success was likely negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

The British Council in South Africa has emerged as a dynamic, diverse and intentional supporter of the arts and creative industries. They clearly have a global perspective, and it feels like they are opening conversations beyond just South Africa and the UK, this has been accelerated even more with DICE activities.

“ There is a bit of scepticism about foreign development agents building networks across the country and region – but British Council have developed trust over the years. 10 years ago it wasn't clear what its purpose was. Now it is much clearer; a

focus on arts, young people and creative industries has really helped them clarify their aims, and the focus on connection building has really demonstrated their value.

That said, in trying to improve trust it is important that the British Council itself has a voice. They are good at giving the platform to their collaborators and implementing partners, but it is also important for the sector and public audiences to know what the British Council is thinking and doing, and to what extent this does or does not represent the UK Government agenda.

The team has been very good at building and fostering networks, but it would be good to have a more formalised and consistent approach to this (e.g. regular meet-ups, 'matching' or 'buddying') as it can sometimes feel incidental and reactive (i.e., 'oh you're doing this, you should talk to X or Y'). How to make this work effectively online is another challenge for the team to tackle.

Stakeholders talk of very important and transformative benefits from their association but wonder whether there is a risk of being part of a 'closed group' and how to ensure that all those emerging professionals who could benefit in the country are enabled to be brought in.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

At the start of the pandemic there was a shift away from the British Council being perceived as a funder towards being a source of opportunity for showcasing, promoting and supporting the sector. There shift was described as being 'responsive and positive', making the British Council a part of the cultural community itself.

“ There was a shift when the pandemic hit towards the British Council being a source of opportunity for showcasing and promoting and supporting the sector. It changed the relationship from being a funder to being part of the cultural community, promoting support services etc. This was responsive and positive.

Although this shift was described as positive by some, greater clarity was requested in understanding the role the British Council now seeks to play within this context if it seeks to move away from its perception as a funder. Clear communication and transparency with regards to any changes would be valuable in enabling successful relationship building moving forwards.

“ If you have been a funder – this will still be in people's heads, so need to be clear about what role they are playing and be honest about their aims. What can [British Council] bring to the table? This might take time to change into non-money based relationships. Be open and honest about change in budgets and any background political change.

While some felt the shift to digital working had been smooth and enabled collaboration, others felt as though the British Council could have done more to 'lead the field', sharing innovations and learning from across their international network.

“ Everyone was trying to figure out how to move things online...I would like to see British Council leading the field. Want to see them doing more experimental, honest projects about what the digital world means for artists.. How can they be sharing their learning from around the world to respond? This is when artists really need the institutions.

6.2 Country profile: Zimbabwe

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment	- ³	£390,500	£90,000
Grants	7	10	-
Events	10	9	16
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)	28,844	5,408	72,996

Staff reflections

2018-2020 enabled the team to align the Arts work much more closely to the needs of the sector. This was informed by research and evidence and greater consultation with stakeholders, but more could have been done to explore how impact could be focused at the policy level.

There was a deliberate attempt to shift the working style so that the offer was more appealing to the 18–35-year-olds they were hoping to attract into programmes. This created a change in approach to programme design, as well as how things were promoted. This change, which is ongoing, was described as much more fluid and appropriate to the realities of the creative industries in Zimbabwe:

“ giving partners a voice in what the programme activities look like, putting them at the forefront of creating something new and different, bringing lots of art forms together and responding to

the overlaps between art forms. This all feels more relevant. Spiralling into new work and new networks - catalysing energy.

Working with specific individuals over time to support them to develop their potential has seen some impressive results (e.g., Incubator Zw). Here there is an opportunity to develop people and organisations (i.e., skills and knowledge) across multiple British Council programmes, while also strengthening networks at the country and cluster levels, and with the UK.

Moving towards longer-term programme models (rather than one-off and short term ‘projects’) has created stronger impacts for participants and for the status and recognition of the British Council in Zimbabwe.

“ The idea of the British Council as a funder has changed, [we’re] now thought of much more as partners rather than funders. Feel like supportive partners enabling artists and creatives to do their work; they are not just being ‘supervised’ by a ‘top-down’ institution. We became relevant and present in the sector, and the sector now feels like there is a commitment over time.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

Stakeholders agreed that the perception of the British Council has changed in the 2018-2020 period towards a much clearer partnership approach:

“ They feel much more human, and you can really build relationships, they’re not just an off-putting bank!”.

It was highlighted that some ‘off the shelf’ programmes (e.g. NESTA Creative Enterprise Programme) just would not work in the Zimbabwe context, but that the team was able to work with partners to redevelop content to make it more specific and realistic. This was then able to be further adapted and applied across the cluster as needed.

³ Finance for the entire cluster went through South Africa for the 2018/19 period

The SO Creative summit was regularly mentioned as a great way to connect cultural professionals within Zimbabwe and across the cluster. It seemed like a strong way for the British Council to publicly demonstrate its 'new' approach and identity.

The Zimbabwe team were praised for understanding their role as a promoter of the work and profile of the participants and partners they are working with.

It was suggested that they also need to think about strategically engaging with a broader range of individuals than just the 'usual suspects'. While some individuals have benefited from continued support, these same individuals indicated that there is an ongoing need to bring others in to access the same depth of engagement and impact over time.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

Reflecting on their experiences of working with the British Council during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, stakeholders described the movement of programming online as being 'a challenge but surprisingly successful given the circumstances' and the newly emerging risks presented by working in this environment, with factors such as screen fatigue needing to be given consideration.

Mixed feelings were reported by stakeholders as to the speed with which a response was made to the challenges presented by Covid-19, with some describing the British Council as being 'really responsive, quick to act and really impressive', while others reported that they did not feel things really picked up again until after September.

Although transferring to online delivery has allowed for the engagement of participants and audiences during this period, stakeholders reflected that programming cannot just be 'copy and pasted onto Zoom'. Further from this, it was highlighted that even once appropriate digital programming is in place, infrastructural issues such as network coverage and power outages, as well as access to necessary hardware, means that participants will not necessarily follow. The provision of data as part of online engagement offers was highlighted as one potential solution to this issue, however further discussions

both across the region and in-country were thought to be required to tailor responses to these challenges appropriately.

Other suggestions of ways the British Council may provide support in response to the challenges presented by Covid-19 include new support grants, mentorship opportunities in adaptation to this new context and supported networking opportunities:

“ Keeping relevant digital support is the best thing [the British Council] can do for the moment...people are still adapting to the new normal of digital.

More networking opportunities...recognising how things are different in an online networking situation but still innovating in this space. Covid-19 is still making everyone more isolated, [but we] need opportunities to mix and come up with creative ideas.

6.3 Country Profile: Southern Cluster ‘Cool’ Countries (Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia)

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment	- ⁴	£171,100	-
Grants	8	10	-
Events	12	11	8
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)	16,295	7,693	2,345

Staff reflections

Staff from across the ‘cool’ countries (the term used within the cluster team to refer to those countries with smaller investments in their Arts programmes) reported that there was a very noticeable and intentional shift towards cluster working and that this was largely positive and welcomed. At the same time, the shift in identity of the British Council as a ‘dusty’ organisation that could be ‘putting on a fashion show in a commissioner’s garden’ changed to one of an active and connected partner for a broad and diverse range of creative and cultural professionals.

“ What’s considered ‘mainstream’ creative industries policy in the UK was introduced in this context in a new way. The female DJ project [Rackless Kazi] was really innovative and well received. The concept of ‘The Arts’ changed from being a hobby of the privileged to a future-focused business and industry. It feels like

⁴ Finance for the entire cluster went through South Africa for the 2018/19 period

the programme allowed us to respond to this. Collaboration with other sectors was another off-shoot of this. Brought in partners and collaborators from the UK and across the cluster too.

This shift in perception of the British Council was also described as increasing trust with in-country partners as the organisation could be seen to be genuinely open to partnership and actively listening to their target participants and partners.

Five of the six countries described how collaboration grants had enabled them to develop meaningful projects with UK partners that were largely still having a positive impact. These were described as truly collaborative (i.e., co-created and designed by partners on both sides) and led to changed perceptions in both countries.

There was an acknowledgement that resources were less available and competition higher for work in the strategically lower priority countries. However, it was also highlighted that there is a need to support the British Council staffing levels and resources within these countries as a core way to ensure that the networks and contacts that are emerging can be maintained and galvanised to full effect when new funding or programme opportunities arise (i.e., this is easier to maintain in the larger countries given the size of teams and infrastructure).

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

Recognised a clear shift towards focusing on creative economy and business support. Strong appetite for this from artists and cultural professionals who want profile of creative economy to be raised (as it appears to be in the UK).

Recognition that the cluster model has brought them into closer contact with countries they would not be working with otherwise. Would like longer-term support to develop networks that are established within projects.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

Engagement and exchange with the British Council was described by one participant as respectful and enabling collaboration:

“ Overwhelmingly it's been collaborative with the professionals involved and with the British Council. Respectful exchange feels like the bottom line of all the involvement I've had with the British Council.

However, it was noted by some stakeholders that at times activity can be focused and geared towards the larger countries working within the cluster. More emphasis can be placed upon representing and catering towards smaller countries within the cluster, ensuring that topics of discussion remain relevant across all contexts and countries engaged.

“ Generally, within the cluster, one thing is that there is just much more going on in the bigger countries, so it feels like that the discussions, workshops and content is not as relatable to the smaller countries. Feels like the smaller countries could be showcased more. Feels like the creative sectors of these are not being represented as much as they could be.

6.4 Country profile: Ethiopia

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment	£60,000	£70,000	-
Grants	-	5	-
Events	15	15	1
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)	274	500	-

Staff reflections

Flexibility was key through staff reflections; as well as flexibility in language, the team spoke about the importance of flexibility in programmes that can enable them to adapt to their local context. For example, they noted a number of shared elements between different programmes that provided benefits in delivery, as well as the opportunity to sit some of the previous delivery for Creative Futures under the Creative Enterprise strand with some adaption.

“ Customisation is so necessary. We’re the only key players in this sector working on business support for the creative sector. It’s needed more than ever.

While the East Africa Arts strategy has been broadly welcomed, the transition from Creative Futures to Creative Enterprise Programme was less smooth than the team had initially hoped for. The team noted that resourcing meant that there was only one member of staff available to deliver the Creative Enterprise programme, whilst recruitment to that programme was hampered by a predominant focus on online promotion; only 2% of the population in Ethiopia regularly find out about things using online platforms, which limited engagement

and created a perception of having lower engagement than other countries. Further consideration on how programmes can be promoted would be welcomed.

Staff reflected that language provides a potential barrier to activity in Ethiopia and felt positively that their efforts to adapt content to local languages had helped increase engagement. However, they noted that this barrier also exists when seeking UK partners as, if partners’ working language is English, it can create exclusionary criteria for working within Ethiopia.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-21

The British Council was highlighted as being an important institution in Ethiopia, supporting activities alongside other cultural relations organisations, universities and governmental organisations that would otherwise not be well supported by the private sector. Alongside this however, challenges around the way the British Council is perceived were noted as needing to be addressed, as although significant changes have been made to the brand and identity of the British Council, this could still be further improved. In order to build the reputation of the British Council it is important to consider the way the organisation projects and defines itself as accessible, relevant, and as partnering with and embedded within the local creative community.

“ The Creative Futures programme is great, it feels locally relevant, responsive, owned – not flown in by big international institutions who then make no long-term commitment to local networks and opportunities to build momentum with individuals and groups. There needs to be a focus on developing key individuals via international links who can then spend more time working directly with a broad range of local participants.

Recognising the creative sector within the context as a rapidly changing landscape, stakeholders emphasised a need to engage and relate to newly emerging graduates, and to establish means by which cross-sector partnerships can be formed. A need for flexibility and responsiveness in engaging these

young creatives was also emphasised so as to ensure programmes are accessible to those who need it most. Enabling connections within this landscape was also highlighted as key, with sustained exposure to UK partners creating new opportunities, but an insistence that these need to be supported long-term.

“ Networks can be so powerful, but you need to make a long-term commitment, and then find that the impacts come later.

Whilst numerous positive experiences of working with the British Council were highlighted by stakeholders, it was also reflected that at times, working with British Council and other similar international organisations can be overwhelmed with bureaucracy, and that there is a need in some instances for approaches and methods to be localised and made specific to their context. This was also recognised in the sense that the system by which the British Council operates can often be restrictive with regards to matters such as finance, and that delays or slow progress in making payments can act as a barrier to engagement with some smaller organisations.

6.5 Country profile: Kenya

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment	£240,000	£100,000	£43,378
Grants	-	20	5
Events	-	25	6
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)	1,023	2,000	40,649

Staff reflections

The 2018-2019 period was described as a good moment for the programme in Kenya, when they found that they were really hitting their stride. Through recognising the needs and enquiries that were coming through the team were able to respond and regain the trust of the cohorts they were seeking to engage. Having received the updated sector analysis reports, in 2018-2019 the team were able to highlight and focus on film, fashion and festivals, and as such were able to communicate a clear British Council offer in relation to these sub-sectors.

Mobility grants were highlighted as being a particular success of this period, enabling travel within the region and regional collaborators who did not know each other to build relationships. The necessity of these grants in achieving mobility within the region was emphasised, as building this foundation would then enable mobility both within the cluster and with the UK.

“ Nyege Nyege as a festival (Uganda) came into the British Council family via a mobility grant to get Kenyan artists to appear at the festival. Flights are expensive, but British Council were able to remove this risk from the artists themselves. We

went from 3 to 30 artists, and this also brought new audiences, both within Uganda and from Kenya. The fruits of this can still be seen.

“ Jalada made a strong connection with Edinburgh International Book Festival via Momentum, and then Nick Barley came to Kenya in response. They have set up a longer term arrangement, and this has continued to go from strength to strength...these relatively small scale mobility grants are having a huge impact.

The team highlighted encountering difficulties with projects not taking off because of internal bureaucracy, or decision-making resulting in plans being stopped or funds redirected, as having the potential to cause lasting damage to the relationships and trust built by country teams. Such challenges can be avoided in future through clear communication with country teams in advance to allow for preparation to accommodate such shifts in strategy.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

The British Council in Kenya was described by stakeholders as having gone above and beyond in enabling and supporting participants and the delivery of projects between 2018-2020. Engagement in British Council programming was described as have played a key role in the strengthening of international professional networks, connecting those based in Kenya with the UK, and vice versa.

Stakeholders described the opportunity they were afforded to develop skills in cross-border collaboration and networking, and the vital role the British Council played in enabling them to build long term connections and professional relationships. It was also noted however that in some cases, despite the British Council teams best efforts, logistical challenges, particularly with regards to travel, were encountered. These challenges, though manageable, were highlighted as having the potential to challenge the nature of exchange within

projects being delivered, and as a result hinder further opportunities for collaboration:

“ It was so easy to get UK artists to Kenya, but it was embarrassing how difficult it was to get Kenyan artists back to the UK. It was out of our control, but everything we do is built around equitable exchange, so that felt quite uncomfortable.

When reflecting on their experiences of working with the British Council, stakeholders engaged highlighted ‘flexibility and trust’ as two key defining terms. The British Council team were described as being demonstrably passionate and invested in the work being delivered, and as a result has been able to build positive and lasting relationships with stakeholders, making them feel valued and encouraged. It was also recognised that where challenges were encountered in terms of wider British Council systems i.e. administering of grants and cash flow, whilst noting the internal issues surrounding flexibility, the team did everything they could to be flexible and advocate for them.

“ The British Council have hired the right people. They speak to us in such a warm and generous way, so I keep coming every year and am met with such enthusiasm, openness to collaboration – always giving off an energy that more still can happen. Whenever it is a Momentum thing, I make time for it.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

As in 2018-2020, transparency and flexibility in the face of Covid-19 was reported as being a valuable asset within the British Council, as stakeholders were supported to adapt delivery as required to fit with the new global context. Despite the limitations put in place by travel restrictions, stakeholders partnering with the British Council who were due to travel as part of their programming described being able to platform creatives through alternative methods, such as various forms of digital media. Through showcasing creatives work to an international market in this way, participants received international enquiries,

opportunities to showcase their work in magazines, as well as increased confidence in their work and brand.

“ The fact that British Council changed the grant process was very accommodating. Some funders come in and say ‘this is set in stone’ – but they weren’t like that. We did business support sessions to make sure the grant was being used properly by the businesses – but the fact the British Council was able to accommodate and give every participant a grant, was very responsive to the times – and they [the participants] were so impacted...The way the BC team handled it was very transparent and flexible.

More successful partnerships with the British Council were described as being enabled through effective communication at an early stage of the partnership. Sharing a handbook that stipulates every step of the process, including the requirements with regards to publication design, logo placement and so on was highlighted as assisting in setting expectations and allowing for better planning and a more fluid approach to partnering.

“ It allows for more fluid, better planning on our part if we don’t have to keep going back. If we were told at the start, we could’ve planned it in this way, so it takes us more time and they aren’t paying us more. It would be good to have a handbook, just a pdf they update every so often, so you are fully in the know when you start a project...it just allows for better partnerships.

6.6 Country profile: Uganda

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment	£90,000	£10,000	£22,900
Grants		15	3
Events	25	34	38
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)	300	2000	37,427

Staff reflections

The time between 2018 and 2020 was described by the team in Uganda as being a great year for growth, during which their credibility and recognition changed hugely. Through programmes including Creative Enterprise Programme (CEP), as part of which they worked alongside Nesta, the team were able to develop direct links to both the arts scene in Uganda and internationally.

The team reflected that during this time they tried to grow programme delivery across the wider cluster. This was described as being done in a way that assumed the knowledge and design of programmes in Uganda could be transferred to other country contexts with minimal adaptations, however the team learnt this was not the case, with delivery of the CEP in Ethiopia working very differently. The team learned from this process and were challenged to ask themselves what a programme needs to be scaled and grown, and in doing this they were able to ensure that delivery was more successful in Kenya, applying lessons learned. This process demonstrates a culture of review and reflection which was recognised by the team as having been more strongly developed during this period.

The staff team also reflected that in order to ensure continued development and learning, it is important to consider how they can best learn from existing work on a regular basis, in a way that does not demand significant internal resource. The formation of a cross cluster creative economy working group had a significant positive impact. It was however also recognised that in order for this working group to reach its full potential Arts Managers need to be given the capacity to participate.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

Stakeholders described their work with the British Council as acting as a catalyst for developments both specifically for their business and within the wider regional ecosystem. One such example of this was highlighted as being that through programme delivery the British Council have played a role in both encouraging and enabling the emergence of multiple hubs across Uganda.

“ Working with British Council has been the gift that keeps on giving.

Through their involvement with the British Council, stakeholders described having been able to develop their professional networks, which have remained active, in addition to building established lasting relationships with both British Council and partners within the cluster, region and in the UK. Further, it was suggested that the British Council's aim to provide a safe space for cultural values to be explored and exchanged was achieved through participants experiences, acknowledging that all the interactions with peers from other countries had been enlightening in different ways.

Stakeholders engaged also reflected that whilst their association with the British Council had been transformative, it remained unclear to them if the impact achieved demonstrated the full potential of the delivery taking place, highlighting a need for more focused attention on knowledge transfer, and a shift away from the assumption that exposure to other contexts can alone achieve this.

“ There needs to be more focused attention on knowledge transfer [between the creative sectors in Africa and the UK]. We can't just assume that exposure alone to other contexts will work. We need sustained exchange of practice and support to replicate some of the infrastructure in Africa...but the association with the British Council has been transformative, providing a really strong return for the level of time and resources invested, it's just not clear if the impacts are being fully achieved as much as they could.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

Skills support and development were highlighted by stakeholders as being areas of significant need, and although the British Council is already working here, there was a request that momentum not be lost as we move forward. As a significant presence in the region, there was a request that the British Council carve out more of a role for themselves as a convener within the ecosystem, catalysing and enabling the exchange of knowledge and skills.

“ The British Council represents one of the oldest, biggest and deepest traditions of creative work across all sectors. My request is that they see a role [for themselves] of convening and catalysing ecosystems like ours through exchange of skills and knowledge. It is low-hanging fruit and can have a really high impact for little investment by bringing together mutual expertise to make the most from existing sources.

Exchange, while a critical element of the British Council offer, was described as needing more careful consideration, being adapted and responding to the individual needs of those it engages, taking a more bespoke rather than generic approach.

“ Exchange needs to be considered carefully. It shouldn't be lost, but it needs to be made very bespoke to respond to individual needs.

As has been reported elsewhere, there was a sense that despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, the British Council enabled programme delivery to go ahead successfully through their flexibility and willingness to support stakeholders in adapting works that were underway to ensure similar levels of impact.

“ The British Council used different methods and technology to deliver despite the challenges of Covid and to enable similar levels of impact...There was an issue of time, but they have been flexible and adapted, adding time on at the end, being flexible when the trips weren't able to happen, that meant we had more money to spend elsewhere instead of travel – so that was really helpful.

6.7 Country profile: Ghana

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment		£119,000	£25,000
Grants		13	4
Events		18	3
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)		7,040	40,134

Staff reflections

Within Ghana, activity for the Arts team began with a significant scoping of the creative industries across the country in order to prioritise delivery activity. Although there was a recognition of the greater level of establishment of both the music and fashions sectors the team chose to focus on the film sector. This was in part driven by the success of a number of recent Ghanaian films, including two which were purchased by Netflix.

Staff reflected that the Creative Hustle programme had been incredibly successful and was working well for the sector in Ghana, providing a well-rounded offer that the team found to be popular with the local sector. In particular, they recognised the value of the networking opportunities Creative Hustle provided, allowing people to build relationships with individuals who they may not have had access to typically.

The balance of activity across Ghana was not uniformly successful, and staff felt that events in Kumasi were less successful than those hosted in Accra. This was felt in part to be due to the Arts team being based out of Accra, as well as limiting factors created by the geography of Ghana, as well as language-based barriers; much of the local population in Kumasi speak in a local dialect.

There is a recognised need for the team to prioritise becoming more present and visible within the creative community in Ghana. Staff also reflected that there is a potential risk of audience disengagement with the British Council as a result of rejections due to a misunderstanding or lack of clarity regarding the role and offer. The team have an ambition to increase awareness of what the British Council can offer, and to ensure that relationships do not sit solely with individuals within the British Council to mitigate these needs and risks.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

Amongst stakeholders spoken with in Ghana was a sense of the learning opportunities provided by working with the British Council. This was realised in both a practical sense, such as project management skills, and in a wider sense of learning from partners shared and differing experiences; stakeholders were keen to stress how much they appreciated the open dialogue that the British Council fostered.

Stakeholders also reflected that building a relationship with the British Council felt like both a validation of their work and an achievement of itself. In particular there was a recognition that some aspects of the cultural ecosystem in Ghana are relatively unknown, and stakeholders spoke of being able to act as brokers “bringing those two worlds together”.

An important question was raised by stakeholders around the legacy impact of the British Council’s work in Ghana. This was identified as being both the legacy of the impact on the individuals participating in the West Africa Arts programme as well as creating a sustainable opportunity that can continue to be delivered and developed.

Longer term, stakeholders felt that the British Council is making good progress in highlighting the creative industries in Ghana and the next step is to integrate their activities more fully with lesser developed aspects of the creative industries to provide a robust creative business education that can support creatives to develop their work and practice.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

In light of the challenges resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Council was described as making a smooth and effective transition to online delivery, providing hubs with the support and assistance they required, and moving at pace to ensure a loss of momentum was not experienced wherever possible.

“ The British Council have been good at transitioning and making use of digital platforms...they provided the necessary help that hubs needed...they have done really well! Everyone was trying to respond, but the British Council as an institution moved fast to respond.

One of the most significant benefits of being engaged with the British Council was highlighted as being the support provided by the organisation. Stakeholders reflected that support isn't available locally, with most of the support for the creative industries coming from international partners, and that the presence and engagement of the British Council with the sector demonstrates its value to the government.

The financial support provided by the British Council was also highlighted as being extremely valuable, as while this support may not cover all costs, it demonstrates investment and support for the sector and those within it. This investment and support was described as playing a catalysing role for creative businesses and entrepreneurs in the region, driving them to test progress their ideas.

“ It's important for an organisation to say that they are invested in creating creative businesses, in creating opportunities for you to export your talent or knowledge – once you have that support it's like having someone to drive what you do.

It was recognised that over the last 3-5 years there has been a shift from working in silos to better working as a community, as stakeholders are being

encouraged to work with other hubs and leaders across the region. This was described as having the impact of opening stakeholders' minds and allowing greater working across borders, creating opportunities for knowledge sharing, an increased awareness of other potential markets and an understanding of how to best serve and access said markets. Stakeholders reflected on the critical value of this increased connectedness, resulting in a greater awareness of the similarity between the challenges faced by their counterparts across the clusters, and how they can all benefit from working together to solve these challenges collectively.

“ Most of the challenges that are being faced by the creative industries in West Africa, are the same as in East Africa, and similar to Southern Africa, but if we don't have these conversations as a network, we will just recycle the same problems. Now we are engaging with each other, we can work out what we can solve collectively and what can we resolve within our context.

Stakeholders emphasised the male dominated nature of the creative industries in Ghana, and that similarly the trainers engaged in British Council programming tend to be male. Looking to the future, there was a desire to see more female trainers engaged, recognising the valuable role they could play impacting female participants and female-run creative businesses.

“ Having women share their journeys and lived experience...if we could have more female representation [in the training] we might see the impact on female creative businesses.

6.8 Country profile: Nigeria

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment		£606,000	-
Grants		15	-
Events		57	23
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)		113,747	1,738

Staff reflections

During this period the team in Nigeria has been focusing on understanding the Arts and Creative Sector across the country as a whole. Within this work the team have actively sought to look beyond Lagos, whilst acknowledging that the city has the most advanced ecosystem of creative professionals across art forms. Through these mapping exercises the staff team have been able to begin strategic planning at a country level. The anticipation is that this will be a long-term exercise that can both guide planning whilst also having enough flexibility to be responsive to shifting agendas and changing needs as they emerge.

Within the conversations around strategic planning, staff reflected on the importance of dialogue and reflection for the British Council, noting that:

“ We need to have more moments for reflection and discussion; open, respectful, data-driven conversations with the sector and designing programmes on this basis. We need to be able to ‘feel the pulse’.

Staff commented on the strong impact realised by the Creative Enterprise projects taking place outside of Lagos (in Kano, Owerri and Abuja). As part of

the process of delivering these there had been some necessary adaptation of the content to make sure that it was suited to those with less experience of the creative industries. Staff did not consider this to have had a negative impact and reported that the projects received a good response and appear to be supporting emerging creatives across the country as a whole. This has had the knock-on effect of creating stronger networks between these professionals and with the British Council outside of Lagos.

Skills and training opportunities for young people in Nigeria were highlighted by staff as the next challenge and opportunity for the British Council. There was a desire amongst staff to ensure that young people can access opportunities that give them tangible skills and strong ties and connections with each other and with the UK. Staff noted that working with partners – including those in higher education – would be key to realising this challenge and making a significant impact on young people entering the creative industries.

More widely, staff reflected on a need for the British Council in Nigeria to stay connected to the sector, recognising that if, moving forward, they want to be considered as a partner rather than ‘just a funder’ there is a need to be connected into the local creative ecosystem and be seen to be available. This had particular resonance in relation to the British Council’s Connecting programme and a need for more strategic planning of the links needed across the country, cluster, region, and with the UK to ensure that the connecting programme is specifically meeting the needs of the creative sectors and sub-sectors that could most benefit in Nigeria.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

Sector stakeholders were generally positive when speaking about their experiences of working with the British Council. When reflecting on the opportunities provided by the British Council, stakeholders noted that the opportunity to have open and safe dialogue across a range of different topics was something that was valued, whilst the opportunity provided by the British Council to have a strategic focus on specific artforms was seen as a benefit of working with the British Council.

However, there was a recurring reflection on the need for strong engagement, transparency, and clarity. For example, some stakeholders reflected a need for greater clarity around funding requirements, particularly in relation to the organisations that were – and were not – eligible for different funds.

Similarly, it was felt by some stakeholders that the partnerships element of the Creative Economy programme was not as well developed as it could have been. These stakeholders felt that there was a missed opportunity to enhance the participants' experiences, regardless of whether this was done physically or virtually.

Stakeholders noted that there are core partners and allies for the British Council across the country as a whole. Engaging fully and providing strong and mutual connections with key stakeholders across the arts and creative sectors was seen as integral to the continued success of the British Council in Nigeria.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

The British Council's presence across Nigeria was described as being of extreme importance by several stakeholders. While many intervention programmes in the region are seen to be structured to focus on Abuja and/or Lagos, the dispersal of activities by the British Council across the country was described as enabling partners to reach and engage new audiences and communities.

“ The main benefit has been the additional exposure it has given us and our ecosystem. A lot of the intervention programmes in Nigeria run by internal organisations and foundations are structured to have an Abuja and/or Lagos focus, so for us the fact that this project could get to our region demonstrates a significant boost and improvement.

In the past British Council supported activities have taken place in cities like Owerri, but this project was unique, in that it helped us to reach participants in places British Council haven't done stuff in a while. This project, because it was virtual, gives

opportunities to new people through that – this was a major plus of the programme and delivering virtually.

“ There are few similar programmes in Nigeria, and the British Council are able to have a presence in northern Nigeria, which blows my mind about the British Council – and to have people actually be interested in their programmes.

The transition to online delivery as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic was described as having mixed implications by all stakeholders engaged. The British Council were seen to enable quick and smooth transitions, however while digital programming enabled access to new audiences and communities, connectivity and access to the internet continued to pose significant challenges which will need to be considered in future planning.

“ [The pandemic] has been challenging, but it has also encouraged us to try new things...The pandemic has exposed people in the government to the experience of broadband...It's important to highlight the fact that through this experience we realised people can learn from anywhere that they are - so more virtual programming needs to be put in place to reach people more easily.

Through engaging ex-participants and others within the sector, the British Council is seen to value those who are able to relate to individuals engaged in programming, championing and providing a platform to those where other organisations may demand more experience.

“ It's really great that British Council could give me that opportunity...Other organisations would have wanted more experience, maybe looked down on you, but British Council wanted to work with someone who could influence the people they were speaking with and be relatable.

6.9 Country profile: Senegal

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment		£55,000	-
Grants		5	-
Events		13	16
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)		15,913	959

Staff reflections

For staff the Creative Hustle programme was highlighted as having delivered high quality content and it was felt that the format, which included engaging speakers, was successful in Senegal. However they team felt that programme attendance was not as high as initially anticipated.

Linked with this, staff spoke about how within Senegal there are very few creative entrepreneurs making a living solely through their creative practice. It was felt that the majority of this community assume that funding is the key issue that they face, with an expectation that increased access to capital could help entrepreneurs to increase their profit. However, the team at the British Council reflected that the real area of need in Senegal is around capacity building, and have seen this as a way to develop lasting impact in the country.

Within the work programmed in 2019-20, the team noted that they had taken a more focused approach towards gender and had been targeting recruitment of women to British Council activities. Staff reported making this decision in direct response to a recognised need within Senegal for women to have greater access to training opportunities. In particular the team noticed that women were struggling to access capacity building opportunities due to barriers such as care duties to their community and family

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

In interviews with participants, the high level of potential within the Senegalese sector was noted as being a great opportunity however it was felt that the existing structures within the country are not sufficient to support emerging projects. They wanted to see opportunities that can support and nourish professionals, providing opportunities for them to gain knowledge and understanding of other businesses' experiences.

Participants spoke highly of the training that they had received from the British Council, and felt that it had given them the space to consider the impact of their work. They also valued the opportunity to collaborate with other participants, commenting on the legacy relationships that had been created, including supporting each other's work.

When reflecting on growth opportunities, participants wanted more opportunities for formalised follow-up activity, including opportunities to reach wider audiences. The latter was perceived as having benefits for recruitment as it would enable cultural and social entrepreneurs to share their experiences and inspire others to take part in programmes.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

Stakeholders reflected positively on their experience of British Council programming, particularly in relation to those facilitating the sessions. One stakeholder highlighted that greater preparation early on or in advance of the sessions would allow both the participants and those delivering the programme 'to understand where everyone was at'. This approach was thought to allow those leading the sessions to provide more valuable insights and advice to those attending, essentially tailoring the programme content to fit the needs of participants.

Despite the positive experiences of stakeholders in relation to programming, there was described as being a 'disconnect' between the perspectives and approaches of some of the UK-based programme leaders compared to those living and working on the ground in Senegal and the wider region. As such, it was reflected that programming in the future may benefit from engaging more individuals based on the continent.

Looking to the future, participants noted that despite the uncertainty and challenges they are faced with in light of the pandemic, new opportunities have also arisen as result. For some, the greater establishment of distance learning and its associated expectations has presented an opportunity for the expansion of their network, with hub leaders looking to engage teachers and experts who they might not have had access to previously or had to fly in from the UK or USA.

6.10 Country profile: Sierra Leone

Outputs 2018-2021

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
British Council investment		£52,000	-
Grants		4	-
Events		7	5
Face to face participants and attendees (including online attendees)		7,432	85

Staff reflections

Staff in Sierra Leone identified three key industries as their programme focus: film, music, and fashion. The latter provided a natural opportunity for supporting people into and through the fashion industry due to the strength of Sierra Leone's indigenous craft, particularly around tailoring and dressmaking.

Given the comparative scale of activities in Sierra Leone compared to some of the other countries in the West Africa Arts cluster, staff created the Freetown Film Lab by adapting the existing model in Nigeria (Lagos Film Lab). This adaptation required staff to take the specific context within Sierra Leone into consideration; alongside the existing programme of informal and self-directed learning, staff recognised a need for this to be complemented by more formal opportunities for training and development.

Alongside this, staff reflected that the Creative Economy programme had been very well received. It was felt by staff that it attracted people who really wanted to learn and connect, with staff reflecting positively on the deliberate attempt made to reach those who may not have known about the programme previously. Staff noted that participants are now in an active professional network, and this was seen as a marker of success of the British Council's activity.

Looking ahead, staff reflected on a need to continue to focus on partnership building. They recognised the importance that this has in helping the British Council to unlock additional funding, and can also help the team to achieve greater scale for certain interventions. However, this need was balanced by the resource need that is required to build partnerships, with staff recognising that development will take additional time and resource if it is to be done alongside the delivery and monitoring of programmes.

More widely, staff feel that there is a need to better understand the sector outside of Freetown, with an ambition to begin to deliver programmes across the 15 other districts. Staff felt that growing the Arts/Creative Sector ecosystem and market is something which, as well as being required in the capital, should be an aim for the country overall.

Stakeholder reflections 2018-20

Stakeholders value the support that the British Council provides, giving them the opportunity to increase the scale and quality of their programming in ways that would not otherwise be possible in Sierra Leone due to the nascence of the creative industries.

The clarity provided by the British Council was also reflected on positively by stakeholders, who felt that they had a good understanding of the resources and finances that would be available to them through the duration of their contract. Stakeholders also valued the level of flexibility that was provided by the British Council, although they reflected on the difficulties in maintaining this flexibility as the Covid-19 pandemic began to emerge.

Within the conversations, stakeholders spoke about the value of the relationships that had been developed through their work with the British Council, both at the Council and more widely across the West Africa region. They reflected on the benefits of these relationships for exchanging ideas and information as well as collaborative problem solving, noting that they had been able to maintain relationships with the majority of people they had interacted with through their work at the British Council.

Stakeholder reflections 2020-21

Where in-person delivery was able to continue during this period, stakeholders partnering with the British Council described feeling supported and enabled throughout this process. Adapted approaches to delivery and the implementation of additional health and safety requirements and protocols were necessary for in-person delivery to take place. Stakeholders described receiving both practical support, such as finance and additional resources where required, such as face masks, but also emotional support and reassurance, which was equally valuable considering the context within which delivery was taking place. Overall, the various forms of support provided by the British Council team together allowed for the programme to be delivered successfully in-person despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

“ British Council were spot on in terms of their Health and Safety protocols...they enabled that process, so on a really practical level they were very helpful. They paid for each lab, they paid for facemask production, every lab had a special mask made for all participants, they issued personal hand sanitisers...they had the highest level of Health and Safety protocols that you can find in Sierra Leone!

We received the support we needed to pull it off, not only in terms of finance, but the British Council were always checking in, making sure we were okay and able to deliver in the way that we needed, they were joining in the sessions – they made sure we got the support we needed to deliver this successfully.

“ [Covid] stopped a lot of things, it messed up a lot of things, [but] the British Council outdid themselves...They wanted to keep us safe whilst empowering us...The film labs were successful – even when you talk to other people you'll hear the same thing, it was a success despite Covid.

One participant described valuing the diversity in the creative sector encouraged by the British Council, stating that ‘some people think that jobs like this are not for people like us’. They highlighted the significant presence of women in attendance at the programme in which they took part and described feeling both supported and empowered throughout the process. This participant went on to describe the British Council activities they attended as having impacted their career aspirations, demonstrating to them that a career and future in the creative sector is obtainable.

“ I'd given up...I decided to become a lawyer...I can always go back and continue to be a lawyer, but being a filmmaker for me – there's a future in it, it's a job that makes me happy, that's an excellent choice for me. I'm super excited!

Appendix: Methodology

We took a three-stage approach to generate data and findings for this report:

Document review of monitoring and evaluation data collected as part of the 2018/21 programme

We received existing evaluation reports from across the region which covered the period 2018-20. This was generally in the form of written reports evaluating programmes at a cluster level, although we also received some reports that focussed on activity within a specific country, particularly in relation to activity in Nigeria and Kenya.

The level of detail within these evaluations varied by programme and cluster; one of the longer term recommendations for this project will be to create a unified approach to monitoring and evaluation across the region as a whole.

Alongside this, we requested a series of data metrics for each year from each country in the region. These were used to collate a series of outputs at a cluster and regional level, and are presented in chapter 2.

Detailed consultation with the three cluster teams

We held a round of consultation calls with country teams across the East and Southern Africa Arts clusters. We used these as a mechanism for understanding the needs, success, challenges and future plans for the 2018-20 period. For the countries within the West Africa Arts cluster we utilised the consultation calls carried out in March 2020 for BOP's evaluation of the West Africa Arts programme. These conversations were held in two tranches; one at the beginning of the evaluation to orient ourselves to programme structures and context, and one later in the process to conduct the interviews for 'country profiles' exploring country-level needs, successes, challenges and future plans.

In-depth qualitative interviews with participants and partners of the 2018/21 programme

We conducted 30-60 minute interviews with representatives from across the SSA region countries and programmes (n=27 between March and May 202).

These were analysed using a 'framework analysis' approach whereby the interview notes were thematically coded against the outcomes from the Theory of Change, alongside useful findings not already captured in the existing framework. These interviews provided a 'gap filling' opportunity to capture data not already covered by existing evaluations, and the outcomes of these calls were used to inform the stakeholder reflections in the country profiles.

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BOP Consulting is an international consultancy specialising in culture and the creative economy.

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