
A Cultural Relations Approach to Development

**Why and how the British Council approach to
development works**

August 2024

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The interpretations offered in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the British Council, its officers, or those individuals who contributed to the research. Similarly, the authors take full responsibility for any errors.

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List of abbreviations

C4HIG – Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth

CPF – Cultural Protection Fund

DAC – Development Assistance Committee (OECD)

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport

EC – European Commission

GNI – Gross National Income

LMIC – Low and Middle Income (countries)

ODA – Official Development Assistance

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

TA – Technical Assistance

ToC – Theory of Change

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

Foreword

As global development evolves in the twenty-first century, the quest for sustainable and inclusive growth continues to challenge traditional paradigms, urging us to explore innovative pathways to building trust and international cooperation. It is within this context that the British Council has sought to interrogate the underlying validity and potential of a Cultural Relations approach to development. This report, written by Impact Stories, represents a formative piece and stands as a testament to the British Council's commitment to defining its role within the development sector, but also to advancing our collective understanding of Cultural Relations as a catalyst for positive change.

For the first time, the British Council has commissioned a comprehensive investigation, employing a multifaceted methodology that includes a literature review, regional workshops, in-depth interviews, and an expansive survey. The objective was clear: to assess the efficacy of the Cultural Relations approach to development work and begin the conversation of how to embed it within the broader development discourse.

The findings of this report are illuminating and encouraging. They affirm the British Council's position as a specialist player in the development arena, recognised for its strengths in leveraging the English language and education as tools for development, and in certain contexts, extending its influence to the wider arts and culture sector. However, the research also reveals a critical challenge—the need for clearer articulation of the British Council's role and the tangible impact of Cultural Relations on development outcomes. It is here that the report offers insights, proposing the concepts of Cultural Relations 'capital' and 'practice' as a lens

through which the British Council's work, and indeed the value of Cultural Relations more broadly, can be more effectively communicated and understood.

Most notably, this report introduces a high-level 'Theory of Change' for Cultural Relations in development. This framework not only positions Cultural Relations as a foundational element in the architecture of international development strategies but elucidates the mechanisms through which this approach also delivers soft power. This builds upon existing research, including the *Missing Pillar*, and supports the HMG's aim to reconnect with our allies and partners and enhance Britain's global leadership on development.

By mapping the identified elements of Cultural Relations to established 'best practice' in development, the report underscores the unique contributions of the British Council and charts a course for integrating Cultural Relations into the heart of development work.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the confines of the British Council. They offer a call to the entire development sector to recognise and harness the power of Cultural Relations. In a world where understanding and cooperation across cultural divides are more critical than ever, the Cultural Relations approach to development emerges not as an alternative strategy, but as an imperative for achieving lasting peace and prosperity.

As we move forward, this report challenges us to think creatively, to build bridges across cultures, and to invest in the relational capital that underpins all efforts towards a more equitable and sustainable world. Let this be the foundation for a renewed dialogue that recognises the indispensable role of cultural relations in shaping the future of global development.

Mark Stephens CMG
Director Cultural Engagement, British Council

Executive Summary

Aims and objectives

This report sets out the findings of research to understand and evidence the contribution of the British Council to development work supporting the aims of Official Development Assistance (ODA). The British Council defines itself as a Cultural Relations organisation and its model and approach in the field of development as elsewhere is through the values, language, tools, and practice of Cultural Relations. The research objectives were therefore to investigate, record and make explicit how the British Council realises development aims through the practice of Cultural Relations and how in doing so its work contributes secondarily to UK soft power.

Development aid and Official Development Assistance (ODA)

The concept of government-funded Official Development Assistance (ODA) was first adopted in 1969 and is codified by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – the OECD (www.oecd.org/dac). ODA is defined by the OECD as, *‘government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries.’*

The list of Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) eligible for ODA is updated periodically by the OECD. In 2022 there were 141 countries on the list. ODA can be channelled to these eligible countries directly from donor countries in the form of bilateral aid or indirectly via multilateral agencies that pool donor contributions. Approximately 70% of global ODA is administered bilaterally and 30% via multinational agencies. Increasingly, the specific goals to which ODA projects and programmes contribute are defined worldwide by the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and are now a focus of the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Each Goal has several

associated targets and measurement indicators.

The UK’s whole of government strategy for development aid (its ODA contribution) was set out most recently in a policy paper of May 2022 (FCDO, 2022). This paper saw progress against the SDGs to alleviate poverty and to address some of the root causes of geopolitical instability as being vital and set out a new approach to development,

‘.....anchored in patient, long-term partnerships tailored to the needs of the countries we work with, built on mutual accountability and transparency, and focused on the quality of the UK’s offer, not just the quantum.’

In April 2023, the International Development Minister Andrew Mitchell recommitted the UK to leadership in development in a speech at Chatham House. The speech built on the strategy outlined in the government’s Integrated Review refresh and restated the seven initiatives identified within it, including strong support for the rights of women and girls (HMG, 2023c). The speech by Minister Mitchell explicitly recognised the long-term nature of development and the interrelationship between development strategy, soft power, and diplomacy.

The value of Cultural Relations in development

The British Council’s work in development seeks to make specific programme contributions to the two broad aims of enhanced peace and stability and increased prosperity. Its programmes are based on expertise in three core areas: **Arts and Culture; Education; and English.**

The British Council delivers its programmes in ODA-eligible countries using two main sources of income; Grant-in-aid and Contracts. Grant-in-aid is UK government funding to the British Council channelled through its sponsoring department, the Foreign Commonwealth and Development

Office (FCDO). The British Council also manages and delivers development contracts for other UK agencies and government departments as well as for international governments and agencies such as the European Commission (EC). Compared to organisations and funders engaged in major development infrastructure programmes, the British Council is typically seen as a relatively specialised and niche player in the broader sphere of development.

Few external stakeholders, even when they work with the British Council on development-oriented programmes, think of it as a development organisation *per se*. Perceptions and understanding of the British Council among members of the development community and within recipient country governments vary widely and are often partial and incomplete. The British Council's wider activities, especially its work teaching English, administering exams, and, historically, running libraries, often resonate positively with development-focused policymakers and government officials in recipient countries as individuals because many of them will have benefited from those services as young people. Many will be using British Council resources and services to help their children learn English.

In seeking to understand the British Council's contribution to UK development aid, its Cultural Relations approach can usefully be conceptualised in terms of two constituent parts:

- *A Stock of Cultural Relations Capital* in the form of Cultural Relations assets built up in ODA-eligible countries over time.
- The application of that Capital through *Cultural Relations Practice*.

The 'Capital' can be viewed as an accumulation of assets in the form of understanding, trust, credibility, and relationships built up over time by the British Council in the countries in which it operates that give it an operational platform and legitimacy. The 'Practice' can be viewed as the activities, engagement models,

behaviours, and values that the British Council applies in delivering projects and programmes through Cultural Relations to achieve development outcomes.

This approach has some parallels with conceptualisations of Cultural Relations recently developed by IOD Parc (2021 a,b) and Nordicity (2021a).

Assets which constitute Cultural Relations Capital are:

- Longevity in-country
- Track-record
- Brand trusted by key audiences (often based in significant part on the British Council's historic track record in teaching English, administering exams and running libraries)
- Subject matter expertise – especially in English, Education and arts and culture
- Understanding of local context
- Extensive local networks
- Access to key policymakers
- Multinational experience
- Access to UK/international expertise

The British Council's deep understanding of the local context that comes from being embedded within society is an especially highly valued asset for development work.

Elements of Cultural Relations practice valuable for delivering development outcomes are:

- Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality)
- Community ownership
- Brokering of relevant partnerships (Local and international)
- Sharing and exchange
- Convening
- Embracing Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

- Embracing marginalised communities and groups
- Adhering to rigorous protocols (e.g. safeguarding)
- Being evidence-driven
- Being values-driven

Within the wider field of development, a focus on capacity-building of local institutions, systems, and professionals and a development model involving long-term partnerships are emerging as paradigms of good practice. There is a strong mapping of many elements of Cultural Relations Capital and Practice to specific elements of good practice identified within the development literature summarised in table S1.

There is strong evidence for the value of individual elements of a Cultural Relations approach in supporting the delivery of development outcomes. Indeed, several of

these elements are now regarded as being foundational to contemporary good practice in development.

However, within the wider development environment, the concept of Cultural Relations in the expansive sense articulated by the British Council has low recognition and the understanding of what it means is typically very partial and often largely a reflection of what the British Council says it means.

The development sector is largely the professional domain of economists, financiers, and government administrators rather than the international relations practitioners likely to be familiar with the ideas of Cultural Relations. The development sector has its own technical language, approaches, and frameworks that have largely been developed independently of international relations. Therefore, there is a significant engagement and ‘translation’ challenge between the sectors of development and Cultural Relations.

Table S1: Mapping of good practice in development to elements of Cultural Relations

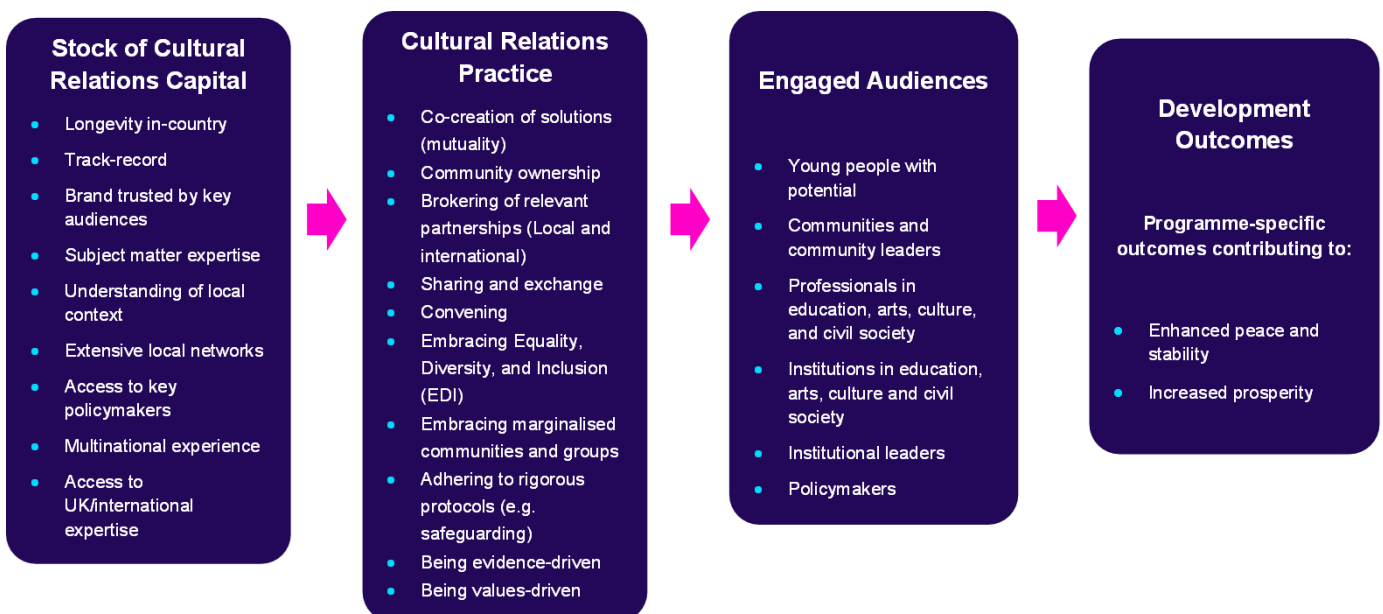
Identified element of Good Practice in Development (adapted from Timmis 2018; Price 2019)	Corresponding elements of a Cultural Relations approach to development
Ensure Partner Ownership	Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality); Extensive local networks
Local Ownership	Community ownership; Embracing marginalized communities and groups; Embracing diversity
Shared vision	Access to key policymakers; Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality)
Understanding context	Longevity in country; Understanding of local context
Involve different levels of government, as well as non-state actors / multi-actor processes	Convening of relevant policymakers and partners; Focus on young people and civil society institutions

Recognise and respond to complexity / Dealing with complexity	Longevity in country; Understanding of local context; Access to key policymakers
Learn and Adapt	Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality); Extensive local networks
Soft skills are important	Trusted brand; Being values-driven
Improve delivery of Technical Assistance (TA) – e.g. Twinning and Peer-to-Peer partnership approaches	Brokering of relevant partnerships, Sharing and exchange
Focus on results /Improved Monitoring and Evaluation	Being evidence-driven
Timings and Strategy	
Improved donor processes and systems	

A Theory of Change for development through Cultural Relations

Cultural Relations Capital and Practice can be seen as the core elements of a high-level Theory of Change (ToC) for how strong development outcomes are delivered by the British Council working with its priority target audiences including young people, professionals, and marginalised communities.

Chart S1: A high-level Theory of Change for the delivery of Development Outcomes through Cultural Relations



The generation of soft power through Cultural Relations development programmes

“Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment.” (Nye, 2017)

At the heart of soft power is the idea that power arises from the possession of ‘assets’ that makes the country attractive. Nye (2004) identified three assets or resources that a country can possess:

- its culture,
- its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad),
- and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).

ResPublica (2017) positioned the values which UK institutions such as the British Council demonstrate through their international engagements as being a crucial element of the power of example and, by implication, soft power, especially in fragile and unstable states.

Alongside the notion of soft power assets or resources, logically there must be a deployment or connective dimension – how those assets are communicated, shared, or engaged with internationally.

Outside totalitarian societies, many of the mechanisms of communication and engagement in the 21st century are now informal and, other than in a very general sense, uncontrolled. But there are also myriad formal state and non-state institutional mechanisms through which cross-border communication and engagement is multiplied. Nye himself argued that states can use public diplomacy—an *“instrument that governments use to mobilize [cultural] resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries”* (Nye, 2008) - to expand their soft power.

Cultural Relations practised by the British Council can therefore be seen as a formalised

(but non state-controlled) way of increasing international engagement with the UK’s soft power assets in the form of the English language, its education system, its arts and culture, and its wider society.

This facilitation of connection and engagement with soft power assets is one important way in which Cultural Relations applied to development generates soft power for the UK. The conceptualisation of both Cultural Relations and soft power as a stock of capital assets and a set of deployment mechanisms or practice supports the development of a more general framework, illustrated on the next page, that identifies a wider set of mechanisms through which soft power arises.

In addition to connecting audiences internationally to the UK’s wider soft power assets through, for example, exchanges, collaborations, and partnerships, the practice of Cultural Relations contributes to UK Soft Power by:

- Developing and reinforcing the UK’s reputation as an expert and World Authority in English and in aspects of education and arts and culture (for example, inclusive arts practice)
- Modelling attractive values such as integrity, professionalism, mutuality and respect for difference
- Generating *“Power-with”* (Vuving, 2019), the sense of mutual empowerment that derives from the experience of mutuality, equality, and shared endeavour and leaves a lasting legacy on both sides of increased respect, appreciation, and attraction.

Cultural Relations practice also creates a legacy of Cultural Relations Outcomes in the form of connections, partnerships, increased understanding, and trust that sit alongside (but do not replace) the specific development outcomes targeted by individual programmes.

These connections, relationships, and partnerships (along with the increased

understanding and trust which emerges from them) are now recognised as valuable soft power assets in themselves and add to the UK’s accumulated stock of soft power capital.

As Nye wrote, *“In this new world, networks and connectedness become an important source of power and security. In a world of growing complexity, the most connected states are the most powerful.”* (Nye, 2020).

The delivery of high-quality development outcomes can itself deliver soft power benefits for the UK in the form of an enhanced reputation as a *Force for Good*.

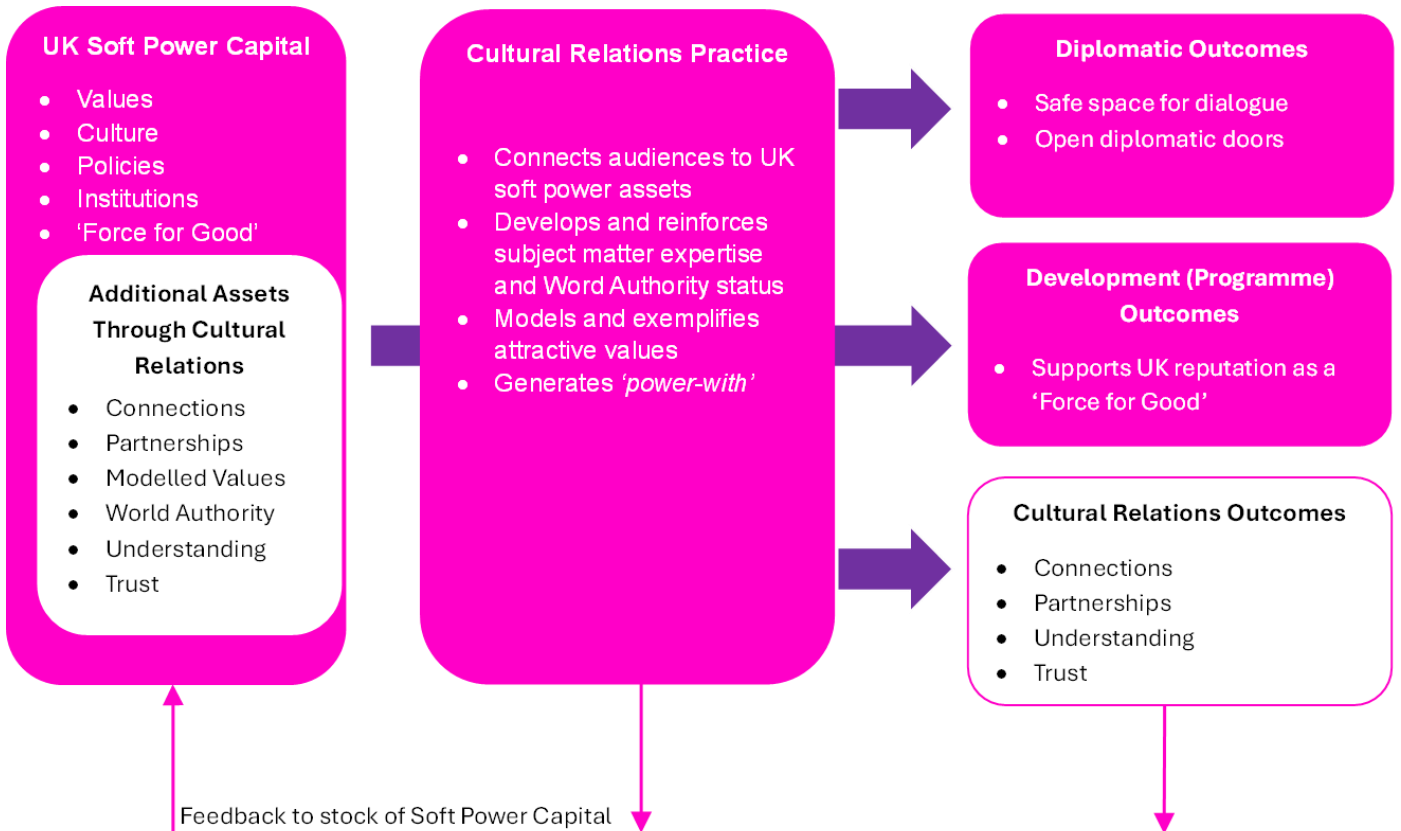
Delivering development outcomes through Cultural Relations can sometimes also deliver specific diplomatic outcomes for the UK:

- Creating safe spaces for dialogue between and within countries

- ‘Opening diplomatic doors’ and creating an opportunity to move on to more difficult conversations.

A core conclusion of this research is that the best way for programmes to develop UK soft power is for them to focus on delivering impactful development outcomes through high quality Cultural Relations practice that foregrounds all the attractive values and behaviours of that practice. If programmes do that, the soft power will arise ‘naturally’. Conversely, there are significant risks if the aim of soft power is instrumentalised at a programme level (as opposed to at a strategic or institutional level).

Chart S2: A framework for soft power generation through Cultural Relations development programmes



Introduction

Aims and Objectives

This report sets out the findings of research to understand and evidence the contribution of the British Council to development work in supporting the aims of Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The formal aims of the research were to develop:

- A clear understanding of the value of British Council development work, whether it is distinctive, and if so, how;
- A clear understanding of the dividend that a Cultural Relations approach to development work achieves, if any;
- A clear understanding of the British Council's place within the wider UK ODA context, and how it compares to other development actors;
- A clear understanding of how British Council development work contributes to UK 'soft power';
- A clear understanding of how individually and together, the arts, education and English programmes contribute to the UK international development strategy and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- A clear understanding of these findings within a wider context, that places this research within a wider 'Theory of Change' that can clearly articulate how the British Council can have wider socio-cultural impacts on communities across the world;
- A clear articulation of how British Council development aligns with the British Council charter.

The British Council defines itself as a Cultural Relations organisation and its model and approach in the field of development as elsewhere is through the values, language, tools, and practice of Cultural Relations. The research objectives were therefore to investigate, record and make explicit how the British Council realises development aims, and how these achievements contribute secondarily to UK 'soft power'.

The research objectives of this work were to:

- Investigate British Council Cultural Relations approaches to development and determine whether and how this enables the British Council to be a strong UK asset,
- Review available evidence of the contributions that British Council arts, education and English programmes make to UK development goals,
- Research and articulate the British Council's role within the wider UK-based and international ODA landscape, and whether there are details particular to the British Council that enable it to conduct effective ODA programmes,
- Collect data about internal and external knowledge and perceptions of British Council's particular contribution to development work,
- Place this research of the British Council approach to development work and its outcomes within a theoretical framework, which may form the basis of understanding a British Council broader 'Theory of Change'.

The output of this research is intended to provide a coherent framework and evidence-based analysis that:

- Supports the role of Cultural Relations generally (and the British Council specifically) in delivering development programmes in ODA countries, especially those focused on SDGs,
- Identifies the valuable and distinctive elements and benefits of Cultural Relations practice in the field,
- Supports the case to government and other high-level stakeholders of why delivering development programmes through Cultural Relations provides positive impacts for recipient countries,
-
- Illustrates how development programmes delivered through Cultural Relations align to HMG's ambition for the UK's work in development to be seen as a positive influence in the world and for the UK to be seen as a 'Force for Good',
- Forms the basis of a broader British Council 'Theory of Change'.

Methodology

Research activities

This report is based on seven main research activities.

Literature Review: The review has encompassed academic literature around themes of development, soft power, and Cultural Relations. It has also included documentation and reports from organisations including HMG, OECD, UNESCO, European Commission, and other multilateral bodies.

The British Council also identified a considerable body of literature, including grey resources and commissioned research. The literature is documented in the appendix to this report.

Five regional workshops with British Council development practitioners: These have been conducted with British Council practitioners in South Asia, MENA, Wider Europe, Americas and SSA. Each workshop had representation from 3-4 colleagues and provided a good balance of input across development work in English, Education, Arts and Culture. The engagement has been very strong and the input extremely rich; and in some ways remarkably consistent. The workshops generated follow-up documentation and a number of suggestions for case studies.

An online survey shared with a wide group of British Council development practitioners. The survey sought to collect quantitative data to identify priorities and differentiators for the British Council and qualitative input identifying good practice, opportunities and challenges.

- The survey received 51 responses of which 36 were fully completed.

Ten in-depth interviews with a selection of internal (British Council) development practitioners. These aimed to explore issues around Cultural Relations and Development in greater depth. The consultees hold responsibility across different ODA regions, the three core sectors of Arts, English and

Education and a selection of major programmes.

Thirteen in-depth interviews with a selection of external development practitioners. These interviews explored perspectives on good development practice, the British Council, and the value of aspects of Cultural Relations.

- The interviewees hold senior positions in country governments, development agencies and NGOs. Their experience spans a number of countries in Africa, Asia and South America.

Review of Impact Evaluation reports from 20-30 major British Council development-focused programmes.

A spreadsheet analysis of this review has been prepared as a separate document accompanying this report. The spreadsheet analysis summarises for each evaluated programme:

- The programme aims and approach,
- The main development outcomes achieved,
- An assessment of the key Cultural Relations assets (in line with the analysis set out in this report) evidenced as supporting the programme's delivery of development outcomes,
- An assessment of the key elements of Cultural Relations practice (in line with the analysis set out in this report) evidenced as supporting the programme's delivery of development outcomes,
- A summary RAG (Red, Amber, Green) assessment of the quality of evidence of development outcomes within the programme evaluation,
- A summary RAG (Red, Amber, Green) assessment of the quality of evidence of Cultural Relations within the programme evaluation.

Development of seven programme and country case studies. These aim to exemplify how the portfolio of British Council work through specific programmes and in particular countries and clusters has supported the achievement of development objectives under the broad ambitions of peace/stability and enhanced prosperity.

These case studies try to illustrate the range of development outcomes targeted by the British Council and its range of expertise across arts, culture, English and education. They also identify specific aspects of Cultural Relations in line with the conceptualisation set out in this report which have supported the delivery of these specific development outcomes.

The seven case studies are embedded within this report:

- Case Study 1: UK/Georgia Season 2019,
- Case Study 2: Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (CH4IG),
- Case Study 3: Tfanen,
- Case Study 4: Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN),
- Case Study 5: English for Isolated Communities,
- Case Study 6: Nepal. The Nepal case study specifically exemplifies development goals around education and access to employment closely in line with SDGs,
- Case Study 7: The Western Balkans. The Western Balkans case study specifically exemplifies development goals around increased peace and stability which in turn supports future prosperity.

Context: Development Aid and Official Development Assistance

Development aid

The roots of development aid lie in the colonial era and are tied to attempts to boost economic activity and trade in the colonized countries of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to the economic benefit of the colonial power (Shriwise 2022). Over time, the motivations of developed countries shifted to be less overtly self-interested. The US-funded Marshall Plan to rebuild the European continent after the Second World War is often seen as marking a transition to modern ideas of development aid (See, for example, Tarnoff, 2018).

Development is typically the academic and practitioner domain of economists and financiers but even the Marshall Plan had a secondary geo-political purpose of supporting the ability of the European economies to resist the lure of communist ideology (Tarnoff, 2018). Indeed, the ultimate purpose of aid is much discussed in the literature, especially in the context of the US, the world's largest contributor.

The US has long been more explicit than most countries that it views aid as philanthropy in the short term which will be pay back as an investment in the long term. As articulated by Daniel Runde of the US Center for Strategic and International Studies,

“International assistance is a reflection of national generosity, but at a strategic level it aims to help countries develop economically and socially so that they can become net contributors to the rules-based world order..... Historically, U.S. foreign assistance has been strikingly effective. Nineteen of 20 top U.S. trading partners are former assistance recipients, including key partners like Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.” (Runde, 2016).

Despite the formalisation of Official Development Assistance (discussed below) as being explicitly for the benefit of recipient countries, there remains an extensive literature, exemplified by the work of Jason Hickel (Hickel, 2017), which sees development as a continuation of western-centric, colonial era policies of the past. Within this interpretation, the ‘development industry’ is a capitalist, profit-oriented construct explicitly invented to exploit, rather than economically emancipate, poorer countries.

Certainly, development aid and its potential for impact is now understood as being intertwined with political considerations in both the recipient and donor country (Lancaster and van de Walle, 2015).

In contemporary framing, development aid is regarded as trans-national financial and in-kind assistance given by governments and other agencies to support the economic, environmental, social and political development of Low and Middle Income (LMIC) countries.

Development aid is typically distinguished from humanitarian aid through its focus on supporting long-term improvement in the conditions in a developing country. In contrast, humanitarian aid focuses on short-term relief, often in response to emergencies and natural disasters such as crop failure, earthquakes or extreme weather events such as floods or hurricanes.

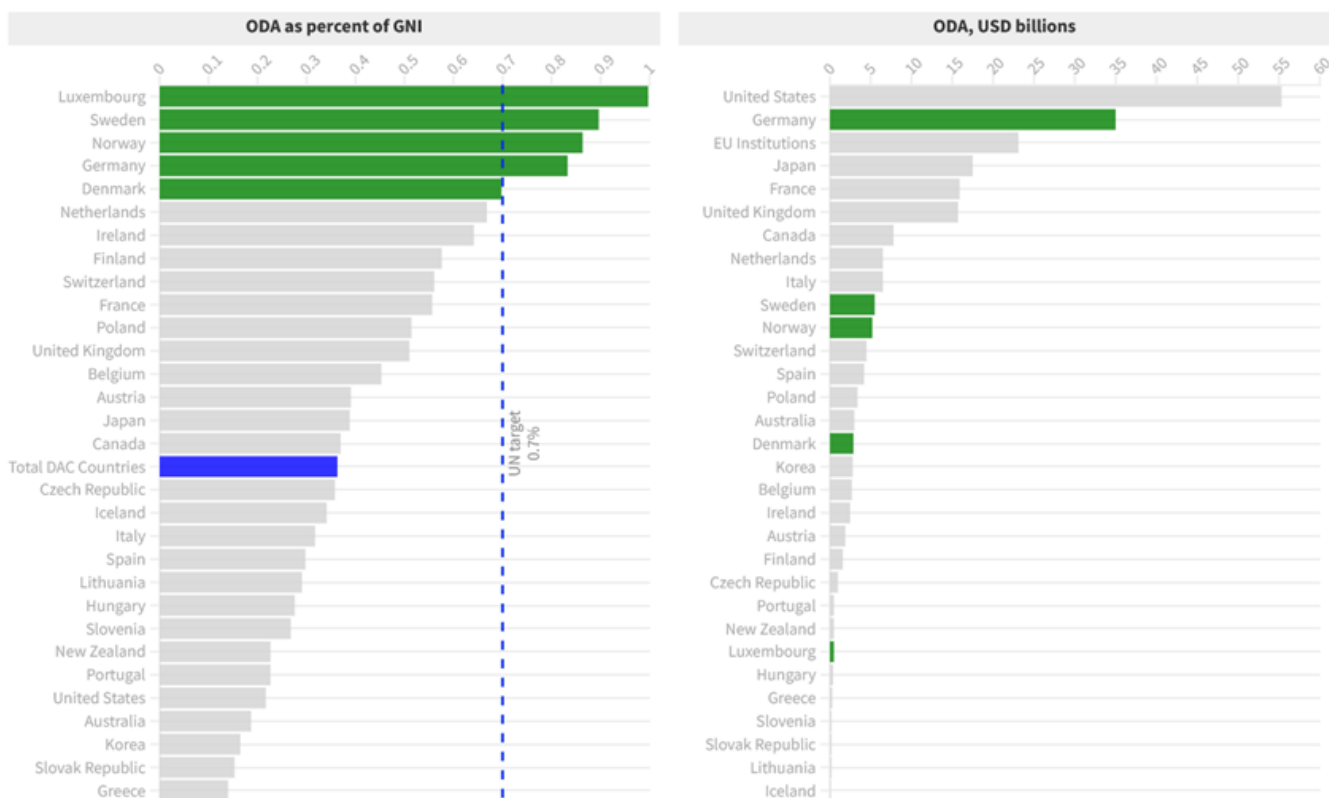
Approximately 80% of all development aid globally is estimated to come from donor governments and is administered within the framework of Official Development Assistance (ODA). The remaining 20% of development aid comes from individuals, businesses, charities, or international NGOs such as Oxfam or Save the Children (www.oecd.org/dac)

Two other important areas of trans-national financial support to LMICs are military assistance which most, although not all, of the international community regards as being separate to development aid, and international remittances. These remittances are money or goods that migrants send back

to families and friends in origin countries. It is not widely appreciated that the value of these remittances to LMICs, reported at \$647bn in 2022 (World Bank, 2023), has been

consistently running at approximately three times the value of Official Development Assistance for more than a decade.

Chart 1: Value of ODA contributions in 2022 by OECD DAC Members



Source: [DAC1 – Total Official and Private Flows](#)

Notes: Green bars represent providers that met or exceeded the UN target of 0.7% ODA/GNI in 2022. (Left-hand chart): ODA on a grant equivalent measure by members of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as percent of gross national income (GNI). (Right-hand chart): ODA on a grant equivalent measure by members of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

Official Development Assistance (ODA)

The concept of government funded Official Development Assistance was first adopted in 1969 and is codified by the OECD (www.oecd.org/dac). ODA is defined by the OECD as, ‘government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries.’

The list of LMICs eligible for ODA is updated periodically by OECD. In 2022 there were 141 countries on the list, still including the world’s two most populous countries: India and China.

ODA can be channelled to these eligible countries directly from donor countries in the form of bilateral aid or indirectly via multilateral agencies that pool donor contributions. Approximately 70% of global ODA is administered bilaterally and 30% via multinational agencies.

The most important multilateral agencies include the EU, World Bank and UN agencies such as UNESCO. ODA can only be undertaken by these multilateral agencies, by individual governments or by their executive

agencies. In the UK, both the FCDO and the British Council are among the relevant executive agencies.

Many western countries are members of the OECD's Development Aid Committee (DAC) contributing \$204bn in 2022, which represents 0.36% of their combined Gross National Income (GNI). In monetary terms, the world's largest donor country by far is the USA, which contributed \$55bn in 2022. Only five DAC countries currently contribute at or above the UN target of 0.7% of GNI: Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden (Chart 1).

Several countries outside the DAC, notably countries in the Middle East, contributed an additional \$20bn in ODA in 2022. Of these, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia both contributed above the 0.7% UN target. In 2021 the world's largest recipient of ODA from DAC countries was India, receiving \$4.5bn, followed by Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Ethiopia. These five countries received 12% of global bilateral ODA.

The range of development activities funded through ODA is wide. Sometimes it involves money transfers or relief of outstanding debt. Major projects funded via the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank might involve physical infrastructure development in areas such as transport, housing, sanitation or energy. Other ODA, which is the type most relevant to this research, is in the form of projects and programmes designed to build capacity or support reform and restructuring within recipient countries.

Major sectors of ODA spend globally include Health (\$32bn in 2021), Government and Civil Society (\$23bn), Education (\$17.2bn) and Conflict, Peace, and Security (\$4.6bn). In 2021, a further \$16.3bn was spent on what the OECD classifies as cross-cutting themes

of the environment, gender, and urban and rural development.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Increasingly, the specific goals to which ODA projects and programmes contribute are defined worldwide by the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and are now a focus of the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Each Goal has several associated targets and measurement indicators. Global progress against the goals is reported annually by the UNDP (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). *“The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.*

The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who are furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls.”

(UNDP, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>).

Together, the SDGs integrate and balance the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies to improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and

working to preserve the world's oceans and forests.

Sixteen of the seventeen Goals focus on a specific development ambition. For example,

- SDG4 aims to, 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all',
- SDG5 aims to, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

SDG17 is different because it is an enabling Goal which aims to:

'Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development'.

SDG17 places particular emphasis on capacity development and includes target 17.9 which aims to:

'Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.'

SDG17 also envisages multi-stakeholder partnerships being at the heart of practice for achieving the SDGs.

"Sustainable Development Goal 17, which reads "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development", recognizes multi-stakeholder partnerships as important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries. Goal 17 further seeks to encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the

experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships." (United Nations, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>)

The 2023 United Nations SDG Summit marked the halfway point in efforts to achieve the SDGs by the original target date of 2030. The Summit was informed by a report from the UN Secretary General which highlighted that *'many of the Goals are moderately to severely off track'* (UN, 2023).

In calling for greater investment and accelerated ambition to close the delivery gap around the Goals, the Secretary General's report emphasised the increasing evidence of the inter-relationship of the goals and the fragmented nature to date of efforts to achieve them.

Image 1: The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals



UK development priorities

The UK contributed nearly \$16bn in ODA in 2022 according to the OECD, making the UK the world's fifth largest contributing country in cash terms, and very close to France as the fourth ranked country. [EU Institutions collectively contributed \$23bn].

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) in the UK uses its Official Development Assistance, also known as its overseas aid budget, to support and deliver the 4 strategic objectives of the government's 2015 Aid Strategy which aligns the government's global efforts to defeat poverty, tackle instability and create prosperity in developing countries. The four objectives are:

- Strengthening global peace, security and governance,
- Strengthening resilience and response to crises,
- Promoting global prosperity,
- Tackling extreme poverty and helping the world's most vulnerable.

The UK's strategy for development was set out most recently in a policy paper of May 2022 (FCDO, 2022). This paper saw progress against the SDGs to alleviate poverty and to address some of the root causes of geopolitical instability as being vital and set out a new approach to development,

'.....anchored in patient, long-term partnerships tailored to the needs of the countries we work with, built on mutual accountability and transparency, and focused on the quality of the UK's offer, not just the quantum.'

The strategy identified four overarching priorities for the UK's contribution to Sustainable Development:

- Deliver honest, reliable investment through British Investment Partnerships,

- Provide women and girls with the freedom they need to succeed,
- Step up the UK's life-saving humanitarian work to prevent the worst forms of human suffering around the world,
- Take forward UK leadership on climate change, nature, and global health.

This strategy was positioned explicitly as a whole of government approach and made clearer than ever before the role of Development Aid within the wider strategy for UK international engagement. It did not reference the British Council specifically, nor did it focus to any significant extent on core areas for the British Council such as English or education beyond access to education for women and girls. It did, however, note the value of mutuality and emphasised the importance of sharing UK expertise and the role of international partnerships especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Seven specific initiatives to deliver against these priorities were identified in a 2023 refresh of the UK Government's 2021 Integrated Review (HMG, 2023a), which was itself a response to the growing volatility in the world exemplified by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's increasing global assertiveness. These seven initiatives are:

- Reforming and greening the global financial system,
- Championing global efforts to make global tax systems fairer,
- Delivering clean, green infrastructure and investment, through British Investment Partnerships,
- Leading a campaign to improve global food security and nutrition,
- Leading a global campaign on 'open science for global resilience',
- Catalysing international work to prevent the next global health crisis,

-
- Coalescing a collective response to the accelerating, well-financed and organised attacks on the rights of women and girls, including online.

The final initiative, *‘responding to attacks on the rights of women and girls’*, is the most immediately relevant to the work of the British Council. UK Government thinking was set out in its ‘International Women and Girls strategy 2023 to 2030’ (HMG, 2023b) around the three ‘E’s:

- Education,
- Empowering women and girls and championing their health and rights,
- Ending violence.

In April 2023, the International Development Minister Andrew Mitchell recommitted the UK to leadership in development in a speech at Chatham House. The speech built on the strategy outlined in the Integrated Review refresh and restated the seven initiatives identified within it, including strong support for the rights of women and girls (HMG, 2023). The speech explicitly recognised the long-

term nature of development and the interrelationship between development strategy, soft power, and diplomacy.

“..... international leadership owned by the British people, our universities and think tanks and by the British NGOs and charities too, which are at the forefront of all our work..... It is this leadership which pledges to work in patient, long term partnership with people and governments around the world. Where engagement comes without coercion. And where tackling the development crisis and the climate crisis are not a choice, but two sides of the same coin that need to be resolved together.”

Minister Mitchell emphasised that the UK sees partnership as lying at the heart of the UK’s approach to development in future, an approach which he said is, *‘about listening to our partners and working together to secure shared objectives.’* The speech also launched a new brand for UK Aid: UK International Development – UKDEV.

Context: Cultural Relations

The origins of Cultural Relations

The British Council approaches its work in development as elsewhere through the practice of Cultural Relations. It describes itself as a Cultural Relations organisation and the core of this report is a review of the elements of that approach which support delivery of strong development outcomes and impact. The origins of the British Council and therefore of the concept of Cultural Relations lie in the turbulent International Relations environment of the 1930s. The United Kingdom faced the rise of totalitarian ideologies, both communism and fascism, in Europe and Asia. The UK's domestic economy and international trade had been weakened by global depression and the government felt that as a result, its global influence was reducing.

The UK government founded the British Council in 1934 as part of its response to these global challenges with a purpose to:

“.....create in a country overseas a basis of friendly knowledge and understanding of the people of this country, of their philosophy and way of life, which will lead to a sympathetic appreciation of British foreign policy, whatever for the moment that policy may be and from whatever political conviction it may spring.”
(www.britishcouncil.org)

In retrospect, while there is a hint of colonial superiority in this purpose it has at its heart an insight which became central to the ideas of soft power which would emerge sixty years later; if people internationally came to understand and engage more with British people and culture, they would like what they learned and experienced and as a result, feel more sympathetic towards and appreciative of the UK and its foreign policy. The purpose of the British Council was consolidated through a Royal Charter issued in 1940 which forms the basis for its current charitable objectives. The

www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight

Royal Charter identified the British Council's objectives as being to:

- promote cultural relationships between the people of the United Kingdom and other countries,
- develop a wider knowledge of the English language; and
- encourage educational co-operation between the United Kingdom and other countries, support the advancement of United Kingdom education and education standards overseas, and otherwise promote education.

The British Council's role has evolved over the last ninety years but the concept of Cultural Relations and the position of Cultural Relations within the broader sphere of International Relations still retains a strong link to these original ideas. The Cultural Value Project, a project led by the Hertie School of Governance and The Open University (2018) proposed as a working definition:

“Cultural Relations are understood as reciprocal transnational interactions between two or more cultures, encompassing a range of activities conducted by state and non-state actors within the space of culture and civil society. The overall outcomes of Cultural Relations are greater connectivity, better mutual understanding, more and deeper relationships, mutually beneficial transactions and enhanced sustainable dialogue between people and cultures, shaped through engagement and attraction rather than coercion.” (Hertie School of Governance 2018)

Cultural Relations within the field of International Relations

Important distinguishing features of Cultural Relations include its direct audiences and its ownership. Cultural Relations is distinguished

from traditional diplomacy in that its primary audience is people and society rather than government institutions and it is distinguished from public diplomacy in that it is practised independently of government control (Arndt, 2005; Rivera, 2015).

Cultural diplomacy is a term which is also sometimes used and is generally recognised as a specific example of public diplomacy in which governments use their country's cultural assets to try to impress and influence international audiences.

Cultural Relations programmes are typically designed to work with communities, young people and professionals such as teachers, journalists, public servants or people active in civil society organisations because they hold, or have the potential to hold, positions in which they can channel influence and multiply the impact of their inter-cultural engagement (e.g., teachers passing on their learning and skills to students).

This focus within Cultural Relations on international relationships between non-state actors and on communities and people rather than diplomats and governments aligns to two important and related contemporary critiques of traditional approaches to International Relations. The first is that they have focused almost exclusively on government-to-government relations and therefore are reductionist in their approach:

“They [contemporary critiques] challenge an understanding of the world which is made up of bounded subjects within bounded political communities. The state-centred approach to world politics requires binaries, such as identity/difference, inside/outside, national/international, past/present, and development/underdevelopment as a necessary starting point for thinking about international politics. These binaries are

relentlessly questioned and fiercely resisted by poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial approaches. Such approaches instead focus on key concepts discussed within IR and show how these concepts work through and beyond such binaries.” (Ní Mhurchú, Shindo, 2016)

The second critique is that International Relations theorists have until relatively recently engaged in largely disconnected analysis which ignores the reality of civil society and the everyday lives of people affected by International Relations in favour of abstract strategies and theories. Christine Sylvester has argued that much of International Relations has lacked the ‘creativity’ necessary to place itself in the world of people and their politics, rather than above it. (Ní Mhurchú, Shindo, 2016).

Although starting from a different position, the idea of soft power discussed in this report understands the relationships between countries as more complicated and nuanced than state-to-state relationships alone and brings into focus the influence of countries’ respective societies, values and cultures. Indeed, the definition of Cultural Relations advanced by the Cultural Values project incorporates language which is identical in part to that of soft power, ‘...shaped through engagement and attraction rather than coercion.’

As Melissen (2005) noted, an important overarching direct goal of Cultural Relations is building trust between people internationally. The British Council places trust building at the heart of its mission and purpose, “We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.” (www.britishcouncil.org)

In everyday experience, trust between individuals supports the development of closer relationships and more frequent and more important interactions. It does so by allowing individuals to ‘assume away’ concerns that a stranger may not adhere to accepted norms, behave as they are expected to or do what they say that they will. Trust is therefore an important determinant of notions of social capital as developed by Putnam (2000) and others. As Francis Fukuyama (1996) wrote:

“Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community ... Social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between. Social capital differs from other forms of human capital insofar as it is usually created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like religion, tradition, or historical habit.” (Fukuyama, 1996)

And the same ideas can readily be extended across borders. In aiming to build trust and the creation of international opportunities, Cultural Relations can be seen to build international and inter-cultural social capital.

Characteristics of Cultural Relations

Conceptualisations of Cultural Relations often focus on the ‘How’, arguing that it is a field of practice represented by a set of programmes, tools and practices supporting the UK’s cultural and educational sectors and industries.

As undertaken by the British Council, Cultural Relations is the practice of showcasing, connecting, and exchanging internationally the UK’s people, Arts, society, language, and culture in a broad sense.

The characteristics of Cultural Relations are discussed in detail below but within the British Council, foundational elements are seen to include:

- An approach which is collaborative and non-coercive.
- Mutuality,
- A commitment to equality and diversity,
- Tolerance and respect for difference.

These foundational ideas of Cultural Relations have strong echoes in the ideas of Contact Theory, first articulated by Gordon Allport in 1954 and developed by Pettigrew (2011) among others. The basic tenet of contact theory is that social contact between different groups can, under certain conditions, reduce intergroup prejudice. These conditions, which align closely to the practice of Cultural Relations, are:

- Equality of status,
- Common Goals,
- Cooperative working,
- Institutional support.

The ideas of Contact Theory were first developed in the context of ethnic differences and racial perceptions but have since been extended to embrace intergroup differences along numerous dimensions including religion, age, sexuality, disease status and economic circumstances.

Context: Soft Power

The idea of Soft Power

Soft power is a concept closely associated with the work of Joseph Nye who first coined the term in his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead* (Nye, 1990). Nye (2004) identified soft power as one of the three levels of power in the world, after military power and economic power, which he refers to as hard power.

“Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one prefers, and that can be accomplished by coercion, payment, or attraction and persuasion. Soft power is the ability to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment.” (Nye, 2017)

In an article (Nye 2017) reflecting on how the idea of soft power had originated he pointed to his dissatisfaction with the then prevailing assumption of the inevitable decline of US power and his attribution of what in his opinion was a mistaken analysis to deficiencies in International Relations theory:

“After looking at American military and economic power resources, I felt that something was still missing—the ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion rather than just coercion and payment.....

..... Both academics and practitioners in international relations tended to treat power as tangible resources you could drop on your foot or drop on a city. This was less true of classical realists like Carr (1939), but particularly true of neorealist theorists such as Kenneth Waltz and his followers who became fashionable in the 1970s (Waltz, 1979). Everything was coercion and payments, but sometimes people influence others by ideas and attraction that sets the agenda for others

or gets them to want what you want. Then carrots and sticks are less necessary, or can be used more frugally because others see them as legitimate. (Nye, 2017)

In Nye’s view, International Relations theory had failed to appreciate the vast power inherent in wider US society outside its government, economy and military:

“With its universalistic values, open culture and vast popular cultural resources ranging from Hollywood to foundations and universities, the United States seemed uniquely placed to affect how others viewed the world and us. Of course, it did not make us attractive to everyone. Quite the contrary, as the Mullahs in Iran proved. But where we were attractive, it was a huge advantage. As one Norwegian scholar put it, if the Americans had created an empire in Europe, it was an “empire by invitation” (Nye 2017).

Nye and others quickly came to realise that the analysis first applied to the USA had more general relevance around the world. In explaining soft power, Nye set out a spectrum of power behaviours which span Co-option (attraction) – Agenda-setting/framing – Inducement/payment – Coercion. Co-optive (soft) power is the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own. Soft power therefore stands in opposition to hard power wielded through force, coercion, or payment but it is for Nye still a form of power. As such, and again importantly in the context of a discussion of Cultural Relations, it appears to reflect an asymmetrical relationship between the partners involved and an attempt (however indirect) to exert influence for the preferred outcomes of the wielder.

“Power is a relation between states rather than a resource a state wields.” (Baldwin 2016).

At the heart of soft power is the idea that power arises from the possession of ‘assets’ that makes the country attractive. Nye (2004) identified three assets or resources which a country can possess:

- its culture,
- its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad),
- and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).

The importance of values and the power of example

Since Nye first outlined these resource categories, several commentators have refined and expanded them and they are often detailed in great depth within the various operational Soft Power monitors from organisations such as Portland or Brand Finance.

An often-overlooked aspect of Nye’s conception of soft power resources is the emphasis he puts on a country being seen to live up to its political values consistently and the moral authority of its foreign policies and international engagements. This is why Nye and others have highlighted the many negative perceptual impacts of the US-led invasion of Iraq and its aftermath.

“When you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive.” (Nye, 2004).

ResPublica (2017) made a similar point in undertaking a wide-ranging review of the role of soft power in the UK’s foreign policy post-Brexit. In arguing that soft power had to be central to that foreign policy in the future, ResPublica positioned values at the heart of the UK’s soft power assets, despite acknowledging that any discussion of ‘British values’ is deeply problematic.

“A country’s soft power thus becomes a reflection of how its character and beliefs are seen abroad.....

.....If Britain is to play a positive role in the world today, its leaders must identify and understand the values that underpin why others are – or are not – attracted to us.” (ResPublica, 2017)

In the foreword to the ResPublica report, openness, fairness and creativity are identified as example UK values. Linked to the centrality of values, ResPublica also conceptualized Nye’s ‘power of attraction’ as being dependent on ‘the power of example’. They argue that British institutions serve a number of vital roles, including as exemplars of attractive behaviour and values internationally, in part through the cohering and moderating effect they are seen to have (from abroad) on UK domestic society.

“What is less contested is the value of some of the most prominent British institutions: the monarchy and parliamentary democracy, including Westminster’s willingness to devolve to both the home nations and the city regions; but also universities, museums, professional societies, trade unions, and the free press. We have an institutional ecosystem that remains particular to this country and which, broadly speaking, encapsulates much of its political, social and cultural landscape.” (ResPublica, 2017)

Both ResPublica and Nye (2017) have pointed to the relative failure of China's vast investment in soft power as being in large part a result of the dissonance between the apparent goals of its soft power agencies such as its Confucius Institutes and the everyday example of the behaviour and values of its government and institutions.

"I say that China should realize that most of a country's soft power comes from its civil society rather than from its government. Propaganda is not credible and thus does not attract. China needs to give more leeway to the talents of its civil society, even though this is difficult to reconcile with tight party control." (ResPublica, 2017)

Alongside the notion of soft power assets or resources, logically there has to be a deployment or connective dimension – how those assets are communicated, shared or engaged with internationally. For Nye, there is a distinction between the behaviour associated with a form of power and the resources that are used in order to exert that kind of influence. Discussing the same issue, Henne wrote:

"Discussions of soft power must clarify how a state deploys culture and ideology as power and how this relates to its material resources." (Henne, 2021)

Vuving (2019) uses the terms 'power base' and 'mechanisms'.

"At the level of power base, soft power is the attraction of positive agential qualities such as kindness toward the audience, competence in a domain valued by the audience, and commitment to a value, identity, belief, or aspiration shared by the audience."

*At the level of mechanism, soft power is the ability to produce favorable outcomes through social exchange (diffuse reciprocity), in which the **participants maintain mutual control** [emphasis added] of the range of choices available."* (Vuving, 2019).

Outside totalitarian societies, many of the mechanisms of communication and engagement in the 21st century are now informal and other than in a very general sense, uncontrolled. International tourists and students experience the UK, its values, culture, and education system in person. UK tourists exemplify their culture and values when they travel abroad. An increasing number of people internationally can form opinions of the attractiveness of the UK directly by talking to family and friends already living in the UK. The conventional media and of course the internet and social media provide a direct window on UK society.

But there are also myriad formal state and non-state institutional mechanisms through which cross-border communication and engagement is multiplied. Nye himself argued that states can use public diplomacy—*an "instrument that governments use to mobilize [cultural] resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries"* (Nye 2008) - to expand their soft power. Here, Nye was using the term public diplomacy in the US-tradition of state organised cultural engagement as opposed to the UK and European tradition of Cultural Relations organised independently of government (see for example, ICCR, 2022). But in this context the general point is the same. Where states and civil society institutions do engage internationally they have a role to play in consistently exemplifying attractive values and behaviours.

ResPublica positioned the values which UK institutions demonstrate through their

international engagements as being a crucial element of the power of example and by implication soft power, especially in fragile and unstable states.

“British institutions, from universities and the British Council to the BBC have frequently served the role of non-corruptible exemplars in parts of the world where states have failed to provide the conditions needed for a flourishing civil society. The British government must recognise this role, both at home and abroad, and uphold the work of such institutions as it looks to express the values of Global Britain. (ResPublica, 2017)

The independence from government enjoyed by these institutions is considered to add to their perceived integrity and moral authority.

Cultural Relations and Soft Power

Since Nye first developed the ideas behind Soft Power, his thinking has evolved and many others have critiqued and expanded the concept. However, it has become an almost ubiquitous term within and outside government and it is now used in many contexts and by many different people. So much so, that commentators have noted that the very popularity of the term presents a challenge.

““Soft power” can mean anything from having a vibrant popular culture to symbolic appeals meant to persuade other states to take one’s side. The term includes the use of cultural resources to amplify material might and make up for military weakness.” (Henne, 2021)

In their review of Cultural Relations models around the world undertaken for the British

Council, ICCR noted that countries’ understanding of both soft power and Cultural Relations is varied and confused.

“Our research found that there was a lot of confusion around what countries mean by the terms soft power and cultural relations and that ultimately these impact on perceptions of countries’ motives and reputations.” (ICCR, 2022)

This amorphous idea of soft power is reflected in the observation made by several British Council staff that in discussions with their FCDO peers, the British Council is sometimes referred to in short-hand as *‘the soft power bit’* of HMG. This observation reflects a superficial understanding of both soft power and Cultural Relations. It also reflects a common misunderstanding, which Nye himself cautioned against, of simply equating soft power with cultural influence (Nye, 2004).

“Excellent wines and cheeses do not guarantee attraction to France, nor does the popularity of Pokémon games assure that Japan will get the policy outcomes it wishes.” (Nye, 2004)

Cultural Relations is a field of practice undertaken by the British Council which in the context of development has primary outcomes designed to aid development. As discussed below, the practice of Cultural Relations with the aim of aiding development can both facilitate engagement with the UK’s wider soft power assets and in doing so itself contributes to the stock of those soft power assets. But Cultural Relations is not soft power, nor is soft power only derived through Cultural Relations.

The British Council's work in development

Scope and structure of the British Council's work in development

The British Council's broad development aims are summarised in its purpose statement, *'...to support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.'*

It has a physical presence in more than 100 countries, many of which are eligible for ODA funding, and reaches more than 200 countries through digital programmes.

The British Council delivers its programmes in ODA-eligible countries using two main sources of income; Grant-in-aid and Contracts.

Grant-in-aid is UK government funding to the British Council channelled through its sponsoring department, the FCDO. In 2021-2022, the British Council received a total of £183m grant-in-aid from the FCDO of which £145m (79%) was ODA.

The British Council uses Grant-in-aid to fund its own development programmes. Increasingly, it will partner with other agencies on a shared funding basis using its own grant-in-aid alongside external funding. For example, the Connecting Classrooms for Global Learning (CCGL) programme, an iteration of several generations of international school-to-school partnership programmes, was partly funded by British Council Grant-in-Aid and partly funded by the FCDO through its own ODA funds.

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL)

The Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL) programme was a £34.5m initiative jointly funded by the British Council and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. It operated across the UK and 29 overseas countries.

The programme promoted school partnerships, offered professional development for teachers, and sought to influence policy on core skills, global learning, school leadership, and inclusion.

Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL) supported teachers and school leaders to improve teaching giving students the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to make a positive contribution now and in the future. Through connections with other schools, professional development for teachers and engaging with learning resources, Connecting Classrooms helps develop students equipping them to live and work in a globalised world.

The programme was tailored to meet the needs of individual education systems, helping countries to develop school leadership, core and transferable skills and inclusive education. Through policy engagement, professional development for teachers and school leaders and international collaboration, the programme helps to develop an international network of schools that is able to share knowledge and experience, bringing learning to life.

In its latest annual report (British Council 2022), the British Council noted that it has recently identified 25 priority countries based on their importance to the UK government and on the strengths of British Council. Going forward, it aims to spend more than 50% of its grant-in-aid in these 25 countries, many of which qualify for ODA.

The second source of development funding is the management and delivery of development contracts in partnership with UK and

international agencies. For example, The British Council delivers The Cultural Protection Fund (CPF), a heritage protection programme funded by the UK's Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) using the DCMS's own ODA funds. The British Council also manages and delivers contracts for many national and regional governments in ODA countries and for other international agencies such as the European Commission (EC).

The Cultural Protection Fund (CPF)

The Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) is led by the British Council in partnership with the UK Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). It was launched in 2016 to protect vital cultural heritage at risk in conflict-affected regions. In 2019 the fund expanded its remit to protect cultural heritage at risk because of climate change and related disasters.

The overarching objective of the fund is to help create sustainable opportunities for social and economic development through building capacity to foster, safeguard and promote cultural heritage.

The CPF awards funding to projects which keep cultural heritage sites and objects safe, as well as supporting the recording, conservation and restoration of cultural heritage. It also provides opportunities to local communities for training and education, enabling and empowering them in the long term to value, care for and benefit from their cultural heritage.

To date, the fund has supported projects in 16 countries across parts of the Middle East, North and East Africa, safeguarding a wide range of cultural heritage including buildings, monuments and artefacts, music, languages and recipes.

The British Council also partners with some non-government agencies to deliver programmes with strong development outcomes, even though the programme funding falls outside the technical definition of ODA. For example, Premier Skills is a programme which has been running in a

number of iterations since 2007 and is a global partnership between the British Council and the Premier League which funds it through its community investment. In 2021-2022, the British Council received total contract income of £142m, much of which was for programmes in ODA eligible countries.

Premier Skills

Premier Skills aims to use the global power and appeal of football to enrich the lives of young people around the world.

Premier Skills provides an opportunity for young people, including society's most vulnerable, to develop their football and life skills, raise their self-esteem and have a safe place to play.

Across different countries, the Premier Skills model is tailored to address key social issues specific to a country or region, such as violence against women and girls, female participation in sport and educational opportunities for disadvantaged young people.

Premier Skills has worked in 29 countries, the majority of which are ODA eligible.

Worldwide, Premier Skills has had 39,000 coach and referee course participants who have gone on to develop the confidence and skills of 1.7 million young people.

The programme is now evolving to become more a more schools oriented programme.

British Council expertise in development

The British Council's work to support the development of peace and prosperity is based on expertise in three core areas:

- Arts and Culture
- Education
- English

In the Arts and Culture Sector, its priorities are:

- **Cultural Exchange** including bilateral cultural Seasons with countries including India and Vietnam,

- **The Creative Economy** including support for creative entrepreneurs and support for the creative sector especially in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Western Balkans,
- **Culture Responds to Global Challenges** including the Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) now extended to encompass heritage at risk from climate change and Creative Commissions combining arts, science, and digital technology for creative, innovative and inclusive solutions to address climate change.

In the Education sector its priorities are:

-
- **Higher education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and science** including developing stronger, more inclusive and globally connected higher education systems and developing demand-driven and inclusive TVET systems, especially in Africa and South Asia.
 - **Schools** including support for inclusive, quality education for all learners including for girls and marginalised children and support for ministries of education, teachers and school leaders as they rebuild in the wake of the pandemic,
 - **UK qualifications**
 - **Youth skills, leadership and positive pathways** including providing opportunities for young leaders and influencers to develop skills and build consensus for change, especially in the area of climate change.
 - English Assessment,
 - English teaching,
 - English programmes including improving standards of English teaching, learning and assessment and the teaching of other subjects through English, supporting girls' empowerment, agency and voice by building their English, digital and other life skills.

In the English sector its priorities are:

Languages for Resilience: Retention and Support Project Lebanon

Since 2016, the British Council has been working in partnership with UNICEF Lebanon, supporting the Lebanese government to improve the enrolment of vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugee children in formal education and increase the likelihood of them staying in the education system for longer.

The British Council and local Arabic-language partner Ana Agra were selected by UNICEF and the Ministry of Education in Lebanon to work together to create a standardised model that helps NGOs deliver a 96-hour retention support programme. The programme was designed to respond to some of the factors driving school drop-out. Designed to help students develop strategies and skills that will help them do their homework, it was made up of two principal components.

The first part was delivered in Arabic and focuses on classroom management, developing a safe learning environment, and creating higher thinking strategies and guided reading plans to meet individual learner's needs.

The second part looked at attitude and language aptitude and provided communication tools to help teachers promote diversity and social cohesion within the classroom, as well as motivate students to learn a new language. It also included strategies for learning for teachers and students.

British Council alignment to the SDGs and UK development priorities

The priority areas for the British Council find strong echoes in many elements of both the SDGs and the UK's development priorities, especially around the championing of opportunities for women and girls in education and employment (reflected in SDG 5) and increased awareness and understanding of the challenge of climate change (reflected in SDG 13).

However, there is no simple answer to the question of exactly which SDGs the British Council's work contributes. A common-sense reading of the SDGs and the British Council's core sectors as set out above would highlight

an expected contribution of British Council work to:

- SDG 4: Quality Education
- SDG 5: Gender Equality
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 10: Reduced inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
- SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

But a more evidence-based analysis needs to rely on formal reviews and mapping of programme outcomes to SDGs. Two mapping exercises have been undertaken recently. The first was undertaken as part of the research for the Missing Pillar report (Nordicity, 2020). Based on a formal review of 15 British Council programmes, the mapping identified 11 SDGs to which the British Council contributed. These included the 7 listed above plus:

- SDG 1: End poverty
- SDG 3: Health and Well-being
- SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production

The second mapping exercise was undertaken as part of the review of the role of international higher education partnerships in contributing to the sustainable development goals, prepared by Technopolis for the British Council and the Association of Commonwealth Universities (Technopolis, 2021). It concluded, based on the content of partnerships, that the partnerships, and by implication the work of the British Council, contributed to all 17 SDGs.

This conclusion of universal relevance is unhelpful and suggests that there may well be value for the British Council in looking in greater detail not only at alignment to the overarching SDGs but also to the individual indicators and targets within each of them. A clearer alignment of the British Council's work to these will aid communication internally and externally.

For example, the British Council's priorities in English and education broadly align to *SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*.

Within SDG 4 there is an emphasis on equality of access to education for girls and boys, women, and men and for disabled people and members of minority and disadvantaged communities. There is also a specific ambition to improve the quality of global education systems and the skills and capacity of teachers which is very much a British Council priority.

Specific targets within SDG4 to which British Council priorities appear to align closely include:

- Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university,
- Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship,
- Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations,
- Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development,

- Target 4.a: By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries,
- Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

SDG 11, *'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,'* is also especially relevant for the work of the British Council across arts and culture.

A notable target within SDG11 is Target 11.4: *'Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage'*, which aligns squarely to the aims of the Cultural Protection Fund and Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (Case Study 2).

UNESCO has long asserted that strategies to achieve sustainable development need to be people-centred, whereby culture is a key driver of people's participation, ownership and creativity: *'By safeguarding cultural heritage in all its forms, both tangible and intangible; promoting the diversity of cultural*

expressions; ensuring access to cultural spaces, infrastructure and institutions; and protecting the rights of all peoples to enjoy and share their culture free from fear, people are rightly placed at the heart of local and national strategies for sustainable development.' (UNESCO 2016).

From the perspective of UNESCO and many other cultural actors, culture is therefore a 'missing pillar' of sustainability. Its centrality to addressing development challenges and in particular its potential contribution to truly sustainable development had been underappreciated and that culture should have been more explicitly represented within the SDGs.

The Missing Pillar report prepared for the British Council (Nordicity, 2020) specifically examined the role of culture in supporting development and came to a similar conclusion arguing that:

"As highlighted in a recent study by UNESCO, many countries have begun to view culture as an asset in eradicating poverty, addressing social inclusion and inequality, and creating economic growth." (Nordicity, 2020)

Perspectives on the British Council and the role of Cultural Relations in development

The British Council's role in the UK's development portfolio

The British Council's contribution to development is viewed in the countries in which it operates within a wider perspective on the UK's overall contribution to development. There is a general consensus among external stakeholders consulted for this research that the UK has a strong reputation in aid and in delivering development projects. Its focus on the empowerment of women and girls is increasingly recognised and valued.

"FCDO is a known entity in the girls/ adolescent education space. I think it is playing a huge leadership role in that globally." (External Stakeholder)

"Even though USAID has recently shown interest to work in gender and inclusion, FCDO has a much stronger reputation in girls' education. I like the fact that FCDO has maintained a thematic orientation." (External Stakeholder)

"Looking at the current relationship that [] has with Britain, it has had a huge impact on the development of []. And, they are highly regarded. (External Stakeholder)

The UK remains a major global player in aid in contribution terms but in line with the temporary reduction in its ODA contribution from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5% the dollar value of

its contribution has fallen from \$22bn in 2018 to \$16bn in 2022. Some stakeholders have linked this reduction to other factors, including Brexit, to paint a perceptual picture which sees the UK's commitment to development weakened.

"It is concerning that their [UK's] overall development assistance is decreasing." (External Stakeholder)

"I think the UK has really been shaken over the past few years and they are kind of unreliable at the moment. Brexit, the creation of FCDO, the multiple delays in procurement, and multiple changes in strategies made them an unreliable development partner." (External Stakeholder)

"Over the last 5-10 years, due to budget cuts and a lot of politicalization of aid that the country provides, I think the contribution of the UK to the world has been reduced. But they do good work." (External Stakeholder)

There are also specific issues which affect the UK's work in individual countries. In Nepal, for example, the UK's decision not to participate in the Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) to education development under which donors pool contributions within a government administered scheme is seen to have led to some marginalisation of its work in the country.

"For education there are down and up-sides when it comes to UK. They exited from SWAP in 2014. The size of programmes is very small now and all delivered through NGOs." (External Stakeholder)

The British Council is an arms-length agency, independent of the UK government but its grant-in-aid (much of which is ODA) comes via the FCDO. In the development field, the

British Council's *perceived* identity and in particular its relationship to the rest of UK government is complex and highly variable and depends very much on the local context and on the level of direct engagement of the individual stakeholder. Few external stakeholders, even when they work with the British Council on development-oriented programmes, think of the organisation as a development organisation *per se*.

"I thought they were a private company. I think their identities are complex, I never considered them as a development organization. But they do. They are involved in assessment, sponsorship, and operational management." (External Stakeholder)

"I know there are several [British Council] projects in education testing, training and others, but it is difficult for me to figure out whether they are ODA funded or not." (External Stakeholder)

Stakeholders within the development field who have limited direct experience of the British Council typically are simply ignorant of the detail of its status and if pressed would see the British Council as part of the UK's overall portfolio of agencies without thinking too deeply about the specifics.

Some external stakeholders with more direct experience of the organisation and its work understand and value the British Council's independence.

"Although JICA and USAID do also support cultural activities, they are directly part of their respective government whereas the British Council is not. I do not think there are any other non-governmental agencies that focus on inter-cultural exchange." (External Stakeholder)

Some know that the British Council is officially independent but are sceptical about its real independence given its name and its perceived reliance on FCDO funding.

"There is gossip in the education sector that the British Council is rotating the UK government's money." (External Stakeholder)

On occasions, the diplomatic status of senior British Council staff and/or the close working relationship between its offices and the local FCDO post is taken as evidence that the organisation is essentially part of HMG's overall in-country presence.

"If I have a problem with the British Council I go and tell the British Ambassador.on one occasion, the Ambassador asked me why I hadn't told him before." (External Stakeholder)

External perspectives on the British Council's role and positioning in the development field are often based on experience within a particular project or programme and/or rooted in an understanding of its specific work in Arts, Education or English.

The British Council's wider activities, especially its work teaching English, administering exams, and historically running libraries, often resonate positively with policymakers and government officials in recipient countries as individuals because many of them will have benefited from those services as young people. Some will have studied in the UK and may have been supported to do so by the British Council. Many will be using British Council resources and services to help their children learn English.

"English language speaking and writing was a part of British Council culture. Learning English and library was their big brand and

that's what I related to when it comes to the British Council and Cultural Relations.”
(External Stakeholder)

“The British Council is popular in my country because everybody wants their children to learn English.” (External Stakeholder)

However, on occasions, there is some perceptual dissonance between stakeholders' experience of the organisation's development activities on the one hand and its commercial activities on the other.

“...the commercial side, which is the teaching centres and the exams, those aspects of the British Council can be very well known in countries. And that can be the first association that people have with us. So, if that's the case, then getting people to take us seriously in the development context is much more difficult, because they see us as being a provider of training courses for students who can afford to pay for them. And they don't necessarily see us as being serious partners in the development projects.” (British Council staff)

The British Council's work in development is therefore wide-ranging but compared to organisations and funders engaged in major development-infrastructure programmes it is typically seen as a relatively specialised and niche player in the broader sphere of development.

“I think in terms of FCDO funding, they [the British Council] are niche partners, and they bring lots of recognition and visibility...but we have a little bit of FCDO funding and a lot of USAID funding. (External Stakeholder)

“We are part of groups called Development Partners Groups which are often set up by the World Bank or the EU or one of the UN

agencies in countries and we are invited to participate in those. We managed to get ourselves into the room. And then we become kind of affiliated with it. So I think at the country level, there is an understanding that we are development partners. But if you went to the headquarters of the World Bank or the EU or any of those big ones and if there was a list, would you see the British Council on the list? I'm not sure about that.” (British Council staff)

Understanding of Cultural Relations

The authors of the Cultural Values report pointed out that there is no common understanding of the term Cultural Relations. “There is no universally agreed definition of cultural relations. The conceptual confusion can lead to contradictions in practice, though it can also enable flexibility” (Hertie School of Governance, 2018). This ambiguity can enable flexibility and adaptation but in the field of development, which has its own extensively developed frameworks, approaches and in-group language, it is an overarching terminology and concept which is often met with simple ignorance. Unless stakeholders have direct experience of the British Council or perhaps one of its close analogues such as the Goethe Institut, they interpret the words as best they can, often doing so in their second or third language.

In practice, this means that there are three broad understandings of Cultural Relations among external stakeholders which are relevant to the field of development.

The first focuses on the word culture(al) and interprets Cultural Relations as attempts to use culture as a tool for development. This focus on culture as a stimulus for development is represented most obviously in British Council programmes such as the Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) and Cultural

Heritage for Inclusive Growth. It extends relatively easily to programmes built around the organisation's expertise in English and education but in some languages and contexts extends less easily to the British Council's more expansive conceptualisation of culture which embraces aspects of civil society, media and justice.

The point is that the argument that culture can be valuable in supporting development is valid but is not in itself an argument for the practice of what the British Council means by the wider concept of Cultural Relations. Organisations such as the Arcadia Fund (*'Our aim is to defend the complexity of human culture and the natural world, so that coming generations can build a vibrant, resilient and green future'*) or the Aliph Foundation (*'Protecting Heritage to Build Peace'*) clearly support the same argument but would not describe themselves and the work that they undertake in development as Cultural Relations.

The second understanding takes a literal interpretation of the words – *relations* (between) *cultures*. This leads to a focus on the most obvious examples of exchange and collaboration, especially academic and professional exchanges or scholarship programmes designed for capacity building. Again, these are important aspects of Cultural Relations and can have significant value in supporting development but they are not the whole of what the British Council means by Cultural Relations.

"It (Cultural Relations) may mean different things to different people/contexts. If you are talking from a diplomatic point of view, or whatsoever, there is the component that might cross all these entities. Maybe bicultural

exchange - arts, knowledge, language. Cultural relations can hit sectors such as food, language, art, family, and other practices."
(External Stakeholder)

"Maybe cultural exchanges, sharing, scholarships...?" (External Stakeholder)

The third interpretation is confined to development stakeholders who have worked closely with the British Council and includes a more rich and nuanced understanding of the term. However, even among these stakeholders there is rarely an *independent* understanding of what the term means. Rather, that understanding is typically a reflection of what the British Council says it means.

"I don't know much [about Cultural Relations] but when I interacted with some local staff, I learned about British Council programmes."
(External Stakeholder)

To be clear, this is not to negate the value of different elements of Cultural Relations in supporting development, nor the extent to which several of these elements are regarded as being foundational to contemporary good practice in development by external stakeholders. But it is important to recognise that within the wider development environment, the overall concept of Cultural Relations has low recognition and the understanding of what it means is typically very partial and often largely a reflection of what the British Council says it means.

The next section decomposes this overall concept of Cultural Relations to examine the individual elements within it.

The application of Cultural Relations to development

Cultural Relations as Capital and Practice

Two recent conceptualisations of Cultural Relations as demonstrated through the wider work of the British Council have adopted a broadly similar approach which aids understanding of the term. Both conceptualisations distinguish between the accumulated stock of Cultural Relations assets and the ways in which Cultural Relations is applied to projects and programmes as practice in order to generate impact and value.

The first conceptualisation was developed by Nordicity for the British Council (Nordicity 2021a). This framework sees ‘*Cultural Relations Mechanisms*’ such as exchanges, cultural showcasing and support for language studies leveraging a stock of ‘*British Council Cultural Relations Assets*’ such as local relationships, institutional knowledge, and on-the-ground presence.

These Cultural Relations assets in turn sit on a broader platform which Nordicity calls ‘*Foundational Intangible Capital*’ which can be interpreted as the cultural capital within the UK which is valued internationally and potentially shared through Cultural Relations practice. These ideas of sharing UK cultural capital have important implications for the role of Cultural Relations in supporting soft power to which we return in chapter 10.

The second conceptualisation is a framework developed by IOD Parc for the British Council following a review of the organisation’s work in Ukraine (IOD Parc 2021a). A similar approach was also applied to the assessing the cumulative impact over time of the

portfolio of work of the British Council in Egypt (IOD Parc 2021b). The approach taken by IOD Parc uses the terminology of a ‘*reservoir of capital*’ and ‘*enabling results*’.

“The Conceptual Framework is centred on the idea of a ‘reservoir of capital’, a pool of non-quantifiable ‘resources’ held by country offices which is constantly being accumulated or depleted based on the development and maintenance of relationships, perceptions, reputation, trust and soft power. Country offices can draw from this reservoir to influence key processes in country and to identify and make the most of opportunities that arise in country.”

The state or ‘health’ of the reservoir can be tested by examining the ‘assets’ possessed by the country office. These ‘assets’ are constant, though their presence and importance may differ country to country. They require ongoing effort to maintain and the composition changes over time as the country office’s internal and external context shifts. These assets enable the country office to deliver activities and in turn results and impact. For example, a well-designed British Council programme that delivers strong results and impact will likely have been enabled by ‘assets’ such as the country office’s local relationships, existing brand awareness and institutional knowledge. (IOD Parc 2021a)

While external stakeholders do not, of course, think of Cultural Relations in these terms, internal stakeholders often do, either explicitly or implicitly, and the distinction provides a useful organising framework for assessing those elements of Cultural Relations that are valuable to development.

In assessing the contribution of different aspects of Cultural Relations to development

impacts, we distinguish between a *Stock of Cultural Relations Capital* in the form of Cultural Relations assets and the application of that Capital through *Cultural Relations Practice*.

The Capital can be viewed as an accumulation of assets in the form of understanding, trust, credibility and relationships built up over time by the British Council in the countries in which it operates which in essence gives it legitimacy and an operational platform. The Practice can be viewed as the activities, engagement models, behaviours, and values which it applies to delivering projects and programmes through Cultural Relations.

The elements of Cultural Relations capital

Longevity

A common departure point for internal and external stakeholders when discussing the British Council's work through Cultural Relations is its longevity and visible commitment to the countries in which it works. It has been physically present in many ODA eligible countries for more than 50 years and importantly, it can point to many countries, including Myanmar and Ukraine, where it has maintained its presence and commitment even during revolution, civil unrest or open conflict.

"This [impact and influence] is enhanced by the physical presence and history of the British Council in Egypt since 1938." (IOD Parc, 2021)

This longevity and commitment gives it a strong level of credibility and trust with key partners in countries and has allowed it to build multi-layered and multi-sectoral relationships which are ongoing and transcend individual activities or short-term priorities.

"I've seen the longevity of the British Council and how it leads to partnerships that are not based on politics of the day - they're based on relationships, connections and understanding of the context we work in" (British Council staff)

"We have a long-term presence, I think that does distinguish us significantly from other organisations. And it means that it can always be a less transactional relationship with the Ministry of Education or a local partner in a country because they are people who we will continue to talk to, before the project after the project regardless of the outcome of a particular contract, or a particular piece of work. Those relationships will endure as part of what the British Council does on a day-to-day basis in any country." (British Council staff)

In a detailed series of reports written in 2018, the Tom Fleming consultancy showed how these long-term relationships facilitated the contribution over time of the British Council's work to developing the creative economies in Vietnam, Indonesia, Colombia, and Nigeria (Fleming 2018). Each report documents how the British Council's impact has been cumulative and how its longevity and sustained commitment has enabled it to build impact through multiple activities and programmes over time.

"2018 marks the 25th anniversary of the British Council in Vietnam. It has 250 staff, and five offices in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In 2016-17, 72 Vietnamese government officials studied English; 870 policy makers attended British Council Social Enterprise events, 400 attended Alumni Events, and 24,000 people attended arts activities....."

.....Over the last decade, the British Council has played an important and much-

valued role in connecting Vietnamese and UK creative talent and cultural organisations to build strong and mutually beneficial relationships; in highlighting opportunities for innovation and inclusive growth through the creative industries; and in directly building capacity and confidence. As part of its broader portfolio of education and cultural activities, the British Council has operated as an enabler and influencer, supporting an emergent Vietnamese creative industries sector to develop a voice and profile; and working in partnership with Government, civil society and other international agencies to build the first National Strategy for the Cultural Industries.....Through these activities, the British Council has had a proactive and much-welcomed presence in a country undergoing major economic and demographic change.” (Fleming, 2018a)

Track record

The British Council’s long-term commitment to countries in which it works has often allowed it to build up a compelling track record of projects which supports its credibility as a development partner. For example, the British Council Colombia has been working in partnership with the Secretary of Education in Bogota for 16 years to improve the standards of the teaching, learning and assessment of English. In its latest phase its work will directly benefit 3,000 students, 220 head teachers and more than 2,300 teachers.

The project in Lebanon focused on languages for resilience referenced in Chapter 8 above came about because of previous work with the Ministry of Education on a teacher training and foreign language support programme for Lebanese schools which meant that the British Council was viewed as a trusted and credible partner.

Trusted brand

In turn, this track record means that in many of the countries in which it works the British Council is a highly trusted brand as a reflection of its long-term commitment to the country, its history of delivery and its wider work within society teaching English, administering exams, facilitating access to educational opportunities in the UK and, historically, providing access to libraries.

“The British Council is considered reliable, and less affected by the political climate in the UK. They have remained pretty stable in terms of their focus and priorities for many years. They have their own reputation and brand.” (External Stakeholder)

“Compared to other organisations, the British Council emphasises high-quality deliverables. They have well-developed standards for almost everything. These are super-helpful in implementing ODA projects. If you want to drink 'Coca Cola' but you were offered 'Pepsi', you won't get the same value even if they look the same. The British Council has a brand and maintains a standard.” (External Stakeholder)

“If a ministry was to choose us, whether it's through tender or whatever, it is based on the reputation that we've built in those countries over many years.” (British Council staff)

Subject matter expertise

Among external stakeholders one of the most valued elements of the British Council’s Cultural Relations Capital is its subject matter expertise.

Most importantly, this is a very widespread recognition of the organisation’s world authority status in English.

“Language is still their strength and they can still support it. Teaching English by native

English speakers can be of great value.
(External Stakeholder)

“It’s an English language trainer type of organization.” (External Stakeholder)

“...the thing that they [Ministries] are most likely to come to us for directly is English language related. And the brand is really strong in relation to English language provision.” (British Council staff)

In a development context, this translates very easily into recognition of the British Council’s work in education, primarily teaching teachers of English but also extending to elements of its work directly with schools and policy-makers.

“They have done a lot of teacher training in the country and have good recognition for their capacity building support at local level. School exchange programmes they do also.”
(External Stakeholder)

“I think the British Council’s major strength is language expertise. They have done remarkable work in teacher training, and student assessment, including speaking tests. They are the only agency that brings such an angle to the development project, especially in the education sector.” (External Stakeholder)

The British Council’s approach is typically built on a combination of training in English (for the English teachers or teacher trainers) and/or training in teaching practice.

EfECT (English for Education College Trainers Project) was a training programme in Myanmar which targeted professional development of teacher educators (teacher trainers).

The evaluation report (Borg et al 2018) based on baseline and longitudinal analysis through the two-year programme of feedback from

1,647 teacher educators found many positive changes in their English proficiency; overall confidence in their use of English and their teaching ability; theoretical knowledge of teaching methodology; observed classroom competence overall and specifically related to interactive teaching methods.

The SPEX (Speaking Excellence in State Schools) programme in Azerbaijan (Borg, 2018) targeted changes in the teaching practice and the English ability of state English teachers.

At end-project compared to baseline, the evaluation found that SPEX teachers as a group made significant improvements in their overall English proficiency and specifically in their speaking. Over 73% of SPEX teachers improved their English proficiency, as measured on the APTIS for Teachers test, by at least one CEFR band at end-project compared to entry.

Relatively unusually, the Delhi English Project involved the British Council working in partnership with Macmillan Education and the Delhi Directorate of School Education to recruit teachers to deliver a specific targeted English course directly to learners.

Evaluation results (Trinity, College, 2019) showed a significant improvement in language use as a result of the input. In the pre-assessment, 58% had very basic English (CEFR pre-A1 or A1) vs 27% at the same level at post-assessment. Those scoring at CEFR A2 level increased from 36% (pre-test) to 52% post-test) and at CEFR B1 level or above from just 6% to 22% at post-test.

The effective deployment of this expertise was also brought out in the evaluation of the Connecting Classrooms for Global Learning Programme.

“The experts/staff from the British Council facilitated curriculum mapping sessions supported stakeholders including school leaders, curriculum experts and policymakers in reflecting on how Core Skills can be embedded into or complement the existing curriculum. British Council staff also worked with policymakers to develop Country Plans, which outlined the country specific strategy for the programme. In both cases, the mobilisation of the British Council’s expertise was useful to drive meaningful changes.” (Ipsos UK, 2022)

For the British Council, this expertise in English and Education may seem obvious but it is important to recognise that in many ODA-eligible countries it remains a highly valued area of expertise, with clear applicability to national development priorities.

“Their role is particularly relevant in []. We have prioritized quality of education - teacher training and student assessment. In both of these areas, the British Council has the expertise.” (External Stakeholder)

In some, but probably fewer, ODA eligible countries the British Council is also recognised for its work in development through arts and wider areas of culture.

“...there are very few agencies in the development sector that can bring in such a unique expertise of combining art and culture to development.” (External Stakeholder)

The reports by Tom Fleming cited above highlighted the recognition of the British Council’s contribution to the development of the creative economy in several countries and the more recent DICE programme has extended that recognition. The Cultural Protection Fund and CH4IG (Case Study 2)

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have increased the British Council’s association with Cultural Heritage as a vehicle for sustainable development.

“But I think we sometimes do ourselves a disservice by not emphasising the technical expertise and track record and institutional knowledge that we have, that we’ve built up over, you know, whatever, many years, 80 years, or whatever it is. And that’s another reason why we are unique, because we have been around a long time. And we have learned a lot along the way. And we have highly skilled people working for us.” (British Council staff)

Understanding of local context

A second characteristic especially valued by external stakeholders is the organisation’s deep and nuanced understanding of the local context which is interpreted as ensuring that projects and programmes are localised and adapted to work in the prevailing social and cultural environment within the country. For stakeholders, this localisation and contextualisation is regarded as one of the key requirements for ensuring that development projects are likely to be successful.

“If you don’t understand the culture, if your interventions are not culturally appropriate and aligned, they are not going to work. We have example after example of things not working because something external was introduced and not contextualised.” (External Stakeholder)

“Most of the low-impact projects [in development, generally] are not designed very well. The UK office might have designed a project for [] without considering the local situation. And, in many cases, the context might be different during the time of actual implementation.” (External Stakeholder)

The British Council's long-term presence in-country is widely seen as a particular asset in ensuring the appropriate contextualisation of programmes and their alignment to genuinely relevant national needs.

"The British Council won a project in this country [in education] through a competition. For the scope of work, they were good. They were locally present in the country. They understood the country context very well, unlike other INGOs." (External Stakeholder)

This understanding of local context is supported by the British Council's widespread employment of local staff who have grown up within the context in which the ODA project will be implemented.

"I think one of the strengths that we have at the British Council is the fact that we have people who are from the sector on the ground. And so the localisation of the staff is important. [...] think the local expertise is key, if you don't have that local expertise, I don't know how you could do without it. The local expertise and the local networks that we create, someone from the UK could not do the job that we're doing here." (British Council staff)

"The British Council is kind of trying to move in the direction of employing people who are from the regions where the projects have to be conducted. So, for instance, now we have a British Council manager who is from [...], I'm very happy now to have a local manager because she understands the problems. She's willing to help to solve the problems. So overall, I think it's a good improvement." (External Stakeholder)

The value to external stakeholders of this deep understanding of context is brought out

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strongly in the evaluation of The Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning (CCGL) programme (Ipsos UK, 2022):

"We have also trained for our students on English language by other providers but it's not like the British Council because the British Council have their offices here in Gaza and coordinate very well the trainings, even in the West Bank. The British Council has long experience in Gaza and the MENA area, they know the environment and what to provide. They are not like other partners that do not have the same experience about UNRWA, Palestine conflict, and Palestinian culture." (Policymaker, OPT quoted in Ipsos UK, 2022)

Extensive local networks

One consequence of its on the ground presence and understanding of local context is that the British Council can access and mobilise an extensive network of relevant local organisations within civil society. For example, its work for the Cultural Protection Fund (CPF) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) has been operationalized in close collaboration with four local NGOs which, in the challenging context of the OPT, perform many functions which central government is incapable of undertaking. A report on the impact of CPF in four countries and territories including in OPT found that the British Council had worked effectively with these key NGOs to create impact and in doing so had also helped strengthen important relationships between these NGOs and central ministries.

"There are four well-developed NGOs focused on cultural heritage in the OPT..... Funded projects [within CPF] in the OPT were largely decentralised, capitalising on the skills and experience of the four major NGOs, but they also managed to involve the Ministries of

Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) and of Local Government (MoLG) in projects such as EAMENA and As Samou'. They have, therefore, made a contribution to forging stronger and more effective relationships between central government and local NGOs which will be important for heritage protection in the OPT in the longer term." (In2Impact, 2021).

The report on the evaluation of the CH4IG pilot illustrated how wide these local networks accessible to the British Council can be.

"Over the first two years of the pilot of CH4IG, 240 institutions were supported through the programme's capacity-building activities, including 210 Kenyan organisations, 21 Vietnamese organisations and six indigenous groups in Colombia. In Vietnam, an additional 504 institution-level stakeholders were indirectly supported through capacity-building activities of a partner organisation. As such, there were more organisations reporting strengthened capacity than were initially supported. Each of the partner organisations was a highly regarded expert in its field, and

in many cases the capacity-building activities were bolstered by their quality and quantity." (Nordicity, 2021b).

Access to Policymakers

In addition to these extensive local partners, over time the British Council has also developed extensive contacts within government and other policy-making bodies in education, culture, the creative economy and civil society which it can access to maximise impact through its programmes. These contacts can help to ensure that programmes working directly with beneficiaries receive appropriate policy-level support and also that the policy strands which are integral to many programmes benefit from appropriate participation.

The evaluation of the two-year pilot programme for DICE concluded that in Brazil, for example:

"Stronger outcomes regarding policy engagement and change were often built from existing connections and indicates the added value of the British Council leading the programme." (Itad, BOP Consulting, 2020)

Developing Inclusive and Creative Economies (DICE)

The DICE programme, launched in 2018, aimed to contribute to inclusive and sustainable development by supporting creative social enterprises (CSEs) and by strengthening the ecosystem in which they operate. The pilot programme focused on five countries, Brazil, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Africa, Egypt and prioritized key areas around gender, disability, marginalised communities and youth unemployment.

The programme operated at policy, institutional and individual levels and engaged with policymakers and key influencers to help participating countries identify systemic barriers and promote legislation, strategies and funding that enable social and creative enterprises to flourish.

Multi-national experience

One advantage of being a globally recognised authority in areas such as English and Education is that the British Council is valued for having multinational experience, a global perspective and being able to bring learning from different countries and context into its programmes. Indeed, many of its programmes are multi-country and consciously seek to build connections and share learning across countries. Within the CPF programme, for example, there is now a specific strand to identify on a multi-country basis ‘*What Works*’ in the protection of cultural heritage.

The evaluation of the pilot of the CH4IG programme pointed to the value of adopting a multinational approach.

“Drawing on action learning from different sources and contexts, the British Council has been able to apply knowledge, expertise and credibility quickly and effectively. The role of the global programme spanning different countries adds prestige and credentials to all elements, expanding their reach, influence and outcomes.” (Nordicity, 2021b)

The evaluation also identified the following benefits of a multi-national project:

“Exploring different areas and models of cultural heritage and inclusive growth under one concept as outlined in the Theory of Change;

Fostering international dialogue on cultural heritage and inclusive growth;

Advancing research and further development of the concept;

Building stronger external, internal and international connections for investment, improved programming and future opportunities.”

Access to Multinational expertise

A final element of Cultural Relations Capital available to the British Council is its wide access to international and especially UK expertise.

As discussed below, brokering partnerships between international and local organisations is central to the practice of Cultural Relations and the British Council’s track record and brand values allow it to engage world leading organisations such as the Departments of Archaeology at the universities of Oxford, Edinburgh and Durham (among many others) in the Cultural Protection Fund.

In the CH4IG pilot programme, 31 UK-based heritage and cultural organisations shared practice with others based outside the UK. Two UK-based organisations shared practice with Kenya, 24 with Vietnam and five with Colombia. Within DICE, 28 UK based intermediary organisations were connected to partner organisation in one of the other DICE countries (Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan and South Africa).

Importantly, especially in the context of soft power for the UK discussed later, the British Council does not exclusively leverage UK expertise. Although not uniquely focused on development, its international conference such as Going Global (in education) and New Directions (In English Language Assessment) bring together experts from all over the world. CPF works with many expert institutions in the UK but also with institutions from other countries which can provide international best practice. For example, *Brandenburg University, Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud* and *Premiere Urgence Internationale* are three of the international organisations involved in the latest phase of CPF projects in the Middle East and East Africa.

“The British Council, unlike other institutions, it's not exclusive. The Cultural Protection Funds are not exclusively for British institutions. Anyone in the world can apply”
(External Stakeholder)

The value of Cultural Relations Practice

Cultural Relations Practice can be viewed as the activities, engagement models, behaviours and values which are applied to delivering projects and programmes through Cultural Relations. They stand very much as a direct counterpart to the elements of Cultural Relations Capital discussed above.

Co-creation

The first element which is highlighted by almost all British Council staff is co-creation; the idea that in approaching development projects it looks to develop solutions in consultation with in-country governments and agencies rather than imposing ready-made solutions developed externally. This idea of co-creation has strong alignment to Mutuality, one of the core values of Cultural Relations.

“So it's not a deployment of a particular approach to something and this is how we are going to do it. It's a two-way process.” (British Council staff)

“.....because that's what Cultural Relations is about. It's about listening.” (British Council staff)

A wide-ranging review of how the British Council's work in schools exemplifies a Cultural Relations approach was undertaken by Partners for Change in 2022 and summarised the approach, which has co-creation at its heart, very well.

“Reflecting on the diversity of Cultural Relations contexts in schools work, there is a spectrum of approaches that is evident. The

formation and support of equitable, inclusive, mutually beneficial partnerships are at the core of the British Council's approach: projects and programmes are designed in consultation or partnership with stakeholders, and intercultural exchanges such as policy dialogues or school partnerships are structured and facilitated by the British Council to ensure equitable and mutually beneficial processes and outcomes.”
(Partners for Change, 2022)

Community ownership

The second element is local and community ownership, which links very strongly to the idea of co-creation of solutions and to the overarching partnership model discussed below.

Local ownership is especially evident in the British Council's work in cultural heritage. Within the Cultural Protection Fund, community understanding and ownership (in both a conceptual and economic sense) is a fundamental principle of the programme, aligned to a belief that sustainable heritage protection is only possible through local communities who feel they have a stake in their own heritage. Almost all projects within the fund have a local partner, such as the four heritage-oriented NGOs in the OPT referenced above, and all projects have an element of community outreach and engagement.

The evaluation of CPF over the period 2016-2020 noted:

“Across a number of projects, the engagement of young people, and activating them to become advocates for their heritage in order to safeguard it for the future, is seen as a key success factor. One grantee described young “heritage gatherers” now leading new cohorts of young people, sharing the knowledge, skills and practices they had

gained through involvement. The grantee described this peer-to-peer transmission as “critical” to the sustainability of the work as it is locally-owned and led.” (ERS, 2021)

“The key legacy left from this project is that building the capacity of young people from within their own communities to become the gatherers, mediators and disseminators of their own heritage under threat offers a sustainable, locally owned and led, exciting pathway for both empowering young people while ensuring that heritage is protected within and across generations. The replicability of the work in other countries shows that the methodology lends itself to local adaptation and adoption.” (CPF grantee, quoted in ERS, 2021)

Similarly, the evaluation of the pilot programme for Ch4IG noted:

“In terms of the proof of concept evidenced on a community level, the programme has supported people in gaining a deeper understanding of the value and opportunities that their cultural heritage can bring.” (Nordicity, 2021b)

Brokering partnerships

Partnerships are at the heart of the majority of Cultural Relations programmes run by the British Council in the development field. The core idea is that brokering partnerships between UK or other international organisations and local analogues can facilitate co-creation of context-appropriate solutions, stimulate innovation, facilitate two-way exchange of knowledge and skills and, crucially, support longer-term capacity building in the recipient ODA eligible country, which is seen as the route to long-term, sustainable development impact.

The partnership model is central to a wide range of programmes including Connecting

Classrooms for Global Learning, the Cultural Protection Fund and DICE among many others.

Findings within the evaluation of CCGL (Ipsos UK, 2022) found for example, that at a school level,

- In Nepal, teachers highlighted the benefits of participating in partnerships; these exposed them to new teaching methods and motivated them to implement these in their classroom. Examples included project-based learning, practical activities, and competency-based assessment. They also reported that partnerships made them more aware of global dimensions of learning and helped them broaden their students’ horizons.
- In OPT, policymakers reported that school partnerships had positive student, teacher, and school leader outcomes through providing opportunities to learn best practice and develop core skills.
- In Kenya, most teachers agreed that partnerships added value for schools in terms of understanding best practice in global citizenship, embedding global learning in other subjects, and increasing the quality of teaching and pedagogical skills. There was also strong agreement that partnership activities improved their teaching of active global citizenship.

But the partnership model is also multilayered, so that individual school-to-school partnerships are set within a higher-level set of partnerships at government level. Based on the longevity of the British Council in many countries and the deep relationships of trust which it has built over time, the recent report on the role of Cultural Relations in schools concluded:

“In some cases, the partnership between the British Council and the local Ministry of Education has reached the point where the British Council is entrusted with delivering key elements of entire national teacher training programmes.” (Partners for Change, 2022)

Several programmes are explicitly devoted to partnerships as a tool for development and this practice is very much in line with the thinking behind SDG 17 which is about partnership as an overarching mechanism for achieving other SDGs.

The British Council has now consolidated a number of education partnership schemes at HE level which cover research, teaching and institutional capacity building under a single portfolio of Higher Education Partnerships (HEPs). Within this portfolio, The Newton Fund, for which the British Council is an implementing partner, aims to build research

and innovation partnerships with countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to support economic development and social welfare, tackle global challenges and develop talent and careers. A recent report on the partnerships’ achievements in Latin America concluded:

“The British Council’s flagship Higher Education programme, the Going Global Partnerships in the period of 2017-2021, in the Americas region alone has facilitated 491 partnerships with UK HE institutions; directly benefitted 1,897 HE institutions, mostly universities in LATAC and over 15,000 researchers and academic staff and 170,000 students in the region.” (Technopolis, 2021b)

The DICE programme also incorporated a pilot programme to understand whether digital partnerships can be effective in supporting innovation and building capacity.

DICE Digital R&D Fund

Within the overall DICE programme, the DICE Digital R&D Fund aimed to explore the possibilities of digital mediums in creating experiences for marginalised individuals in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The fund supported pairs of organisations, known as Digital Partners (DPs), from different countries to collaborate and deliver digital experiences for specific target audiences. The partners, drawn from Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Africa, and the UK, engaged in co-designing and co-delivering these experiences using only digital platforms. In total, 20 Digital Experiences (DEs) were supported, involving 40+ organisational DPs, with average grants of £15,000 for each DE to support activities over three months (March-May 2021). The fund went beyond providing grants and included activities like match-making, community-building, and research to enhance the collective experience.

The final evaluation of DICE Digital Research and Development Fund (Emily Rogers, 2021) reported that the fund has proved that organisations from different countries can collaborate digitally to co-create and realise an experience, and for many that these collaborations engaged people marginalised by the societies in which they live. 90% of the DPs felt the experience had strengthened their relationship with the organisations they partnered with, and 14 out of the 20 partnerships plans to continue collaborating confirming for the majority the experience of collaboration was positive and mutually beneficial.

The partnership model can also support strengthened relationships both within countries and multilaterally. As CPF has developed it has focused not only on bilateral partnerships but also on developing communities of practice within countries to strengthen heritage protection. We noted above how involvement in CPF has brought together the four heritage focused NGOs within the OPT and also helped align their work more closely to the relevant ministries of the central administration.

The evaluation of the DICE Digital R&D Fund noted, that, *“as a result of the programme, there is now, a web of relationships and links between organisations in the six countries that did not exist beforehand.”*

Sharing and Exchange

Partnerships is one highly important mechanism for supporting an underlying mechanism of Cultural Relations, that of sharing and exchange. Within programme partnerships there is ample evidence of sharing of skills and knowledge across a wide range of areas. On occasions, the exchange is of people, with professionals and researchers spending time in peer countries

working collaboratively with their international colleagues.

Within Higher Education Partnerships, the skills and knowledge exchange is often focused on specific academic and scientific research. Within the recently completed UK/Ukraine Season of Culture sharing and exchange of art forms and people was designed both to increase awareness of Ukraine culture in the UK and internationally and to support the financial and artistic resilience of Ukrainian artistic and cultural professionals.

The evaluation of CCGL found that active sharing and exchange can improve outcomes:

“Qualitative evidence showed that schools that had participated in reciprocal visits and had high levels of pupil-to-pupil engagement experienced the most significant knowledge and behavioural outcomes, and these outcomes supported transformative change across the school. This finding from qualitative research with schools is also supported with quantitative evidence from monitoring data, which found that schools that had participated in reciprocal visits reported high scores on what they had ‘achieved or gained from the school partnership,’ as shown in the table below. Schools that participated in a reciprocal visit consistently rated higher what they had achieved or gained from the partnership across the seven criteria included in the partnership survey than schools that had not participated in a reciprocal visit. Furthermore, schools’ self-reported student outcomes in the partnership survey were also on average higher for those schools that participated in a reciprocal visit as compared to those that did not. (Ipsos UK, 2022)

Within the DICE Digital R&D Fund, the digital experience, *“Weaving Pathways”* involved a three-way partnership between Brazil, Pakistan, and the UK. One of the partners noted: *“More than international, the project allowed transnational collaborations. As we were weaving pathways, cultural borders got blurred from Sao Paulo to Hunza Valley crossing the Andes, between Casa do Povo, CESF, Social Innovation Lab, and KADO. The richness of the project exchanges could not be reached without the interaction of so many groups and influences. This can be directly attributable to the Fund, in particular the Community of Practice (CoP) which has demonstrated a community of diverse organisations can be nurtured on-line.”* (Emily Rogers, 2021)

Convening

The ability to convene national and international forums of policy-makers and like-minded communities of interest and practice is seen internally and externally as a further key area of Cultural Relations practice. Within the British Council it is enabled by its in-country relationships and its international reputation in English, areas of education and the arts.

“I think the British Council is good at convening research and publishing research, and hopefully the research gets utilized. I attended a symposium long back that was jointly organized by the British Council and Open Society Foundation, and the purpose was to bring the learning together from many organizations who worked in the space of youth engagement. The program was really impactful.” (External Stakeholder)

We discussed above, the standalone industry-wide forums such as Going Global and New

Directions which are convened by the British Council to share international good practice.

Within programmes, convening can support wider activities focused on beneficiaries and/or constitute a parallel strand of policy-level work. The Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) Programme - an initiative of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) aimed at improving security and stability to prevent population displacement and forced and irregular migration - was implemented by the British Council in three states in North-eastern Nigeria. It facilitated the convening of dialogue platforms to address specific conflict issues in local communities.

“To promote reconciliation and stability in polarised conflict-affected communities, MCN has engaged and supported 213 civil society organisations to undertake activities. CSOs were supported to convene 33 dialogue platforms to address specific conflict issues in communities. These platforms undertook 72 actions leading to the resolution of 30 issues, notably many involving farmers and herders and enrolment of children in schools.” (Partners for Peace, 2022)

Within CH4IG, the British Council designed and delivered the CH4IG Bogotá Symposium in collaboration with The Regional Centre for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Latin America (CRESPIAL). The symposium promoted the articulation of knowledge networks with nodes in Colombia, other parts of Latin America, Kenya, Vietnam and the UK. British experts in eco-tourism and sustainable business who attended the symposium said that they learned new ways of thinking about various topics after listening to the experiences of the communities in Colombia. (Nordicity, 2021b)

Embracing equality and diversity

Certainly within the British Council a commitment to EDI is seen as one of the central principles and core strengths of Cultural Relations practice. It is now a central strand running through every programme. For example, to support partnerships within the recent India/UK Together Season of Culture a specialist EDI consultancy was employed locally to support the development of diverse and inclusive practice within India-UK partnerships.

The sharing of UK expertise around disabled arts is one of the major impacts of the UK's arts programmes in the last ten years and UK organisations such as Unlimited and Graeae have worked with the British Council and leveraged that cooperation to become internationally renowned experts in the field.

For example, Transform was a multi-year programme that aimed to develop the artistic dialogue between the UK and Brazil for mutual benefit and long-term impact. The evaluation report (BOP Consulting, 2017) noted.

“Projects addressing issues of social inclusion were a consistent strand within Transform.The Shape Arts training delivered through Unlimited allowed professionals to come together and exchange knowledge about existing comparative practice in Brazil that addressed disability issues. Attendees of performances and Unlimited training also praised it for providing a developmental opportunity for all taking part, rather than presenting the ‘spectacle’ of artists with disabilities. This opened-up discussion as to whether policy should address access, participation or both.

Interviews with Brazilian State Governments demonstrated that the arts are definitely viewed as an opportunity for government to

better support those with disabilities. In this context, Transform was welcomed by Governments in helping them to think through and enact a more holistic policy towards disability art.” (BOP Consulting, 2017)

Embracing marginalized communities and groups

Many British Council programmes now consciously target marginalized communities, including in countries where women are marginalized. This conscious targeting complements the wider attempt through Cultural Relations to facilitate local ownership of development initiatives.

For example, Women In STEM was a study in Egypt examining the barriers for women and girls in STEM. The Cultural Assets and Vernacular Materials (C&VM) programme explored a range of sustainability challenges currently being faced by craft practitioners and artisans in Borneo. Projects within the Cultural Protection Fund have included work to support the cultural heritage of Bedouins and Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Likewise, the languages for Resilience programme aimed to support the resilience and long-term employability of refugees and the English for Isolated Communities programme supported access to education and employability in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe

“.....assessing outcomes of the programme to date in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Belarus, and Moldova. In a survey of students, the review found strongly positive outcomes in all countries, with over 80% indicating that their further education and/or employment prospects had improved because of taking part in the English clubs.” (The Research Base, 2019)

C4HIG provides some of the clearest examples of impact through working with marginalized communities.

“ In Colombia, CH4IG partnered with the Misak indigenous government (Cabildo of Guambía) for the programme’s implementation. Because there was no team dedicated to culture or cultural heritage within the Cabildo, the community stressed the need to establish a group that would coordinate the CH4IG activities. Three community representatives were appointed by the governor to act as intermediaries between the CH4IG team and the Cabildo. The Misak Cultural Heritage Programme was thus established.....

.....The creation of the Misak Cultural Heritage Programme is evidence of the mind shift that CH4IG brought to the community and its ecosystem. As Patricia Navas, CH4IG Colombia’s director highlighted: “they changed their government so cultural heritage would be as important as education or health”. (The Social Investment Consultancy, 2022)

Adhering to rigorous protocols

The British Council’s perceived regard for strict standards around child protection and safe-guarding allows it to work effectively with young people and members of marginalized groups and as discussed in chapter 10 serves as an example of the role-modeling through Cultural Relations of attractive values.

For example, during recent UK/India Together Season of culture partners were given safeguarding training ahead of any involvement in the programme. Safeguarding protocols were also rigorously followed even in the context of projects undertaken in Govandi (a severely disadvantaged community on the outskirts of Mumbai). During a celebratory Lantern Parade the

under 18s of the community were cordoned off and accompanied by adults to provide them with the necessary safety in traffic, while walking in the dark.

Being evidence-driven

Evidencing development impact is difficult for all organisations working in the field. But having a focus on evidence collection and a commitment to rigorous Monitoring and Evaluation is increasingly an entry-level requirement for any organisation wishing to be taken seriously, especially when dealing with the major multi-lateral agencies such as the EC or World Bank.

Although external evidence for its importance within a Cultural Relations approach is limited internally it is believed to be an increasing strength of the British Council

Being values-driven

The final element of Cultural Relations Practice captures an intangible element which cuts across all the other elements within it. It is a sense among many staff that the essence of Cultural Relations practice is as much a state of mind and an ethos as it is a set of deconstructed tools.

“...actually the ethos of the organisation, the way we approach relationships, and deal with external parties, I think does embody a lot of those principles in a way that is quite hardwired into our ways of working, in our relationship building and in the type of people who want to work for us and do work for us.” (British Council Staff)

The combined elements of Cultural Relations as Capital and Practice was very well summarised in a document prepared by the British Council for the 2019 World Justice

Forum (WJF) in The Hague (British Council, 2019):

“We have a long-term relationship with the countries we work in: in many countries we have had a consistent presence for over 80 years. We build trusting partnerships with stakeholders at many levels of society: we work with governments to inform, influence and strengthen policy, and we are embedded in social and cultural life through our work in society, arts, sport for social cohesion and teaching English.

These long standing and multifaceted relationships in many countries have enabled us to build trust with both citizens and state. We are ideally placed to convene safe spaces

in which contentious politics and difficult issues can be identified, discussed and mutually beneficial dialogue facilitated.

Our approach is grounded in mutuality and guided by contextual understanding and locally-driven solutions. We work closely with local communities to gain a deep understanding of the challenges they face, in order to support them in the process of developing appropriate responses and peaceful outcomes.

We have an extensive network of specialist and experienced staff who know the communities we work with and who are able to reach and then engage with key institutions and organisations effectively.”

Contemporary good practice in development

A focus on capacity development

No direct counterfactual is available to show whether the development impacts of programmes delivered through Cultural Relations practice would have been different had they been delivered outside of a Cultural Relations approach.

However, recent literature on good practice in development points strongly to the value of the overall approach of Cultural Relations as well as to many of the individual elements within that approach.

A lessons learned review by Timmis examining donor support to Technical Assistance (TA) programmes in development argued that the broad concept of Capacity Development, “*building the ability of people, organisations and society to manage their affairs successfully*”, has become the dominant discourse and practice in development programming, replacing the previous model of Technical Assistance (Timmis, 2018).

Timmis outlines the differences between Capacity Development and Technical Assistance in Table 1 (page 57). Key links between the broad concept of Capacity Development and Cultural Relations include,

- the overarching idea of local ownership,
- the emphasis on local skills and resources,
- the prioritisation of inclusivity,

- the contextualization to local needs – not adopting a one size fits all approach.

Alignment between Cultural Relations and good practice in development

Timmis’s review identified five best practices for which there is strong support in the literature. In each of these areas there is some alignment to elements of a Cultural Relations approach.

Ensure partner ownership. In line with the Cultural Relations practice of listening and working in a mutual partnership, Timmis argues after Lucas (2013) that, “*it is a reasonable assumption that local partners are best placed to identify what capacity they need.....how it can best be developed in their context, and what support they need from development partners to achieve it.*”

Recognise and respond to complexity. The literature argues that practitioners should respond to this complexity by taking “a holistic and system-responsive” approach to organisational capacity building, employing numerous types of activity. Timmis reproduces Table 2 (page 59), drawing on Datta et al. (2012), which illustrates the types of activity which are valuable. These include action research, knowledge brokering and networking, coaching and mentoring and knowledge networking, all strongly represented in Cultural Relations approaches.

Table 1: Approaches to development assistance (Timmis, 2018)

Development approach	Assumptions	Characteristics
<p><i>Technical Assistance (1960s – 1990s):</i> Foreign experts come in to operate their own projects, which they expect yield similar results to those seen in developed countries</p> <p>-and-</p> <p><i>Technical Cooperation (1960s – 1990s):</i> Greater emphasis on training, transferring knowledge, based on national policies and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing countries should just model themselves after the developed ones • Few or no resources available locally • Developing countries should partner with developed ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects launched, but disconnected from local goals or priorities • Dependence on foreign experts • Expertise not always transferred from foreigners to locals • The externally driven models often ignore local realities • Idea of ‘assistance’ highlights unequal relationship between developed and developing countries • Local expertise is enhanced • Projects somewhat more in line with local priorities and goals • Driven by outside forces, opportunities missed to develop local institutions and strengthen local capacities • Expensive
<p><i>Capacity Development (1990s – present):</i> A focus on empowering and strengthening endogenous capabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing countries should own, design, direct, implement and sustain the process themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes the most of local resources – people, skills, technologies, institutions – and builds on these • Favours sustainable change • Takes an inclusive approach in addressing issues of power inequality in relations between rich and poor, mainstream and marginalized (countries, groups and individuals) • Emphasizes deep, lasting transformations through policy and institutional reforms • Values ‘best fit’ for the context over ‘best practice; as one size does not fit all

Source: Adapted from Pearson, 2011: pp. 11-12

Table 2: Examples of capacity building activities (Timmis, 2018)

Conventional	Advanced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and related workshop forms; • Technical advice (often focused on specific systems and/or procedures); • Support to project management; • Support to lobby and advocacy work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action research and action learning, including pilots and laboratories; • Knowledge brokering and networking; • Various kinds of multi-stakeholder processes; • Stimulating mutual and public accountability mechanisms; • Coaching and mentoring • Change and process facilitation; • Leadership development • Value chain development; • Knowledge networking.

Source: Ubels et al. (2010) in Datta et al. (2012)

Improve delivery of Technical Assistance. Suggested mechanisms include Twinning and Peer-to-Peer partnership approaches. *“These models pair similar public agencies or departments in different countries to foster the long-term exchange of knowledge, learning and expertise. They emphasise collaboration and equal partnership.”* The facilitation of multilateral and/or South-South partnerships is also mentioned.

Involve different levels of government, as well as non-state actors. The argument here is to work not only with National Government Ministries but also provincial and district authorities. *“Building the capacity of non-state actors can also contribute to better governance and other development outcomes. For example, a strengthened civil society is central to improving government accountability, while supporting non-state authorities, such as religious organisations or tribal chiefs, can contribute to improved public services in some contexts.”*

Focus on results. *“Monitoring and communicating capacity building outcomes is*

a pre-requisite to ensuring intervention effectiveness.”

A complementary review undertaken by Price, 2019 looked at lessons learned around Technical Assistance and Capacity Building in institutional reform. The review identified ten general themes emerging from the learnings and several of these find strong echoes in the feedback both from external stakeholders consulted for this research and also from British Council staff working in development.

Local ownership – making the project relevant to local priorities, invest in local teams and use local systems.

“The first ingredient is local ownership, i.e., prioritizing the local needs and giving attention to them ensuring that whether its community or district level or prevention level, or with multi-ethnic entities like in Bangladesh, Pakistan, etc. So, within those countries, there are different forms of power structure, and it's very important to keep them in mind.”
(External stakeholder)

“I would say some of the characteristics of high impact projects are when you have really

significant buy in from the community. When I say the community, I mean teachers, headteacher, school management committees, parents, children and usually that is done through community mobilization, it might be done through social and behavioral change communication. It is possible when the implementers are really close to the community and have a deep understanding of the way things work or the way things could work.” (External Stakeholder)

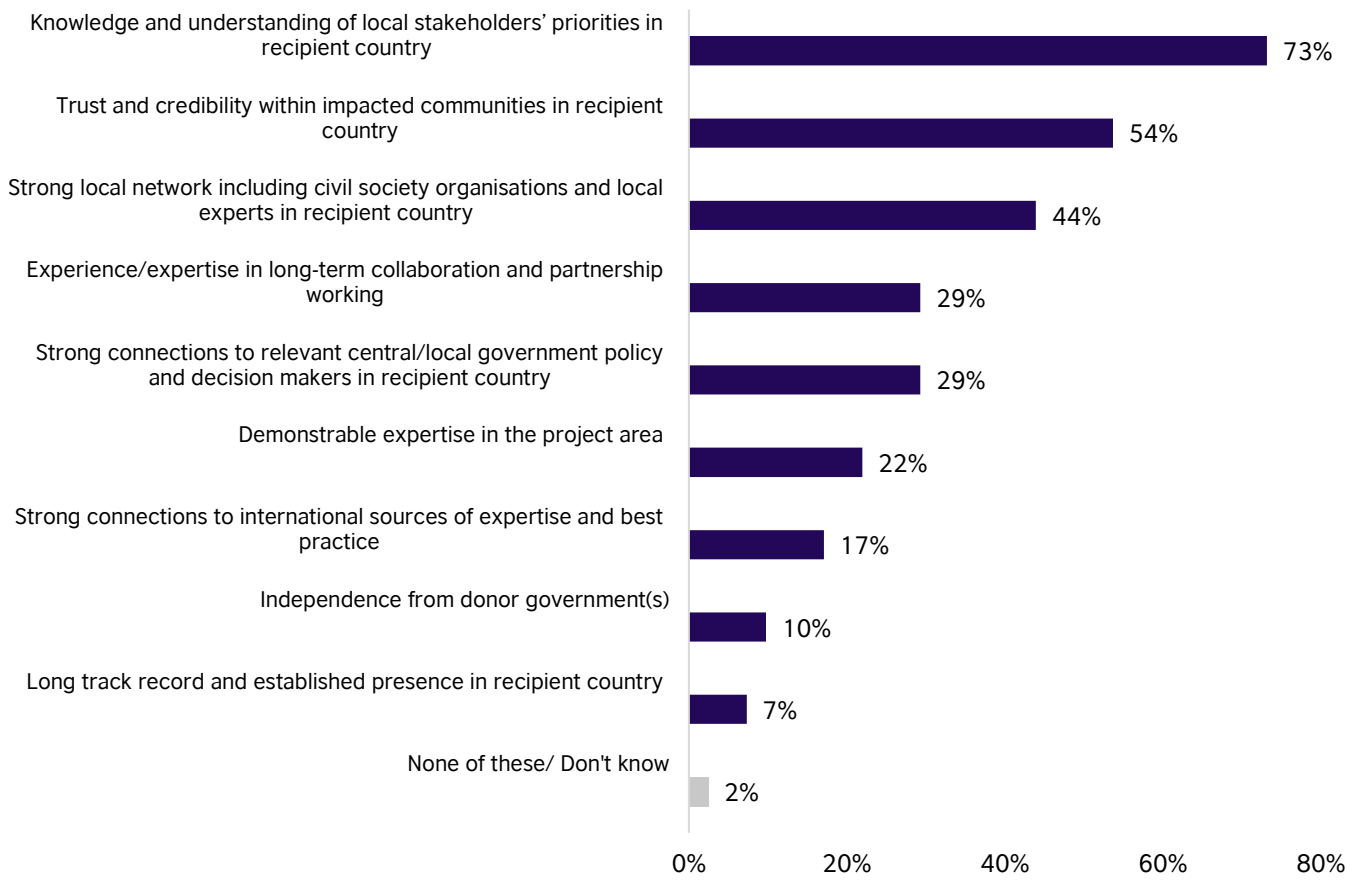
Shared vision – focus on problems that are priorities for partners and where reform has built-in traction.

“The high-impact projects [in development generally] often secure alignment between the local government, donor, and international development priorities such as sustainable development goals.” (External Stakeholder)

British Council staff also see that it is key for development agencies to have both an understanding of local stakeholder priorities and trust and credibility with targeted communities (Chart 2).

Chart 2: British Council staff believe that development agencies need to have an understanding of local stakeholders’ priorities along with trust and credibility in impacted communities

Which of the following do you think are the most important attributes that an effective agency for ODA projects needs to have? Choose up to THREE options



Source: British Council Cultural Relations and Development Survey.

Base: British Council development practitioners (41)

Understanding context is key – need to take the time to understand this and the political dynamics. Purely technical solutions are not enough, importance of thinking and working politically.

“There should be ownership and mutual support among the partners. The top to bottom balance is important. They (donors) have deliverables tied up with their financial commitment. We (recipient governments), sometimes, have ideas which may not match with their thinking. To be successful, donors should be able to listen to the local government and local voices. The project that

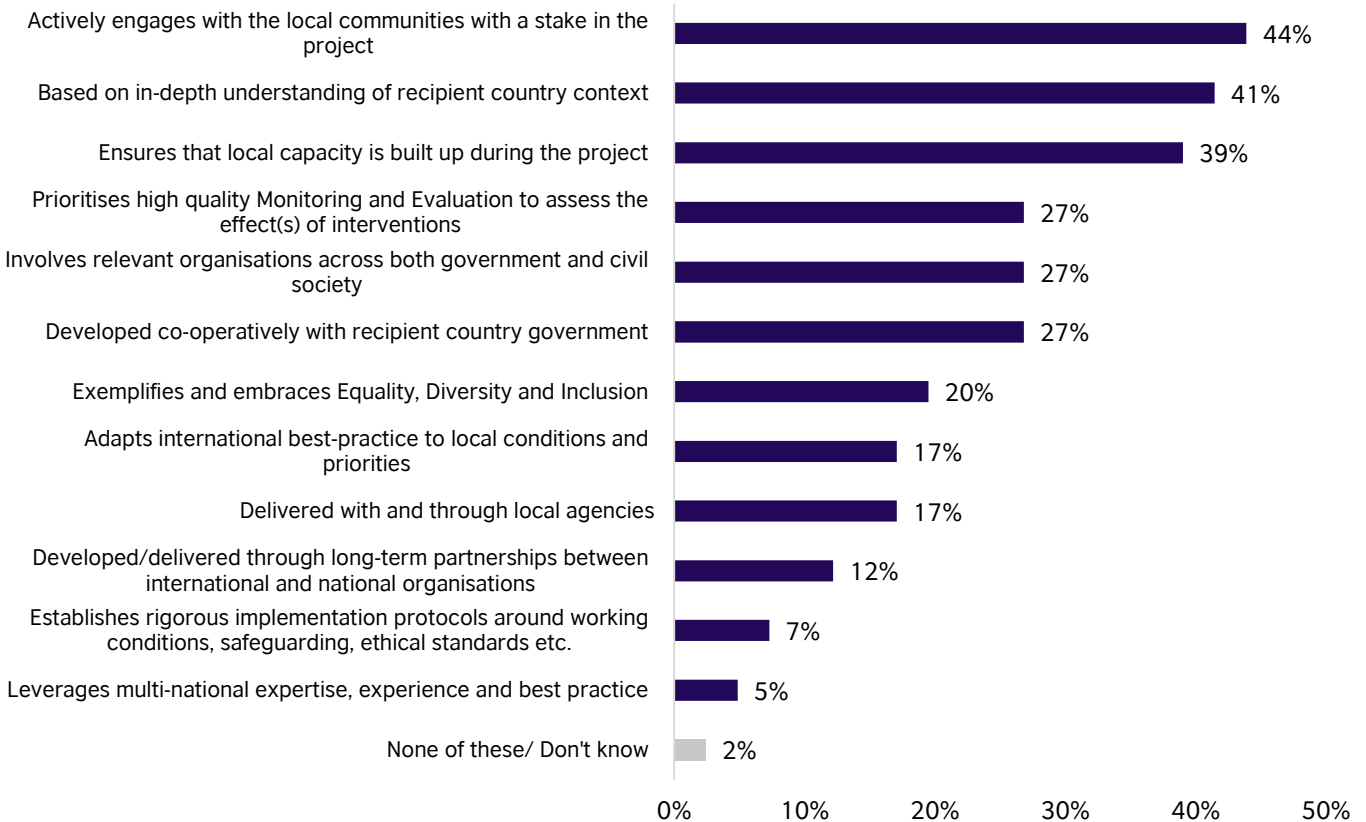
we are running right now, we had rounds of discussions and negotiations. I am glad to say that, recently, they have been listening to what we like to do / how we like to do.”
(External Stakeholder)

“A high impact project takes into consideration the local environment and collaborates with the local government and is also flexible enough to accommodate their requests.”
(External Stakeholder)

Again, the importance of understanding local context as a crucial success factor is strongly endorsed by British Council staff (Chart 3).

Chart 3: British Council staff believe that in-depth understanding of local context, engagement with local communities and building local capacity is crucial to the success of development projects

Which of the following do you think are the most important priorities for Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects which have a high chance of being successful? Choose up to THREE options



Source: British Council Cultural Relations and Development Survey.

Base: British Council development practitioners (41)

Learn and adapt – learning by doing and adapting during implementation is crucial.

“Flexibility and adaptation is super-important in a setting such as [].” (External Stakeholder)

“For me a lot of this starts with the culture of the organization and team, how open and flexible they are, and clarity around what a project is trying to do. The projects with young people that succeed bring youth right from the beginning in designing, implementing, and evaluating the projects. The projects need to adopt agile management, not get bogged

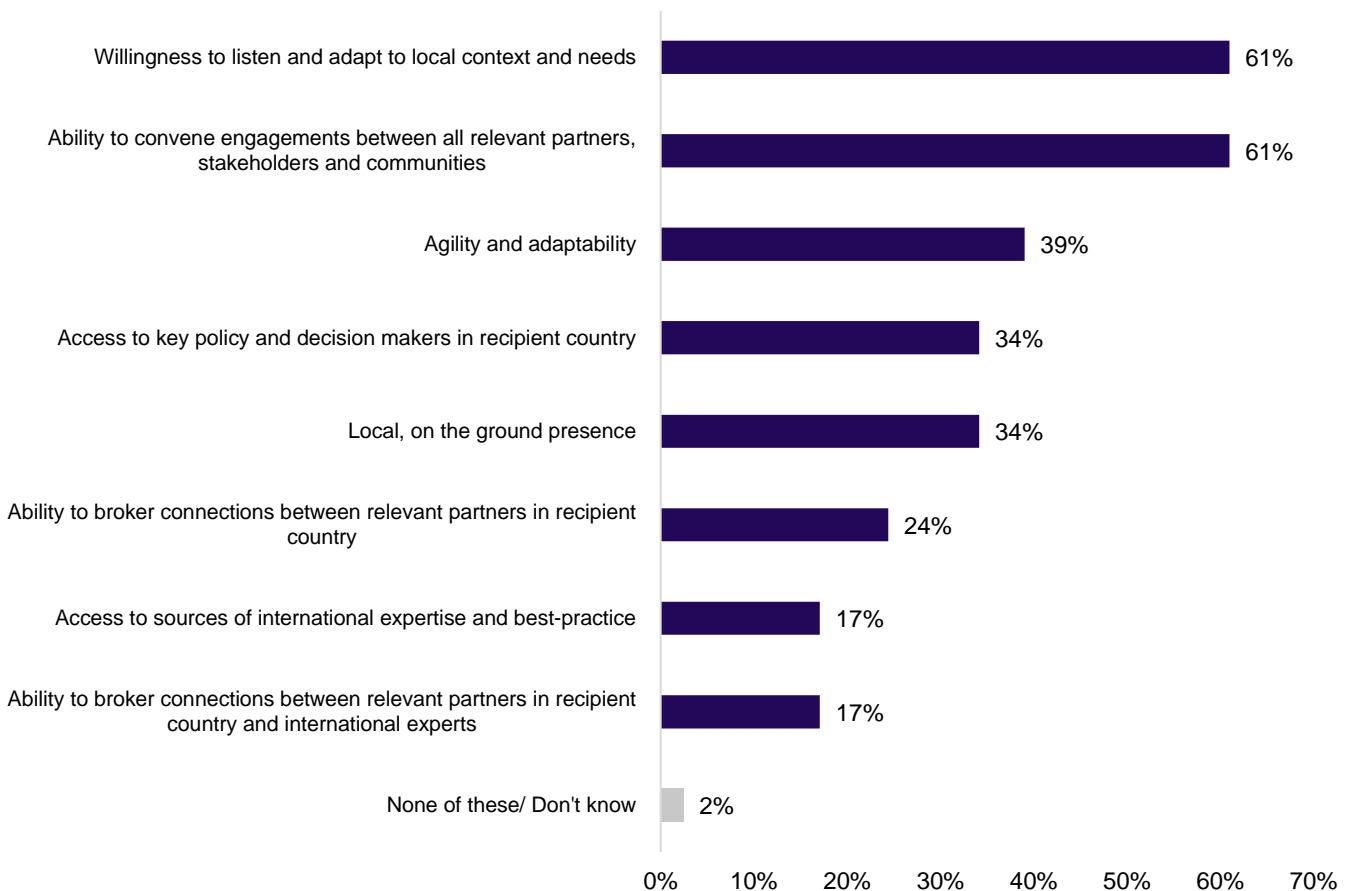
down with a theory of change that stays still for 3 years.” (External Stakeholder)

“Soft” skills are important – soft skills (i.e. developing and sustaining relations of trust and credibility with partners, leadership skills) underpin successful Technical Assistance. Incentives that reinforce broader change are also important.

For British Council staff, a willingness to listen to partners and an ability to convene all relevant partners, communities and stakeholders are among the key skills required for successful development projects (Chart 4).

Chart 4: British Council staff believe that a willingness to listen and adapt and the ability to convene key partners are crucial organisational capabilities in development

And which of the following organisational capabilities do you think are the most important for international organisations to deliver a successful ODA project? Choose up to THREE options



Source: British Council Cultural Relations and Development Survey.

Base: British Council development practitioners (41)

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Dealing with complexity – Capacity development interventions typically take far longer to implement and are more contested than envisioned, and they rarely respond to detailed design or linear execution. Important to recognise the limitations of Technical Assistance.

Multi-actor processes – need to build the constituency for delivering change at multiple levels with multiple actors, adopting a system wide approach.

“And these [high impact] projects usually have some level of being able to be scaled in some way. So when I first started my career, the organization that I was working for was doing a lot of small and highly localized projects which were good, but they were not necessarily changing the policy. And, if we are really thinking about the Sustainable Development Goals, or thinking about mass effects, you should also impact policy. Successful projects are impactful and operate at scale.” (External Stakeholder)

Timings and strategy – need for realistic timeframes (adaptive management approaches and capacities take time) and realistic planning, expectations and outputs based on thorough assessment. There are multiple entry points and tools.

Improved monitoring and evaluation – measure the right things (linear cause and effect models do not always work, and there are often difficulties in defining a “result”) and be flexible in approach.

“Successful projects are designed with clear performance indicators, quality and equity. The indicators are well defined at every stage including the intermediate ones. There is also a sound evaluation mechanism in place for the project for its achievements.” (External Stakeholder)

“The word impact is being colonised. When we say impact, the emphasis is very much on quantitative stuff and statistics (numbers and percentages).....the real gap lies in really exploring lived experiences of the people that benefited, and helping people/orgs to come out with their own solutions.....Personally, I am much interested in all those stories of change, how different communities want to create their own narrative of change, change in individuals/structures.” (External Stakeholder)

Improved donor processes and systems – existing systems are not always appropriate for encouraging adaptive, flexible Technical Assistance. Value for Money analysis is difficult to apply. More sophisticated management and investment in management is needed for adaptive programming.

The first five of these themes identified are clearly aligned to elements of the Cultural Relations approach discussed above while several of the remaining themes have some overlap. Table 3 (page 65) synthesises these fifteen lessons from the reviews of Timmis and Price and aligns them where appropriate to elements of a Cultural Relations approach.

Within development, Partnership has become an overarching paradigm. Long-term partnerships are seen to help build trust between the funders, implementers, and recipient government counterparts and that trust supports mutuality and exchange within the partnership which itself tends to increase the level of impact.

“Building partnerships between institutions in developed and developing countries, based on peer-to-peer relationships and lesson-sharing, is seen as an effective approach for international development. There are a number of features that distinguish north-south peer-to-peer partnerships from more

traditional technical assistance (DFID et al., 2018).

They are oriented around a long-term relationship based on mutual trust, including personal relationships between individuals with similar professional backgrounds, rather than a simple task or discrete objective.

The activities which drive the partnership are based around sharing lessons learned and joint problem-solving, rather than replacing local implementation of core institutional functions.

Peer-to-peer learning is inherently iterative, guided by short delivery cycles with an emphasis on learning and experimentation and reflection points and feedback loops.” (Quak, 2019)

External stakeholders consulted for this research do also see the value of well-directed long-term partnerships, especially where those partnerships are supported beyond the lifespan of typical project funding cycles.

“And, long-term partnerships are helpful to review, adapt, and course-correct the implementation. It increases the opportunity to

deliver projects effectively.” (External Stakeholder)

But even long-term partnerships are not seen as a panacea and there are some challenges which stakeholders recognise. One of these is the possible creation of over-reliance and dependency on the donor agency, which reinforces the need for real knowledge transfer and genuine capacity building during the partnership, so that eventually both partners can thrive alone.

“I do think long term partnerships are very important but they are very sensitive to the dynamic that you are creating by controlling the dependency cycle; you want to uplift other organizations as they uplift you. Critical, but you have to be thoughtful about it. You need to have an exit strategy.” (External Stakeholder)

An important finding in a wider sense of both the literature reviews undertaken by Timmis (2018) and Price (2019) was that there remains a lack of rigorous evaluations of capacity building interventions in development and a recognition that evaluation of the effectiveness of development programmes overall remains challenging.

Table 3: Mapping of good practice in development to elements of Cultural Relations

Identified element of Good Practice in Development (adapted from Timmis 2018; Price 2019)	Corresponding elements of a Cultural Relations approach to development
Ensure Partner Ownership	Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality); Extensive local networks
Local Ownership	Community ownership; Embracing marginalized communities and groups; Embracing diversity
Shared vision	Access to key policymakers; Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality)
Understanding context	Longevity in country; Understanding of local context
Involve different levels of government, as well as non-state actors / multi-actor processes	Convening of relevant policymakers and partners; Focus on young people and civil society institutions
Recognise and respond to complexity / Dealing with complexity	Longevity in country; Understanding of local context; Access to key policymakers
Learn and Adapt	Co-creation of solutions (Mutuality); Extensive local networks
Soft skills are important	Trusted brand; Being values-driven
Improve delivery of Technical Assistance (TA) – e.g. Twinning and Peer-to-Peer partnership approaches	Brokering of relevant partnerships, Sharing and exchange
Focus on results /Improved Monitoring and Evaluation	Being evidence-driven
Timings and Strategy	
Improved donor processes and systems	

A Theory of Change for Cultural Relations and Development

Overview

The analysis in this report has deconstructed the contribution to development outcomes of individual elements of Cultural Relations. The case studies within the report exemplify the development impact of major programmes and portfolios of work delivered by the British Council through Cultural Relations. The case studies also highlight some of the elements of Cultural Relations practice, along with the Cultural Relations assets (within the stock of Cultural Relations capital), which have contributed to the delivery of these development impacts.

Taken as a whole, the analysis presented in this report identifies the building blocks of a high-level Theory of Change (ToC) for how development outcomes and impact are generated through Cultural Relations.

Outcomes

At the outcome level, it is an obvious but important point that the primary aim of ODA-funded programmes, whether or not they use Cultural Relations approaches, has to be the delivery of impact through strong development outcomes.

So, if a Cultural Relations programme is funded through ODA, then its impact has to be measured and reported against the delivery of programme-specific development outcomes of the types exemplified in the case studies. For the British Council, these specific programme outcomes fall within the two broad development aims of enhanced peace and stability and increased prosperity.

Audiences

The direct audiences for British Council development programmes are typically young people with potential or professionals such as teachers, teacher educators, creative and media professionals or civil servants.

“They [the British Council] do wonderful work. They work in the community targeting youths. It's good to invest in youths in countries with a big mass of young population.” (External Stakeholder)

The conscious targeting of leaders and members of marginalised communities is also characteristic while other development programmes work with institutions and institutional leaders across education, arts and civil society; for example, arts institutions and universities.

These audiences are of course embedded within wider societies in recipient countries and these wider societies are at least an indirect audience for development programmes.

Many programmes also have leader-level and policy-maker audiences. Where established leaders in government, education or civil society are directly involved in Cultural Relations programmes it is often in the context of dialogue and policy exchange. Leaders are more often involved as indirect audiences who act as stakeholders for the positive impacts which Cultural Relations can bring to wider societies and people.

Most development programmes also have local institutional partners who are themselves important audiences – because they are part of the trusted relationships which make the interventions possible.

Cultural Relations Practice

Cultural Relations practice captures how development projects are delivered.

As discussed earlier, Cultural Relations Practice can be viewed as the activities, engagement models, behaviours, and values which the British Council applies to delivering projects and programmes through Cultural Relations for the development benefit of its target audiences.

Cultural Relations Capital

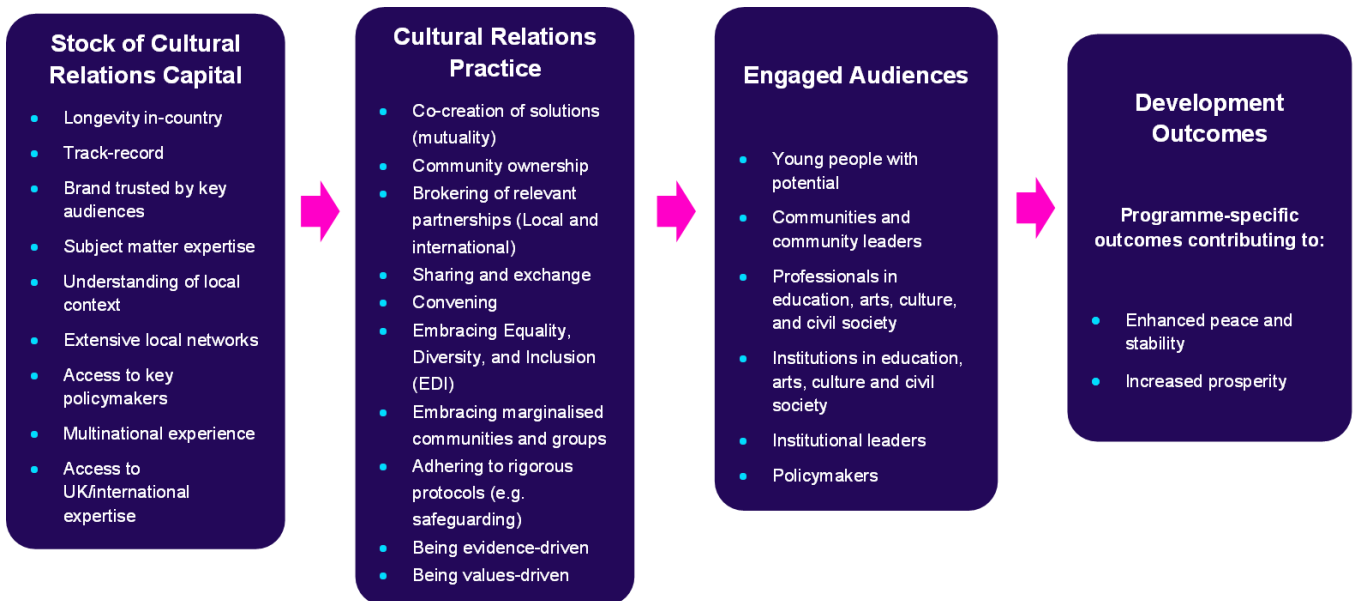
This practice builds on and leverages a stock of Cultural Relations Capital which represents an accumulation of trust, credibility and relationships built up over time by the British Council in the countries in which it operates.

Cultural Relations Capital consists of a set of assets which give the British Council its legitimacy/credibility and an operational platform of expertise, experience, and relationships on which it can draw in delivering development programmes.

A high level Theory of Change

The high-level Theory of Change built from these elements is summarised in Chart 5.

Chart 5: A high-level Theory of Change for the delivery of Development Outcomes through Cultural Relations



Development and Soft Power

Soft power resulting from development aid

One focus of this report has been the role of Cultural Relations in contributing to soft power. However, there is a more fundamental question of whether development aid itself, irrespective of its delivery through Cultural Relations, can and does contribute to the soft power of donor countries.

Nye, at least in his initial writing, appears to have been a little ambiguous on this point, variously using the language of ‘*power through payment*’ while also using examples of aid policy specifically to illustrate soft power. The contemporary consensus is that Aid can be a source of both hard and soft power:

“Aid can serve as a source of either soft power or hard power (or both). Aid operates as an instrument of hard power when it induces recipient governments to adopt policy positions they may not otherwise accept. It operates as an instrument of soft power when it increases affinity for the donor country and the values it espouses.” (Blair et al, 2022)

So, coming back to the conceptualization of soft power, Blair et al are arguing that power derives not from the simple ability/willingness of a country to give (fund) aid but from the ways in which that aid is delivered, the rhetoric around its provision and the ‘values’ which accompany it.

Blair et al also argue that research in the field of aid has not typically focused on soft power, although attempts such as their own to understand and to compare and contrast the impact of China’s aid and its Belt and Road

initiative are leading to an expansion of the literature base to some extent.

As an example of studies that have been undertaken, Goldsmith et al. found that US aid to counter HIV and AIDS did have a positive impact on population level perceptions of the USA. And their overall conclusion is apposite – ‘*By doing good, a country can do well*’.

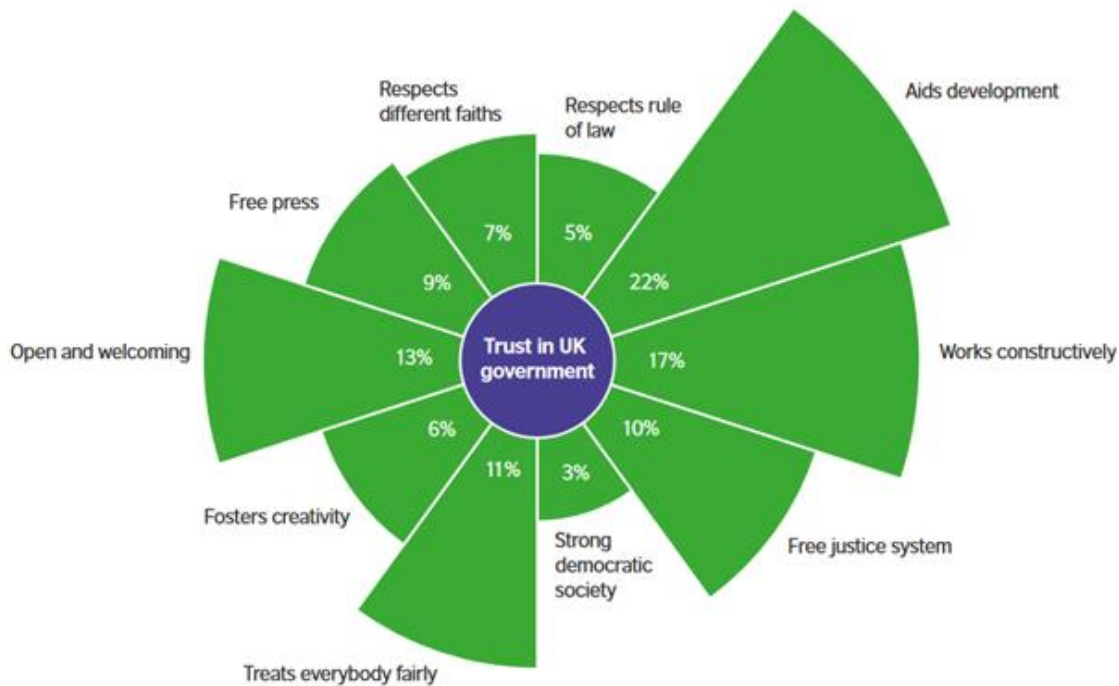
“...we show that a United States aid program targeted to address HIV and AIDS substantially improves perceptions of the U.S. ...Our finding implies that in addition to its potential humanitarian benefits, foreign aid that is targeted, sustained, effective, and visible can serve an important strategic goal for those countries that give it: fostering positive perceptions among foreign publics. By doing good, a country can do well.” (Goldsmith et al., 2014)

The British Council itself undertook research (British Council, 2018) which looked at the contribution which perceptions of the UK’s aid contribution make to levels of trust in the UK government. The research base was more than 18,000 young people (aged 18-34) in G20 countries outside the UK.

The analysis found that from among 18 perception statements about the UK (e.g. ‘*The UK is a strong example of a democratic society*’), perceptions that the UK Aids Development (‘*The UK government contributes its fair share to aiding development in poorer countries*’) was statistically the single biggest driver of perceptions of trust in the UK government for these young people (Chart 6).

Importantly, the young people researched were in countries which are not ODA recipient countries, so the finding is more akin to the perceptions of a peer group.

Chart 6: Drivers of trust in the government of the UK among young people in G20 countries



Results of stepwise regression which show the percentage importance of each factor in explaining the variance in ratings of trust in the UK Government

Source: The value of trust (2018), The British Council. Fieldwork by Ipsos Mori, analysis by In2Impact

Base: 18,010 young people (aged 18-34) in 18 G20 countries (excluding UK); sample for each country is weighted to national population

Soft power as a goal of development aid

The general conclusion of the literature is that development aid which is genuinely delivered for the benefit of recipient countries and delivered effectively can contribute to the reputation of the donor country for being a 'Force for Good'. The discussion in Chapter 4 has already raised the question of whether the generation of soft power should be seen as an 'incidental' benefit of aid or as a conscious consideration around its delivery.

Pamment sees the emergence of the contemporary model of aid which is built on partnership and dialogue (mutuality), and which stands in direct opposition to historical models of conditional or tied aid, as both driving and being driven by the perceived opportunity for the nation brands of donor countries to generate soft power through their development activities.

"The nation brands of developed countries play an increasingly salient role in the economic development of developing countries. As the traditional levers of conditionality between international development, diplomacy and trade have declined since the late 1990s, brands provide a means of linking official development assistance (ODA) to a country's overseas political and economic interests. ... Thus, the nation brands of developed countries may be considered in terms of post-conditionality, a form of indirect influence commensurate with recent debates on soft power." (Pamment, 2018)

But the paradox is that the more evident and short-term the soft power motives at a programme level are, the less effective the programme is likely to be at delivering soft power.

One external stakeholder interviewee who has worked extensively with donors from many countries disparaged a soft power approach characterized as, *“wheeling out the ambassador and sticking a flag on it.”* This stakeholder contrasted positively their experience to date of working with the British Council with their experience of working with some other donor countries.

“One thing I always appreciated of the British Council is the independence they leave to

people to do the project. And the fact that it really is an aid grant, they're really there to help people, not to show off that this is the British Council and the British government.”
(External Stakeholder)

There is therefore an important distinction to be made between the role of soft power in the strategic rationale for development aid and the potentially counter-productive elevation of soft power to the position of a programme-level goal.

Cultural Relations and Soft Power

How Cultural Relation generates soft power

Cultural Relations and Soft Power are not the same thing but in striving to deliver development impact for ODA recipient countries, Cultural Relations can contribute to UK soft power.

The relationship between the two ideas is not linear nor uni-dimensional and can be understood better through the conceptualisation of both in terms of assets and mechanisms/practice.

Most obviously, the implementation models at the heart of Cultural Relations practice - exchanges, collaborations, partnerships – are ones which provide enhanced access to the UK's soft power assets internationally. These assets include its arts, its wider culture, its education system, the English language, its values, its people and its civil society institutions.

These tools of Cultural Relations support the exchange of specific skills and knowledge which help build capacity in recipient countries – for example research and technology skills through Higher Education Partnerships or heritage management skills through the Cultural Protection Fund. In doing so, they also provide access to UK institutions (e.g. its universities, research agencies, museums and cultural institutions) which are a key component of the UK's soft power assets.

These implementation models also facilitate the personal engagement of individuals internationally with the individuals in those institutions in the UK with whom they work and collaborate. Those individuals can exemplify UK work practice and organisational

and individual values which are also an aspect of the UK's soft power assets.

Quak (2019) undertook a specific review of the role of partnerships as soft power tools and used schools and Higher Education partnerships, including those brokered within British Council programmes, as part of the evidence base. His general observations are familiar – the challenges of monitoring and evaluation and the relative lack of conclusive evidence of impact - but he also echoed Pamment (2018) in concluding that, *“partnerships have the potential to be part of a soft power toolkit in the post-conditionality era of international cooperation, often used as a form of country branding combined with self-interest.”*

He also reinforced the importance of personal engagement within partnerships as a channel for soft power and interestingly, in the era of Zoom and TEAMS, the added value of in-person, in-country engagement.

“Partnerships seem to be most effective when they connect to national policies, priorities and strategies, including broader development objectives and linked to other ODA programmes. Furthermore, for partnerships to be effective as soft power tools, it is important to [be] creating personal relationships and understanding that needs to be cemented through reciprocal visits.” (Quak, 2019)

Through the application to development of its subject matter expertise and through its research and convening practice in particular, the British Council's Cultural Relations practice also adds directly to these wider UK soft power assets. This contribution is most obvious in the area of English, where the British Council is widely regarded as a (if not *the*) World Authority on English language and teaching and its knowledge, research and projects around English contribute significantly to maintaining the status of the

UK as the centre of global expertise in English.

Cultural Relations practice also creates a legacy of Cultural Relations Outcomes in the form of connections, partnerships increased understanding and trust which sit alongside (but certainly do not replace) the specific development outcomes targeted by individual programmes.

And these connections, relationships and partnerships (along with the increased understanding and trust which emerges from them) are now recognised as valuable soft power assets in themselves. As Nye wrote, *“In this new world, networks and connectedness become an important source of power and security. In a world of growing complexity, the most connected states are the most powerful.”* (Nye, 2020).

The values which frame Cultural Relations practice in development – integrity (non-corruptibility), professionalism, mutuality, tolerance, respect for difference and diversity – can be seen as attractive values in themselves and therefore, themselves an element of the UK’s soft power resources.

And presented in this way, Cultural Relations also provides an escape route from the contentious issues identified by ResPublica (2017) and others of being seen to proselytize for supposedly British values. A forthcoming British Council study looks at the Cultural Relations impact of International Student Mobility (British Council, 2023). Although not directly within the field of development, an observation by the International Lead of a UK university elegantly addresses a similar point.

“Just how we even talk about values is going to differ between different people. And so I think we have to become more literate at engaging people from different parts of the world, or people with very different backgrounds, engaging them in discussions

www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight

about values. Now, whether that means they take on more British values or not, is another question entirely. But it might be that our ability to stage those conversations in a more literate way now is actually an attraction and attractive value itself.” (Internationalisation Manager, UK University)

Simply, the values which allow the facilitation of an open, honest discussion about different perspectives and value systems (irrespective of whether we agree with those perspectives and value systems), are themselves attractive and a source of soft power.

For Vuving (2019), *“Soft power emerges from social exchange, which is “social” because the terms of reciprocity are “soft,” that is, diffuse.....Social exchange is the crucible of trust.”* His conceptualisation puts emphasis on the agency of both sides of the relationship and argues that, *“soft power is a form of power-with, not power-over.”*

This emphasis on social exchange and *power-with* rather than *power-over* lies at the heart of the apparent contradiction of engaging in mutual, shared activity for long-term, self-interested benefit. The experience of being an equal partner, being treated with respect, listened to and consulted on a peer-to-peer basis through the life cycle of a development programme, not only builds mutual understanding, trust and respect but also creates a sense of shared capability (*power with*). It is this sense of shared capability which leaves a longer-term legacy of increased appreciation, attraction and respect for the partner, their wider society and their value system (potentially on both sides). This is ultimately what soft power is.

A quote from a policy stakeholder involved in New Horizons: The UK/Georgia Season captures the idea very well:

“The aim on the UK side was to showcase the UK but also to ensure engagement. The

process was very mutual and involved many stakeholders, and the activities were designed in a way that made it possible to engage broad representatives from Georgia. [it was] not about delivering a message to the ‘foreign public’ but engaging in mutual conversations. Georgians responded very positively to this.” Policy Stakeholder, Georgia (Source: BOP Consulting, 2020)

A framework for understanding soft power generation through Cultural Relations development programmes

Chart 7 summarises these ideas in a conceptual framework for understanding how development programmes delivered through Cultural Relations contribute to UK soft power.

Chart 7: A framework for soft power generation through Cultural Relations development programmes

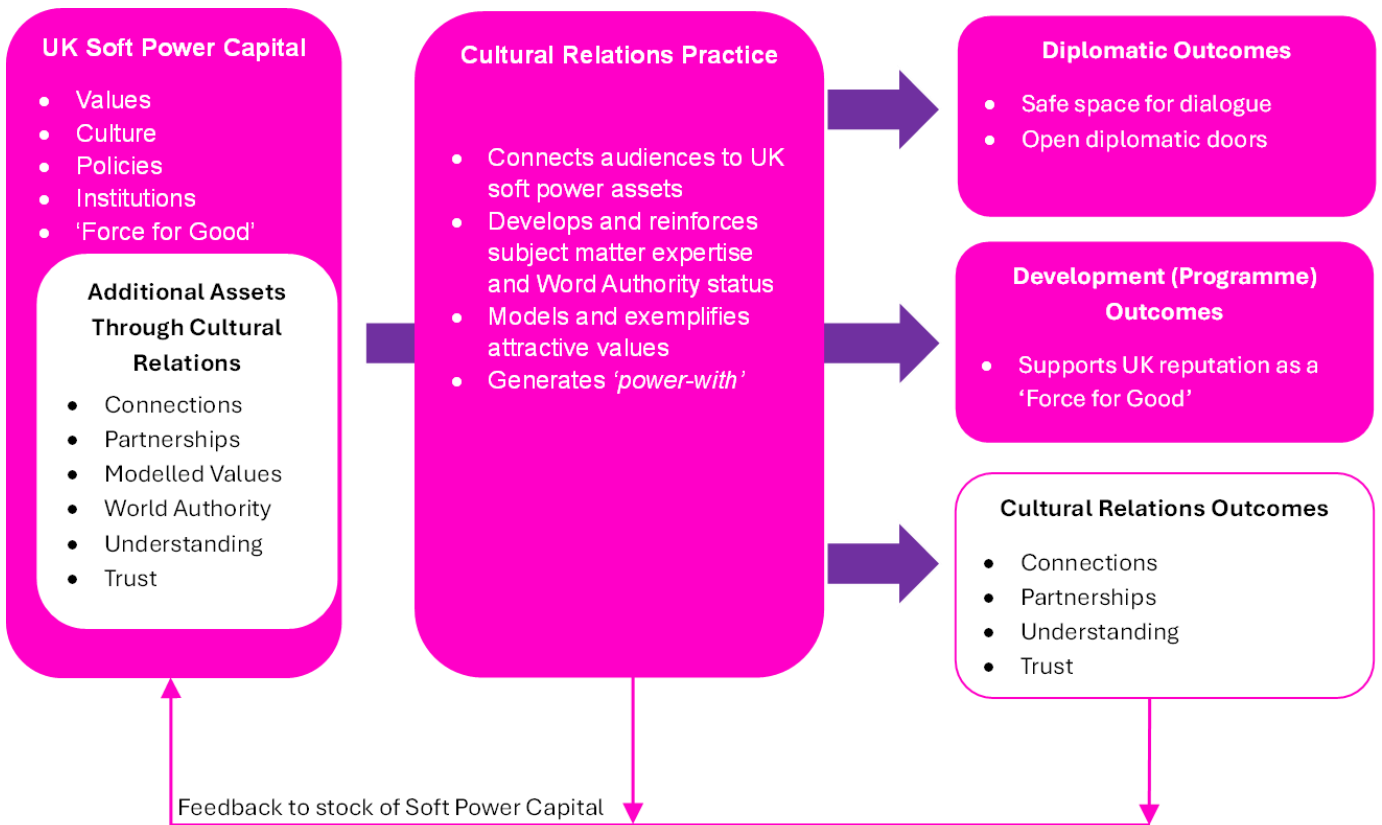


Chart 7 also references an additional set of outcomes which although not central to the current research are sometimes important and supportive of soft power and can arise around development-oriented programmes. We term these diplomatic outcomes.

The first of these diplomatic outcomes is the creation of safe space for dialogue. The idea of safe space for dialogue arises because although ideas of culture are intensely political and contested, an acceptance that elements of culture - for example, access to education or the protection of heritage - is socially valuable is almost universal [The approach of the Taliban in Afghanistan is perhaps an exception].

Therefore, Cultural Relations programmes can sometimes facilitate opportunities for dialogue between partners who would otherwise find it difficult to communicate. The British Council's submission to the 2019 World Justice Forum (WJF) in The Hague

highlights this outcome, "*We are ideally placed to convene safe spaces in which contentious politics and difficult issues can be identified, discussed and mutually beneficial dialogue facilitated.*" (British Council, 2019).

Development support through Cultural Relations to areas such as education or heritage protection can also sometimes generate a second type of diplomatic outcome in the form of opening or keeping open ministerial and policy-maker doors, even when those doors are completely shut for any other topic of conversation with HMG.

The British Council can point to general examples, such as its work in Cuba, Venezuela, Myanmar or the OPT, as well as specific examples such as its ability to remain engaged with government representatives in Egypt even when almost all other channels of diplomacy were shut off following controversy around the suspected bombing of an airline leaving Sharm el Sheikh in 2015.

Implications for the British Council

Cultural Relations and Development

The British Council remains a relatively niche player in the overall context of global development aid but the analysis within this report suggests that in many ways the overall paradigm now being applied to development, with its emphasis on recipient country capacity building and the fundamental role of long-term North-South partnerships involving both state and non-state actors, offers significant opportunities for expansion.

Many of the foundational elements of Cultural Relations practised by the British Council are reflected in the emerging literature on contemporary good practice in development and are valued by development funders and recipient country governments alike. The British Council's deep roots in many ODA-eligible countries, its demonstrable understanding of local context, its subject-matter expertise, especially in the application of English to development but also more widely in education and culture, its track record of brokering relevant partnerships with local institutions and its willingness to listen, learn and adapt is almost a text-book recipe for good practice in capacity building for development. The value of prioritising EDI and working with marginalised communities is also increasingly recognised.

However, while the individual elements of Cultural Relations are compelling, the framing language is to some extent a barrier to engagement with the development community. Cultural Relations has limited awareness and partial understanding even within the International Relations community. The development community is largely the domain of economists, financiers and

government administrators. Unless they have worked with the British Council, most of these individuals have little or no appreciation of the term in the expansive sense used by the British Council. Many are approaching a concept which is complex and multi-faceted for native speakers of English in their second or third language.

So, framing the British Council's development work in terms of an overall Cultural Relations approach can actually act as a barrier to engagement. Starting from a blank piece of paper it is simply an easier narrative to say, for example, that the British Council is an expert in the application of English/Education/Arts and Culture to development or that it is an expert in brokering and sustaining partnerships for development. In practice, many internal British Council development practitioners already recognise the challenge and lead with the individual elements of Cultural Relations.

“Because it could be that you go to present someone, and you talk about Cultural Relations, but it's almost unpicking what that actually means in practice, and in relation to that person that you're speaking to. So, I do think Cultural Relations is a huge term.....But for me, I think what's most important when I go and speak to somebody about the work that we do [in development], is trying to share with them examples of what we mean by Cultural Relations, and what benefit that will bring.” (British Council staff)

On the opposite side, there is an extensive 'language of development' which is largely a language of economists and has extensive frameworks and approaches often developed by the global multilateral agencies - UN, World Bank, OECD. The SDGs are one of the most visible aspects of this language.

There is concern among some British Council staff that the organisation does not have enough staff who are fluent in this development language and a recognition that while the organisation may wish to talk its language of Cultural Relations it has to be willing and able to translate what that means into the language of development.

“I think the language is critically important..... And if you want to work in that sphere [of development] and if you want to be respected, if you want your voice to be heard, you have to speak the language.”
(British Council staff)

Alignment of development programmes to SDGs is a particular example of this challenge. Especially in its work in education, the British Council’s ODA-funded programmes often do align to national (recipient country) development plans, while its overall portfolio of work in development reflects the wider UK aid priorities. However, with some exceptions it does not explicitly and routinely align its programme outcomes to SDGs, nor measure its impact against SDG indicators and targets.

This lack of explicit alignment to the SDGs, as one of the foundational elements of the wider development language, may be a barrier to the organisation’s ability (certainly outside the UK) to communicate its impact in development. In the Africa region this challenge is being recognised.

“In this region (Africa), when we are engaging with government stakeholders, we start from a point of SDGs.....There is much more appreciation of sustainable development goals, also alignment to government objectives and priorities, which are always within the SDG framework. And it's a way of connecting with them and also getting their honest engagement with us.” (British Council staff)

The lack of formal alignment to SDGs was a point brought out in the review of the role of international higher education partnerships in contributing to the sustainable development goals, prepared by Technopolis (2021). One of the conclusions of that report was that in future there would be benefit in using the SDGs more explicitly to frame the partnerships for development.

To aid communication with stakeholders there would be value in the British Council identifying specific targets and indicators within relevant SDGs to which it intends its development programmes to contribute.

Cultural Relations and Soft Power

This report has demonstrated that the application of Cultural Relations practice to development can generate increased soft power for the UK. It has also shown that the terms Soft Power and Cultural Relations are often poorly understood or even wildly misunderstood.

In previous research for the British Council, Rose and Wadham-Smith (2004) cogently argued that mutuality – the essence of Cultural Relations – was logically compatible with an instrumental approach to UK priorities and national soft power objectives. We agree. The challenge is that the argument is nuanced and complex and few people within the British Council and even fewer outside are going to take the time to explore it in any depth.

As words, ‘Mutuality’ has immediate connotations of sharing and equality while ‘Power’ and ‘Instrumental’ have immediate connotations of asymmetry, control and unidirectionality. On the surface, they are simply not compatible.

The very real danger for the British Council is that the message of instrumentality that can legitimately apply at a strategic and

organisational level is internalised and understood as needing to be applied by staff at a development programme level.

We believe that the framework set out in this report can help to explain that soft power benefit for the UK arises naturally as an indirect consequence of needs-aligned development programmes delivered through Cultural Relations.

The core conclusion of this research is that the best way for programmes to develop UK soft power is for them to focus on delivering impactful development outcomes through high quality Cultural Relations practice which foregrounds all the values and behaviours of that practice. If programmes do that, the soft power will look after itself.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A recurring theme within the wider development literature is the relative lack of high-quality evidence of impact and the challenges of identifying and then measuring that impact.

Many issues are familiar to the British Council, especially the challenge of striking a balance between the pressure which often comes from funders for large reach and evidence through numbers and statistics vs the reality that impact in development is often local, small-scale and more amenable to evidence collection through anthropological and observational methods.

If the British Council is going to expand its work in development it will need to plan programmes and collect better evidence of impact in development terms, most likely aligned to SDGs.

Existing attempts to evaluate British Council programmes (whether development-focused or otherwise) have struggled to logically

distinguish between specific Programme Outcomes and the more generic 'Cultural Relations Outcomes'. The confusion for programme teams and evaluators arises because these two sets of outcomes are often seen as alternatives, '*either, or*' when in most cases they are complements, '*both, and*'. As a result, there is no consistent measurement of key indicators and even where there is (for example, how many partnerships were created through the programme) there is little understanding or explanation of why that data is being reported.

We believe that the approach set out in the Theory of Change and framework for soft power developed within this report can greatly help to clarify this confusion and provide better focus for programme and evaluation teams.

It is beyond the scope of this report, but we believe that there would be enormous value in the British Council developing and communicating internally a clearer understanding of the type of outcomes data that should be collected at the programme level vs the organisational or portfolio level.

We repeat our belief that within development programmes, the main focus has to be on planning for and collecting data evidencing development outcomes. Alongside that can sit a set of 'Cultural Relations Indicators'. But attempts to impose routine indicators of higher-level soft power outcomes at a programme level will only accentuate the confusion discussed in this report and potentially undermine credibility and trust in the organisation externally.

We believe that the measurement of soft power, itself of course a contentious issue, has to be undertaken at a strategic and organisational level.

Case Study 1: New Horizons: UK/Georgia Season 2019

Location: Georgia

Timing: September – December 2019

Partner organisation: British Council Georgia and the British Embassy Tbilisi¹

Context

- Georgia is a post-Soviet state occupying a strategically important position in the Caucasus. It has frozen conflicts with Russia in the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and is trying to strike a delicate balance between its relations with Russia and the aspiration of many of its population to join the mainstream of European countries.
- Georgia has a dynamic and innovative cultural landscape. The British Council and the British Embassy recognised the value of increasing partnerships with the UK to develop further the burgeoning creative economy in Georgia and to focus these partnerships on young people and other more marginalised groups (especially disabled artists and cultural producers).



The Programme

- The programme was developed to **build the capacity of the cultural and creative industries in Georgia**, increasing skills, opportunities and networks which will ultimately boost social and economic development and create new, lasting connections between the UK and Georgia. The three specific development outcomes targeted were:
 - Cultural professionals and artists develop their knowledge, artistic practice, skills, and networks to contribute towards greater social and economic development,
 - More young people, especially girls, have access to programme activities improving their ability to take up opportunities, building their confidence in pursuing career pathways in cultural and creative industries and increasing their employment prospects,
 - Increased awareness of the role of art in social development through the exposure to the UK experience in disability led art.

¹ The British Embassy in Georgia contributed (non-cultural) activity, marcomms expertise, funds, and secured some external sponsorship.

- The programme was planned as a touchpoint to develop mutual understanding between Georgia and the UK, to celebrate their cultures and create more and deeper ties between professionals, stakeholders, and organisations in the two countries.



- Twenty arts and cultural events took place across a broad range of activities including performances, exhibitions, training workshops, professional development programmes, conferences, co-productions, competitions, DJ sets and fellowships.
- A centre-piece of engagement was the Creative and Cultural Industries Youth Forum. In partnership with **Creative Georgia**, this inaugural forum brought the leading voices from the UK creative industries together with the young creative entrepreneurs from Georgia to share experiences

and build connections. The forum aimed to create a common understanding of the of **Creative and Cultural Industries**, the role of culture and creativity in economic and social development, capacity building and employability for young creative entrepreneurs.

- The **Unlimited Forum on disability arts** was a major one-day conference that took place inside Georgian parliament. It was attended by 150 stakeholders from the UK, Georgia and the Caucasus, including artists, policymakers, sector representatives, campaigners and practitioners.

Use of Cultural Relations Assets and Practice

- The British Council is a **trusted brand** in Georgia working in English and in Continuing Professional Development for teachers as well as in the Arts.
- The programme built on a **track record of work in the creative economy and on existing strong relations within the culture sector and with cultural policy makers** in Georgia.
- The British Council's work in Georgia has a particular focus on **increasing access to opportunities for disabled people** and has supported the Unlimited programme, a disability led arts initiative in Georgia since 2012.



“A number of Georgian policymakers and cultural professionals had existing positive perceptions of/ good relationships with the British Council, gained through previous experience of programmes such as the Unlimited programme of Creative Spark. This contributed to a mutual understanding around the aims of the season from stakeholders

from both countries and meant that the British Council and British Embassy could easily secure buy-in from Georgian partners.” (BOP Consulting, 2020)

- **Local ownership** of the programme was supported through extensive consultation and co-creation, including with a specially constituted Youth Board.

“Georgian stakeholders were consulted throughout the process, not just at the season’s inception, which helped them to feel invested in the success of the season. This is exemplified by the Youth Board, who contributed their own ideas and helped to steer the programme based on the needs and requirements of young Georgians.” (BOP Consulting, 2020)

- Cultural professionals and artists were supported to develop their knowledge, practice, skills and networks through **exchange and partnership** with peers in the UK. The Creative and Cultural Industries Youth Forum was **convened** with representation from young entrepreneurs with institutional and policy-level stakeholders:

“The aim on the UK side was to showcase the UK but also to ensure engagement. The process was very mutual and involved many stakeholders, and the activities were designed in a way that made it possible to engage broad representatives from Georgia. [It was] not about delivering a message to the ‘foreign public’ but engaging in mutual conversations. Georgians responded very positively to this” (Policy Stakeholder quoted in BOP Consulting, 2020)

Development Outcomes

- The programme contributed to **building the skills, knowledge, and networks** of the next generation of creative professionals and entrepreneurs in Georgia.
- More young people, **especially girls, had access to programme activities** improving their ability to take up opportunities and building their confidence in pursuing career pathways in cultural and creative industries.
- Two-thirds of programme participants were aged 16-35 and nearly four in five were women.
- These skills, knowledge and networks will support future economic growth and job creation within Georgia.
- The programme **‘significantly shifted understanding relating to disabled-led and inclusive arts practice.’** Awareness of the role of art in supporting social development was increased through engagement with the UK experience in disability-led arts, especially Unlimited. Art from disability-led organisations was showcased during the programme, often for the first time. The Unlimited forum held at the Georgian Parliament facilitated strong and senior representation at a high-profile public event.



Benefits for the UK

- The programme contributed to **increased awareness and stronger perceptions of UK arts** in Georgia, especially around disability-led arts.
- **New partnerships and networks** were created with creative entrepreneurs, arts professionals, cultural institutions and some government stakeholders.
- Participants perceived the programme as providing scope for future cultural dialogue. Most believed themselves to have developed a better understanding of the UK through their participation and nearly three quarters have continued to work with the British Council
- Collaboration between the British Council and British Embassy facilitated cross-sector stakeholder dialogue.
- The programme supported a positive environment for the conclusion of the new UK/Georgia Strategic Partnership Agreement in November 2019, the first of its kind signed by the British Government in Eastern Europe.

References: BOP Consulting (2020), New Horizons, Evaluation of the UK/Georgia Season 2019, British Council

Picture credits: Reproduced from BOP Consulting (2020), New Horizons, Evaluation of the UK/Georgia Season 2019, British Council

Case Study 2: Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (CH4IG)

Location: Colombia, Viet Nam, and Kenya

Timing: 2018-2022 (Pilot Phase)

Partner organisation: The Audience Agency and International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

Local Partners:

- **Viet Nam:** Vietnam Institute for Culture and Arts studies (VICAS); Vietnam Rural Industries Research and Development Institute (VIRI); Central Highland Centre for Rural Development (CHCDR).
- **Kenya:** Book Bunk Trust, African Digital Heritage, Mount Kenya University, Twaweza Communications, HEVA East Africa Fund.
- **Colombia:** Fundacion Etnollano, Asociacion Teje Teje, Cabildo Indigena de Guambia

Context

- Increasing growth and opportunity in emerging economies can sometimes come at a cost to wider society, resulting in already marginalised groups being further excluded and there being little reduction in their poverty levels.
- The British Council's report, *Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth (2018)* validated the concept that cultural heritage could contribute to inclusive growth. Heritage is increasingly recognised as a strong asset supporting the goal of achieving 'a more inclusive pattern of growth that will better mobilise the talent of populations'.



The Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth programme takes *an action research approach*, designed to leverage the ways in which cultural heritage can contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth. It explored and developed ways in which local communities can be supported to engage with, learn from, value, protect and share their own cultural heritage contributing to economic growth and improved social welfare. In this way, it was intended that heritage can be a source of sustainability.

The Programme

- The CH4IG programme was developed and implemented in three countries: Colombia, Viet Nam, and Kenya. A two-year pilot programme was launched in 2018. Further activities were undertaken in 2021-2022 as pandemic restrictions eased.
- A core team in the UK developed and led the programme in mutual collaboration with the country teams. On a country level, local partners, and communities co-developed, co-delivered and implemented the programme.

Colombia's programme, known as 'Sembrando Nuestros Saberes' or "Sowing our Knowledge" worked with six indigenous groups to recover and strengthen their cultural heritage,

Vietnam's 'Heritage of Future Past' programme sought to protect and revitalise the country's music and film heritage that is underrepresented or at risk of disappearing.

Kenya's '#CultureGrows' programme aimed to increase visibility, ownership, accessibility, inclusivity, and transmission of cultural heritage by promoting contemporary practice, youth participation, and technology. For example, with partner Book Bunk, the project helped to revive an old colonial library and community spaces as centres of culture, learning and engagement.

Use of Cultural Relations Assets and Practice

The CH4IG programme was designed on the basis of adopting 'a *people-centred way of working*'.

- The people-centred approach "*includes an ethos of promoting wider inclusion, diversity and creating value to generate growth and prosperity as felt by those closest to their cultural heritage, a broad range of stakeholders, the population and wider ecosystem.*" People-centred ways of working and principles and values were identified as: inclusive, participatory, sustainable, building capacity, influencing policy, far-reaching, locally-led and mutual.
- Teams described the people-centred approach as **community owned and co-created**, through involving the individuals and/or communities benefitting from the project. The programme was locally and community owned in practice, with 80% of the budget spent locally, minimising overheads.
- The programme **embraced equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and marginalised communities and groups** through the involvement of different people with diverse backgrounds and points of view.



- The CH4IG country teams **facilitated exchange and brokered collaboration** among local cultural heritage stakeholders including community, practitioners and institutions and between the UK and the three countries.
- Running as a global programme spanning different countries added prestige and credibility to the CH4IG programme. This was enabled through the **multicounty experience and local presence** of the British Council by which in-country delivery teams worked closely with the core team based in the UK, demonstrating a strong team dynamic and global ethos with a shared vision.
- Country teams **harnessed their understanding of local contexts** and implemented projects activities in contextually relevant ways. They also leveraged their connections with key stakeholders, policy and decision-makers in each country to convene dialogues to support and effect longer-term change.
- The British Council utilised its experience in showcasing, promoting, networking and advocacy at a local, national and international level to promote the CH4IG programme and the value of cultural heritage in driving inclusive growth and contributing to sustainable development.
- The CH4IG programme was **evidence-led** from its inception. M&E was central to the pilot with a core feature of action learning undertaken both internally by the British Council and externally by independent evaluators.

Development Outcomes

- Country programmes worked with local individuals, partners, and communities to co-create, influence and co-design programmes.
- Many people showed deeper understanding of the value and opportunities of cultural heritage, especially in Colombia and Viet Nam.
- The projects were able to contribute to social and economic development in a number of different ways including promoting social engagement, community cohesion, tourism development, job creation and investment opportunities.
- Practitioners were supported to develop skills and networks with some gaining the confidence to play a more active role in their cultural heritage, especially in Kenya and Viet Nam.

“We had lost many things in our culture, we lacked interest. But we have been regaining that interest. I like this project because it teaches us to recover a lot of cultural elements. Like the handicrafts. I like that even being a Project from the outside, they help us recover our things, things we had forgotten.” Participant in a community assembly of the Ette Ennaka people of Naara Kajmanta, CH4IG Colombia

- Organisations and institutions in the heritage sector in each country were able to grow their capacity to realise the benefits of cultural heritage that contribute to inclusive growth. This was achieved through extending their networks and strengthening their organisational knowledge, skills and collaborative ways of working with other actors.
- Policy and decision-makers at a national, regional and local level in Colombia, Kenya, and Viet Nam fostered further connections through participation in programme dialogues and developed trusted relationships with participants – a key foundation for creating systemic change.
- The evaluation found CH4IG provided a platform to give marginalised communities a voice and aimed to inform future policies that will benefit communities.

Benefits for the UK

- The programme helped to cement the **British Council's reputation as a good-practice partner** in managing and co-creating locally led development programmes, supporting pathways to a longer-term legacy. Through piloting a 'Globally Connected' space, the programme facilitated peer and collaborative learning sessions for participants to share the learning, build wider networks and to embed ongoing feedback to build on the programme.
- The programme **amplified the UK's reputation as a leader in the wider value of cultural heritage and cultural heritage** through innovative approaches, laid the foundations for policy change and has continued to support long-term societal benefits, both in the UK and internationally , e.g. through
 - Supporting locally led mechanisms to enhance the value and role of cultural heritage on a sustainable basis, for those who CH4IG was working with, including hosting responsive symposiums, stimulating cross cultural collaborations, generating new networks, developing bespoke skills programmes, and initiating new grant offers for community beneficiaries.
 - Sharing the approach, knowledge, learning and impact of CH4IG through wider specialist and international platforms including UNESCO, EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), International Cultural Relations Research Alliance, United Cities and Local Government, the Development Association, DEVEX and the Global Evaluation Initiative.
 - Publishing research reports including *Heritage for Inclusive Growth* in partnership with the Royal Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) and the *Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth Essay Collection* featuring perspectives on the concept from around the world.





- Progressing new work focusing on the CH4IG approach in ASEAN countries with partners ICCROM, aiming to contribute to cultural, economic, social and environmental goals through involving wider stakeholders and building on the learnings from the programme in the original three countries.
- The British Council has since progressed a CH4IG programme in ASEAN countries with partners ICCROM, aiming to contribute to economic, social and environmental goals building on the learnings from the programme in the original three countries.

References: Nordicity (2021), Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth Evaluation, British Council. The Social Investment Consultancy (2022), Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth: Impact Evaluation Report, British Council

Picture credits: Reproduced from The Social Investment Consultancy (2022), Cultural Heritage for Inclusive Growth: Impact Evaluation

Case Study 3: Tfanen

Location: Tunisia

Timing: 2016-2022

Partner organisation: British Council Tunisia on behalf of EUNIC and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Tunisia

Context

- Inspired by the 2011 revolution and following the development of the 2014 Tunisian Constitution enshrining the values of democracy, freedom of expression and equality, Tunisia aspires to develop sustainable cultural and creative sectors through growing talent and creating employment opportunities.
- The British Council and EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture) partnered with the Tunisian Ministry of Cultural Affairs in a shared endeavour to promote **sustainability, freedom of expression, social cohesion, cultural diversity and sharing.**



“In the aftermath of the revolution, we tried to enshrine cultural development in the social dynamics of the territories, to foster collaborations between various actors and to make sense of the role of culture in democracy building. Tfanen brings a share of innovation, but above all has supported a pre-existing cultural commitment.” C.Saelens Delegate General Wallonie-Bruxelles, EUNIC, member of the Tfanen Board

- The Tfanen programme was implemented in the context of a challenging economic and political environment and at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Programme

- Tfanen focused on promoting Tunisian cultural diversity and access to culture, locally, nationally and internationally. It aimed to support freedom of expression and creativity, especially of young people, and also to boost the professionalism of young people.
- It involved interventions in three main strategic areas:
 - funding cultural initiatives and encouraging diversity;
 - contributing to cultural players’ capacity building and knowledge sharing;
 - accelerating the digital transformation of the cultural sector.

- The programme ran from 2016-2022 including a series of extensions, in part necessitated by Covid-19. It was managed by the British Council on behalf of EUNIC and run by local teams.
- It involved four main steps: analysis of the current state, experimentation, implementation and sustainability. A pilot study was undertaken for each activity to better understand the context, followed by implementation using an overarching governance model; local management supported by British Council tools and processes; a monitoring, evaluation and learning stage and communication activity.

Use of Cultural Relations Assets and Practice

- The programme cemented the **strong partnership** working between Tunisia, the EU and British Council in the field of culture. The British Council as the delivery partner worked closely with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in Tunisia and **harnessed its strong understanding of local contexts** ahead of implementing activities.
- The programme aimed to foster a **local collaborative approach** and to **create a cultural and social ecosystem** in which all actors (citizens, civil society, private sector and public institutions) have a role and actively **contribute to the co-creation of the programme**. This participative approach helped to inform better decision-making and to facilitate a culture of debate.
- The British Council was able to **leverage its reputation and connections with key policy and decision-makers** to strengthen strategic partnerships and to ensure the engagement and active participation of these stakeholders throughout the programme.
- With its **evidence-driven approach** and a **strong track-record in programme management** the British Council was able to contribute its extensive experience and expertise to facilitate monitoring, evaluation and learning from cultural programmes. By applying a standardised administrative framework with robust administrative procedures, the local team were able to demonstrate efficiency throughout the project and to ensure transparency and a culture of compliance as well as supporting the sustainability of the programme.

“Beyond the added value to the cultural sector, Tfanen has offered its team members opportunities for human and professional development. It is an ambitious programme that I joined as an intern and since then ... I have had the opportunity to build my experience and refine my skills to become the project manager I am today.” Tfanen Fund Manager
- The operating model drew on the British Council’s **expertise in leveraging new technology** so that the programme was able to support digital initiatives and to optimise



new technology in its operations, especially valuable for enabling continuity during the Covid-19 crisis.

Development Outcomes

- Tfanen contributed to **building cultural and cross-sectoral partnerships and networking possibilities**. 414 collaborations and partnerships were established between decentralised public institutions, civil society organisations, private sector, and international organisations.
- **Greater social cohesion and resilience in the arts and culture** was supported through the participation in the programme of **women and girls**, those from marginalised regions and vulnerable groups.
- **Access to culture**, especially for **young people and women/girls**, helped to build their confidence and encourage them to pursue career pathways in cultural and creative industries. Three in five of programme participants were aged under 35 and just over half were female.
- The cultural sector has been more professionalised to support **capacity building, training, and mentoring** as well as future income generation and job creation within Tunisia.

Benefits for the UK

- The programme was selected by the UN in 2021 as **one of the top 20 best practice examples in the world on the implementation of the SDG agenda**, enhancing the reputation of the British Council and the UK.
- **Aligning with the UK's international priorities**, around **“Supporting stability in fragile states with English, education and arts and culture”** Tfanen has enabled the British Council to work closely with EUNIC and other EU stakeholders, indirectly strengthening relationships between the UK and priority European countries particularly France.
- Tfanen also supported the **“arts and culture sector in Tunisia to recover post Covid-19”** through grants to help with capacity development of arts organisations and the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.
- Further, Tfanen had a specific focus on **“championing shared values such as inclusion and freedom of creative expression”**.



References: The Social Investment Consultancy (2022), Tfanen Evaluation report, British Council

The British Council (2022), The Tfanen Journey, Learnings and Experiences, British Council

Picture credits: Reproduced from The British Council (2022), The Tfanen Journey, Learnings and Experiences, British Council

Case Study 4: The Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) programme

Location: Nigeria

Timing: 2017-2023

Partner organisation: British Council Nigeria and The European Union

Context

- Vulnerable populations in the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yoba have been among the worst affected by the ongoing insurgency in North-East Nigeria.
- The programme aimed to enhance the capability of state and community conflict management institutions to prevent the escalation of conflict into violence in these states.
- The British Council was able to draw on previous experience of implementing the award-winning Justice For All (J4A) and the Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation (NSRP) programmes to partner with local civil society organisations, state and local government to deliver a programme aiming to enhance capacity for conflict management and reduce the impact of violence.



The Programme

- The MCN programme supported training across the country's formal and informal structures for traditional rulers, community leaders, security officials and media practitioners on issues such as dispute resolution, protection of human rights, tackling of sexual and gender-based violence and conflict sensitive communications.
- The programme provided grants which helped youth and women's associations to provide the skills needed and start-up capital for reintegration of displaced women and youth.
- The MCN builds on experience of, the British Council in implementing the FCDO-funded Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation programme (NSRP) between 2012 and 2017 which harnessed its **expertise in establishing robust systems and processes**. Like NSRP, MCN has designed and delivered creating safe spaces and convening platforms for **multi-stakeholder responses to sexual and gender based violence, (SGBV), human rights violations by security forces, weak mechanisms for early warning and response, and exclusion of women, youths, and persons with disability in peacebuilding processes** in these conflict-affected areas.

- Under NSRP, British Council established Peace clubs coordinated by local CSOs that recruited and trained local facilitators to gain the trust of young participants. Participants included boys and young men as well as women and girls.
 - In 5 states these have reached over 3,000 young people aged 10-24
 - They have facilitated the reporting of 1,141 cases of Violence against Women and Girls.
- The Women Peace and Security Network (WPSN) convened under NSRP brings together key women-focused civil society actors and organisations and supports them to work together and engage with government structures and the wider community around the development and implementation of the National Actuib Okan on women, peace and security.
 - 8 WPSNs have been established in 8 states.

Use of Cultural Relations Assets and Practice

- The **longevity in the country, track record and understanding of the local context** meant that a Nigerian-led solution was developed which was based on the needs of local communities.
- **Extensive local networks** supported the ability to **convene dialogue platforms which facilitated community ownership** enabling community members to resolve issues, such as access to land for grazing and farming.
- Expertise in **brokering relevant local partnerships** has contributed to the establishment of the Community, Peace and Safety Partnership (CPSP) meetings which bring together different community stakeholders across the three states.
- **Marginalised communities were embraced**, specifically in terms of creating safe spaces aimed to break the culture of silence around violence against women and girls and to facilitate action to prevent and respond to VAWG.
- Through **access to key policy-makers and stakeholders**, the WPSNs have supported women's participation in peace-building processes and in building trust between civil society, government and stage agencies. This has contributed to better management of conflict without violence and to creating sustainable pathways to peace.



Development Outcomes.

- The programme promoted policy and practices that **contribute to peacebuilding**.
- The EU's 2021 target of 2,860 people **participating in conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities** in Nigeria was exceeded by the end of 2018. By July 2019:
 - 2111 trained traditional rulers recorded an 86 per cent success rate in dispute resolution,
 - 619 youths and 31 women's associations were engaged in economic empowerment initiatives.
- Policy dialogue convened by the programme has contributed to the establishment of a governmental agency to coordinate efforts to prevent violence.
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) have been established in all three states and staff (doctors, nurses and counsellors) have been trained to provide services at the SARCs.
 - 158 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) have been addressed, leading to some successful prosecution and conviction.
 - The three states were represented at a National SARC network meeting held in Abuja.



Benefits for the UK

- The programme has supported the British Council's **strong track-record of work in Nigeria**, specifically in terms of its legacy of justice and security work which continues to help the country meet the United Nation's Sustainable Goals. This long-term support, enables the British Council to provide opportunities to **showcase UK expertise in this sector and create a positive influence in the region**.
- A key strength has been the ability to **draw on global expertise**, bringing in international and UK perspectives to local issues and challenges. An **evidence based approach** in local communities helps to provide **mutually supportive relationships** between Nigerian and international partners to achieve development goals.

References: Partners for Peace (2023), Managing Conflict in Nigeria: Impact Report, British Council

Picture credits: Reproduced from Partners for Peace (2023), Managing Conflict in Nigeria: Impact Report, British Council

Case Study 5: English for Isolated Communities

Location: South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) Belarus and Moldova

Timing: 2019

Partner organisation: British Council



Context

- The post-Soviet transition in the South Caucasus, Belarus and Moldova has been beset by challenges, including several armed conflicts. There are severe challenges to much-needed socio-political and economic reforms including corruption and unemployment.
- Young people (5-29 year olds) make up c 30% of the population, They are a critical socio-economic group and key to achieving the long-term goals of democratic transition and sustainable growth. Limited access to high quality education, especially for girls, those in isolated communities and ethnic minorities, is hindering their employability and life chances.
- The programme was designed to provide access to English language and soft-skills to improve the life opportunities young people in isolated communities and to support prosperity, stability and cohesion in South Caucasus and Moldova.

The Programme

- The programme aimed to address challenges to education for vulnerable young people and especially girls in 20 isolated communities across the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Moldova and Belarus.
- The overarching goal of the programme was to contribute to increased security stability and prosperity in the region through increased skills (English language and soft skills) and opportunities for young people.
- The programme also aimed to inform long-term policy and programme decisions on how to improve the quality of life for young people.
- Programme activities included training of Change Agents and teachers with the skills to deliver improved English language proficiency and debate, negotiation and dialogue (DND) skills to school students (university students in Belarus) through English clubs. The programme also trained a network of Change Agents to implement and maintain teacher activity groups (TAGs) to support the ongoing professional development of teachers.

Use of Cultural Relations Assets and Practice

- The programme built on the **British Council's expertise** in working in English for students and Continuing Professional Development for teachers.
- The programme had a particular focus on **embracing equality (EDI)** and marginalised groups (girls, isolated communities and minority groups and **increasing access to opportunities** for these groups.
- **Co-creation of solutions (mutuality) and community ownership** of the programme was supported through consultation with policy makers and local stakeholders including parents, teachers, Change Agents (selected teachers) and headteachers.
- The British Council was able to **leverage its reputation and connections with key policy and decision-makers** to **strengthen the programme** and to ensure the engagement and active participation of these stakeholders throughout the programme.
- It was able to contribute its **extensive experience and expertise of sound management to enable monitoring, evaluation and learning from the education programme to inform future policy and the development of the programme.**

Development Outcomes.

- The programme **contributed to better English language competence and employment skills** which enabled vulnerable young people (especially girls) in target communities to access opportunities to improve their chances for prosperity and a better life, and contributed to peacebuilding.
- Young people, especially girls, built their confidence in accessing different resources and perspectives (English Clubs played a key role).
- Teachers had access to professional development opportunities and support, developing their confidence, knowledge and skills, and improving the quality of teaching and learning of English for their students.
- There was an increased understanding and acceptance of tolerance, mutuality, dialogue and gender equality among beneficiaries in target countries.

Benefits for the UK

- The programme contributed to improved **English language** and employability skills in the region and demonstrated the value of supporting young people, especially girls and those in isolated communities in the region.
- The stronger relationship firmed between the British Council and key policy makers will inform and support long-term policy development.
- Policy-makers in the region saw the programme as being relevant and effective, reflecting well on UK expertise and understanding of local and regional priorities

“Policy makers in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia all felt that the programme was relevant in their countries, and that there was a strong need for the skills the programme aims to develop in young people. English proficiency and employment skills were felt to be especially important for girls in Armenia and Georgia. The programme was also perceived to be effective by young people surveyed, with very high levels of overall satisfaction expressed.” (The Research Base, 2019)

The programme demonstrated how British Council interventions can help contribute to democratic transition and promote prosperity, stability and cohesion in the region

References: The Research Base (2019), English for Isolated Communities, Evaluation Report, British Council

The Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (2019), Impact of English Language and Skills on the Prosperity, Stability and Cohesion of Isolated Areas in South Caucasus and Moldova, British Council

Case Study 6: British Council Western Balkans

Context

- The Western Balkans (WB) region comprises Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. It sits within the British Council's Wider Europe region.
- The WB holds significant importance for UK and European security due to its recent history of communism and Soviet influence, unresolved conflicts and ongoing challenges including corruption and inter-communal tensions.
- The region remains susceptible to internal and external destabilisation, with NATO and EU peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Corruption and organised crime are prevalent issues, compounded by low institutional trust, gender inequality, and ethnic divisions. The Ukraine conflict raises instability risks in the region.

Development Impact Targeted

- The UK government allocated £5.7 million ODA funding for the region in 2023-24 and is expected to add £13 million ODA funding in 2024-25. Key programming priorities are reflected in the budget allocation: governance (45%), peacebuilding (28%), women and girls (27%).
- Key areas of expertise and UK interests in the region encompass internationalisation, digital transformation, education (both formal and non-formal, with a focus on girls' education and English language teaching), skills and employability, media freedom, and arts and culture. These areas of expertise aim to address societal challenges effectively.

British Council Portfolio

- The British Council delivers a diverse portfolio in the region, working in partnership with the UK government (through FCDO, British Embassies) and other active local and international agents.



- **Education** - The **21st Century Schools Programme** included a package of funding provision and capacity building activities across the WB. It had a budget of £10m and ran for more than three and a half years and six training cycles from 2019 to 2022. The key aim of the Programme was to provide training activities to school leaders and teachers in critical thinking and problem solving (CTPS) and the application of IT skills, namely coding and programming using Micro:bit hardware provided by the UK government. The Programme also provided teachers with guidebooks, manuals and teaching materials. The programme still runs in BiH, Albania and Serbia where it is co-funded by the Ministry of Education.

- **Civil Society** - **Media for All** is a £9.4 million project funded under the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) of the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). It is implemented by a consortium led by the British Council, in partnership with the Balkans Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), Thomson Foundation and INTRAC. The project started with an inception phase in September 2019 and ended in June 2022. **Media for All** is unique in supporting small, local, independent media in the WB to implement innovative approaches and methods to increase trust and engagement with their audiences, including local communities, youth, underrepresented groups and diaspora. In 2023, the British Council was awarded via the CSSF Framework a follow-on project, **Media for Change**.
- **English** - The **Online Teachers Community programme** accredited in four countries involves nearly 3,000 English teachers, fostering knowledge sharing and self-directed learning.
- **Arts and Culture** - **Creative Producers** offers professional development opportunities, arts and culture exchanges and collaborations, supporting numerous projects across the WB and empowering emerging producers.
- **Culture and Creativity for the Western Balkans (CC4WBs)** is a programme funded by the European Union and implemented by a consortium of UNESCO, the British Council, and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS). CC4WBs aims to foster intercultural dialogue and enhance the socio-economic impact of the cultural and creative sector in the region.
- **Assessment** - Access to high-quality UK language assessments, including IELTS and APTIS, helps thousands of individuals in the WB achieve their study and work goals.



Examples of Cultural Relations in practice

- The aims of the 21st Century Schools Programme were seen to be well aligned to the needs and priorities of the WB countries and their ongoing national education strategies and policy frameworks. This led to **strong support for the Programme among policymakers and national ministries which has strengthened and broadened relationships with the British Council.**
- Through the Online Teachers Community programme, the British Council **showcases its teacher training expertise** and provides CPD opportunity for teachers. The platform also acts as a **facilitator for knowledge sharing and peer connections among teachers** from South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Ukraine.
- The Creative Leader Academy, delivered under the CC4WBs is a cultural and creative leadership program delivered by Cultural Associates Oxford. It aims to **foster regional exchange and enhance participants' skills in the cultural and creative sectors through training, mentoring, and networking opportunities.** The Academy covers various areas, including cultural management, business planning, communication, audience engagement, entrepreneurial skills, and exposure to international best practices.
- A mentoring scheme within the Media for All programme illustrates how capacity is being developed through cascaded learning:

“The Mentorship for Women in Media programme gave me an opportunity to support young colleagues in their professional and personal development. Often, women journalists have to deal with violence and harassment on daily basis. Empowering young colleagues in their fight for prevention and sanctioning of violence is integral to mentoring. So, I invite all to listen and help each other through activism and action.” - Džana Brkanić, Editor and Mentor, MNE – Media for all.

Development Outcomes

- The 21st Century Schools Programme was effective in **introducing critical thinking, problem-solving, and coding into school curricula** in the WB despite challenges including limited IT equipment in schools. School leaders' support enabled effective coding clubs to be developed.
- **Teachers improved their knowledge and teaching practices**, despite COVID-19 challenges. Overall, 3,906 schools have been involved in the Programme, to which 100,526 Micro:bit devices were distributed. Training was provided by 283 trainers to 3,690 school leaders (47% female) and 17,534 teachers (70% female) to improve their CTPS skills. In addition, 19,752 teachers completed an online Micro:bit course to improve their coding skills. The project succeeded in establishing 2,294 coding clubs, involving 55,420 pupils (47% girls).

- Through the Media for All Project over 1,500 media professionals (journalists, editors, project managers) from 139 media outlets and freelance journalists across WB improved their skills and/or shared knowledge through training. 62% of these professionals were women. 482, of whom 61% were women, additionally benefited from 1:1 or group mentorship.
- The Project increased media outlets' **financial and operational resilience to preserve their editorial independence**. Evidence shows that more outlets had annual revenue over GBP 50,000 at endline (51%) compared to baseline (42%) while fewer outlets had annual revenue less than GBP 10,000 at endline (12%) than at baseline (5%).
- “We have improved the quality of our broadcasting and created a new marketing offer and price list. Thanks to that, new local businesses became our clients and started advertising in our media outlet.” Durres Lajm (ALB) – Media for All
- As a result of Media for All, more media outlets are **tackling gender equality in the workplace**. Among the impact there has been a 6% increase in women working in content production and as journalists, as well as in commercial, sales and marketing, reflecting a continuing general trend in the media sector.
- The Project has also led to more **high quality, ethical, gender sensitive content**. The political content snapshot analysis found that of the 83 assessed outlets, 95% (=79) remained politically balanced and unbiased in their political reporting. Grantee outlets have produced >700 original, fact-checked journalistic products, including pieces on gender equality/ human rights and minority rights.
- “Experts helped us to improve our Privacy policy and gave us clear and specific instructions for our future work.” - Magločistač (SRB) about their work with SHARE Foundation experts – Media for All
- While the content analysis found that more than one third of outlets had improved content around inclusive representation of minorities, LGBTI or non-binary communities remain underrepresented in media content.



Benefits for the UK

- The 21st Century Schools Programme positions the UK as the **partner of choice for education reform**, increasing the perception of the UK as a global leader in education and innovation among national authorities and the international community. The programme's partnership with the Micro:bit Educational Foundation and the distribution of micro:bit computers to schools further strengthens the UK's strategic position in promoting digital literacy in the region.

- The Programme has significantly extended the visibility of the UK's innovation, creativity, and technology to new audiences, including school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. It directly contributes to SDG 4 by working with ALL schools in the region. Additionally, it supports SDG 5 on gender equality by empowering girls in the field of education. Girls' Education is one of the priorities in the recent HMG Strategic framework for ODA.
- The **Media for All** project has strengthened a key element of civil society in the region and increased the capacity of journalists and media professionals to work in an independent and critical way. It has reinforced UK expertise in media and communications and highlighted aspects of its commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

References: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-western-balkans-region-development-partnership-summary/uk-western-balkans-region-development-partnership-summary-july-2023>

Peter Brown (2023) British Council Western Balkans – excerpts from cluster overview and 2023/24 plan for Impact Stories – May 2023

The London School of Economics and Political Science (2022) 21st Century Schools Programme - Final Evaluation Report – Western Balkan

Media for All Endline MEL Report – August 2022

Annex 10 21st Century Schools Western Balkan PAI Case Stories – July 2021

Annex 9 21st Century Schools Western Balkan PAI Report – July 2021

<https://www.britishcouncil.mk/en/programmes/arts/cc4wbs/creative-leaders-academy>

Picture credits: Picture 1 - Annex 10 21st Century Schools Western Balkan PAI Case Stories – July 2021 [HMA Matthew Field, UK Ambassador to BiH with Minister Rasid Hadzovic, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports for Hercegovacko-neretvanski Canton, with the Online Coding Challenge winning team at awarding ceremony]; Picture 2 & 3 – Annex 6 Media for All Stories for Change [Magločistač team; Screen of citizen's reaction].

Case Study 7: British Council Nepal

Context

- Nepal, a Federal Democratic Republic since 2008, grapples with complex relationships with its huge competing neighbours, India and China. It requires sustained support to address various development challenges.
- Nepal has faced transformative challenges recently, from civil war to a devastating earthquake in 2015, transitioning to a federal republic, and grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have tested its development progress, exacerbating issues like social exclusion, limited access to services, and weak economic growth.
- Remittances make up 24% of GDP, but migration drains the workforce and harms the economy. Reliance on imports leaves Nepal susceptible to global economic shocks. Corruption is prevalent and pervasive.
- Nepal aims to become a Middle-Income Country by 2030, creating opportunities for Nepal-UK relations, especially in trade through hydropower contracts. Nepal shows resilience in climate change adaptation, but the political scene remains fragile. The UK seeks to enhance its influence through partnerships and economic opportunities.



Development Impact Targeted

- The FCDO allocated £28.7 million ODA funding for Nepal in the 2023-24 financial year, and it is expected to add £66 million in 2024-25. The largest chunk of the support is allocated to climate, nature and health initiatives, followed by British Investment Partnerships (trade) initiatives, activities focusing on humanitarian support and tackling issues faced by women and girls.
- British Council Nepal's vision for 2025-26 is shaped by the following outcomes:
 - **Outcome 1:** Improved inclusion, quality and relevance of education and skills training system in line with the Nepal government's sector reform plans
 - **Outcome 2:** More enabled, open and inclusive societies and strengthened civic engagement through arts, culture and education resulting in more equitable and sustainable development,
 - **Outcome 3:** Enhanced social mobility and economic prosperity that benefits the young people of Nepal through the educational excellence of the UK,

- **Outcome 4:** Strengthened system for English language teaching (ELT) and assessment.

- These outcomes very much align to priorities within the cross-HMG country plan: “Deepen our strategic partnership with Nepal, delivering our shared security and prosperity interests and a more democratic, inclusive, prosperous and resilient Nepal”, within the wider strategic context of UK Indo-Pacific Tilt.

British Council Portfolio

- In Nepal the British Council operates in a crowded field of international agencies and diplomatic missions with overlapping areas of focus.
- Education: The Girls Empowerment and Mainstreaming Sustainably (GEMS) project in Nepal, a three-year initiative, delivered in partnership with VSO, aims to foster inclusivity and equitable development. It focuses on strengthening girls' education, healthcare access, and women's empowerment. Outcomes include policy improvement, skills development for girls, and empowering their agency.
- Schools Connect programme aligns with the priorities of the Government of Nepal's School Education Sector Plan (SESP), to support an inclusive quality school education through teacher development, school leadership, municipality partnerships, policy dialogues.
- Skills/TVET: Dakchyata: TVET Practical Partnership is part of the EU-TVET Practical Partnership Programme in Nepal, focusing on improving Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). It was funded by the European Union and managed by the British Council in Nepal. It aimed to address challenges in the TVET sector, including limited private sector engagement, theoretical education, and lack of industry alignment. The project, running from March 2017 to December 2022, made significant strides in enhancing TVET quality and relevance through public-private partnerships.
- Going Global Partnership in TVET in Nepal will build on outcomes of the Dakchyata. The project aims to strengthen TVET in Nepal through evidence collection, policy dialogues, and sustaining partnerships between the government and the private sector.
- Arts and Culture: The British Council collaborated with the British Embassy in Kathmandu on the 'Road to COP26' program in Nepal to support stronger national ambitions and actions for COP26 and to promote more representative governance. This initiative was part of The Climate Connection program.
- English and Assessment: A partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), provincial and local governments, based on the Teaching for Success (TfS) framework through the Quality Education, Quality Schools (QEQS) project,



aiming to raise standards in the teaching, learning and testing of English as a subject. Experts in teacher development, assessment and curricula, use their experience to improve English teaching and learning opportunities for both teachers and learners, and to expand access to high-quality professional development.

Examples of Cultural Relations in practice

- The British Council's programme in Nepal supports the implementation of federalism. They play a convening role to facilitate local solutions by working with local stakeholders and building subnational capacity through regular dialogue, creating platforms for collaboration, and bringing in diverse stakeholders from the government, civil society and the private sector to discuss issues and devise solutions. This includes facilitating public-private partnership collaboration mechanisms in TVET and organising policy dialogues in education and youth development.
- Few opportunities existed prior to Dakchyata to explore public-private partnership (PPP) concepts in the Nepal TVET sector. Several approaches have been used to support stakeholders to engage in international good practice, access emerging learning, and discuss and debate the implications for the TVET sector of Nepal.
- Through improved monitoring and supervision processes within Dakchyata, the British Council has shown effective and data driven management. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) is increasingly willing to employ tools for monitoring, capacity building, and enhancing TVET sector performance.
- The 'Road to COP26' project, and the Climate Connection programme more generally, highlighted the importance of co-creation through youth engagement in climate action.

Development Outcomes

- The overall objective of Dakchyata was to strengthen and implement a more effective TVET policy responsive to the labour market needs and pilot the integrated PPP model in three economic sectors that offer **opportunities for promoting the transition to a greener, climate-resilient, low-emission economy**. This supports Nepal's aspirations to graduate to a middle-income country by 2030.
- Dakchyata has introduced **gender equality and social inclusion initiatives**. The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) adaptation created a more inclusive learning space and cultures. 13 GESI units were established within CTEVT schools.
- Through Dakchyata, 140 private sector, training providers and GoN representatives trained on green concepts. This facilitates organisational change to **improve sustainability through better resource management** (waste, water and electricity).
- Dakchyata also informed the development of a ten-year TVET Sector Reform Plan, ensuring a lasting impact on Nepal's education and employment landscape. The plan, approved by the National Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance, ensures **sustained high-quality and inclusive TVET delivery**. Employer associations, led by

FNCCI, have committed to funding the labour market structures developed through the project.

- The GEMS project aims to **reach 73,000 people including 37,000 women and 800 people with disabilities** through 16 community learning centres, 24 health facilities, 30 mothers' groups and 30 Youth-Led Civil Society Organisations across three districts [3]. These targets very much support working towards SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth).



Benefits for the UK

- Through the Climate Connection project, FCDO and British Council successfully projected **UK leadership capability and support for global engagement on climate change** – supporting GoN's own COP26 goals.
- Dakchyata has showcased UK expertise in vocational education and helped build stronger relationships within the Ministry in Nepal. It has also seen the British Council deliver an important, EU-funded programme.
- Through the Going Global partnerships in TVET the UK is able to **showcase its expertise** in the sector and strengthen its profile as a leader in this field.

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<https://www.britishcouncil.org/np/skills-%E2%80%93-going-global-partnership-0>

Executive Summary Dakchyata Final Report

Picture credit: Picture 1 - <https://www.dakchyata-nepal.org/> [Mr. Baikunta Prasad Aryal (Front left), Joint Secretary, Planning Division, MOEST and Chairperson of the PPP WG during the first residential workshop]

Picture 2 - <https://www.britishcouncil.org/np/programmes/education>;

Picture 3 - <https://www.britishcouncil.org/np/programmes/climate-change/road-cop26-climate-change-women-leadership-roundtable-discussion>

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