
Evaluation of the British Council Sub-Saharan Africa Arts Programmes

British Council
December 2025



Overview

The British Council operates an arts programme across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) that seeks to enhance skills, networks, and business outcomes for creatives across SSA and the UK. It does through three pillars of activity – **Creative Economy, Culture Connects, and Culture Responds to Global Challenges** – that directly link to the British Council’s Global Arts Framework. This report summarises the final report in a four-year evaluation of this programme, examining the cumulative impact of the SSA Arts Programme across the full breadth of activity.



Programme objectives

The SSA Arts Programme was created in 2020 with the overarching aim of supporting young people (aged 18-35) to acquire skills and knowledge, using arts as an enabler, and to create bilateral connections between SSA countries and the UK. The programme responds to the Global Arts Programme Theory of Change, ultimately contributing to the British Council’s goal of:

Strengthening the creative and economic development of the arts, culture, and creative sectors in the UK and internationally to increase their contribution to social and cultural capital and to increase trust and favourability for the UK by building, deepening, and extending international connections and partnerships

Pillar and Included Projects

Creative Economy

- Creative DNA
- Creative Producers Programme
- Design Futures Lab
- Design Futures Residency
- Fashion Acceleration Programme
- FILMLAB Africa
- Ignite Culture
- Music Connects
- SoCreative E-Learning Programme

Culture Connects

- Art Creates
- Creative Showcase (CESP & Culture Connects)
- Creative Hustles / networking events
- Festival Connect
- Liverpool Biennale
- Moving Images

Culture Responds to Global Challenges

- Sustainable Together
- Braid Fund



Economic impact of the Arts Programme

Between 2021 and 2025, the British Council's Arts Programme in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) delivered measurable and meaningful economic gains for creatives and delivery partners across SSA.

Sustained growth in income and sales:

77% of participants increased export value and/or sales, with a third reporting substantial gains. 84% of participants reported an increase in turnover, and a quarter described this increase as substantial. Most attributed this growth directly to the programme.

Job creation:

59% of participants created between one and twenty new roles, boosting employment opportunities in the creative sector.

Strengthening of businesses:

Nearly one in four participants registered a new business during or after the programme, while 96% of existing enterprises expanded operations.

Increased collaboration:

98% of participants in the Arts Programme over the last four years are either already collaborating or actively considering it, with 74% accessing new or additional opportunities as

a direct result of participating, 64% initiating new collaborative projects with other creatives after their involvement, and 54% taking part in collaborative projects during their time on British Council programmes

Enhanced market access:

Both UK and intra-African commercial connections grew steadily, with significant improvements in perceived access to opportunities with UK creatives.

Visibility:

86% of participants increased social media visibility, often translating into greater brand credibility, more clients, and new collaborations.

Boost to delivery partners' capacity:

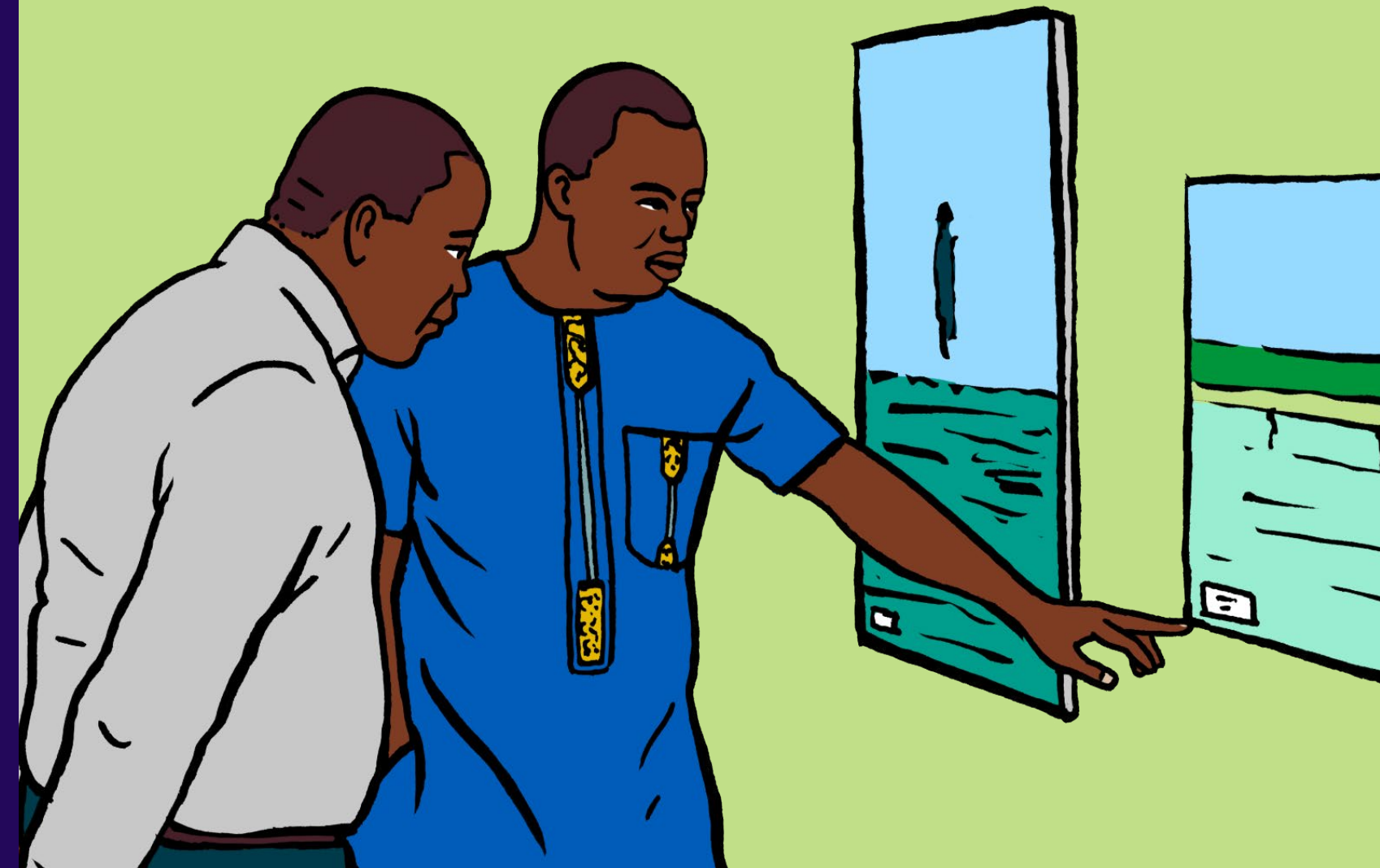
Over half secured valuable new connections, almost half won new business, and a third accessed additional grant funding. Partnerships built through the programme are expected to have lasting economic value.

"I was able to establish my creative enterprise and rollout my projects. Today I boast of having a solid catalogue and an organic growing fan base."

Creative DNA participant, Uganda

"You get more attention and credibility when people know you are associated with The British Council."

Creative Economy participant, Ghana



Economic impact refers to impacts on individuals' and businesses' sales, income sources, turnover, ability to create new work – including through collaborations – access to market(s), and employment.

Impact of the Arts programme in SSA on education and skills

The British Council's Arts Programme in SSA has consistently strengthened participants' skills, confidence, and professional readiness over the past four years.



“Being part of Creative DNA offered me access to a vibrant community of like-minded entrepreneurs and industry experts, fostering connections that are essential for expanding market reach and exploring new opportunities.”

Creative DNA participant

73%

of survey respondents report having gained new skills or knowledge which will help them economically in the future

Business and financial skills:

Participants' financial literacy, strategic planning, and business confidence reached their highest recorded levels in Year 4 (100% for financial skills, 97% for business confidence). Delivery partners also benefited, reporting increased capacity in financial management, monitoring, evaluation, and impact reporting.

Networking and partnership building:

Confidence in building national and SSA-wide networks rose from 81% to 88% between Years 2 and 4. The biggest improvement was in networking with UK and global creative enterprises, increasing from 67% to 87%. Participants gained stronger communication skills and a deeper understanding of the value of collaboration.

Sector knowledge:

Understanding of the creative economy increased from 89% to 97% over the period. Confidence in skills to work in arts, culture, and creative sectors reached 100% in Year 4. Participants expanded practical sector-specific knowledge in areas such as fashion business, music business, curating, filmmaking, and museum practice.

As well as reporting improved skills and education outcomes for participants, delivery partners also highlighted business and financial skills outcomes for themselves. 73% of survey respondents report having gained new skills or knowledge which will help them economically in the future.

“Working with the British Council [...] has helped me build vital skills in finance, communications, and project management - key areas that are essential for career growth and leadership. This holistic development has not only enhanced my confidence but also equipped me with the tools to navigate complex challenges and seize new opportunities with clarity and purpose.”

Culture Connects participant, Kenya



Impacts of the Arts Programme on the wider policy ecosystem in SSA

The Arts Programme has generated wider impact, including policy and ecosystem influence, as well as advancing the British Council's own strategic positioning and credibility.

The British Council is actively working to be known as a space that supports arts and culture. Overall, findings show that the British Council's SSA Arts Programme has been instrumental in delivering sector-wide, policy-level, and reputational impacts. Its work has directly shaped national cultural policies in Kenya and Uganda, formalised high-level strategic collaborations in Nigeria, and indirectly influenced policy through participant success stories in Senegal. There is evidence that these combined impacts have started to shape the role of the British Council SSA as an enabler of systemic change in the creative economy.

Kenya:

The development of a government-accredited national curriculum for poetry.

Uganda:

Working with the Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Creative Industries (UGAPAFOCI) and utilising the International Collaboration and Research (ICR) facility, to review Uganda's national cultural policy

Nigeria:

Signing of a MOU with the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy based on an eight-point plan, including objectives like skills development, improved policy frameworks for revenue and job creation, strategic partnerships, and infrastructure development

Senegal:

Activities have strengthened the British Council's relationship with the UK Embassy.

Rwanda:

Opportunities to align the SoCreative eLearning programme with government strategies.

“There has been tremendous work by the British Council in capacity building for the creatives and providing opportunities for international exposure especially in the fashion industry. The British Council through the bilateral arts engagements is a cultural connector that keeps cultural diplomacy thriving.”

Rachel Magoola, Member of the Parliament of Uganda

“We aim to continue to work through partners to achieve big policy changes. Going forward, we need to continue to work with the institutions that are able to bring that change.”

British Council staff member,
Kenya



Impacts of the Arts Programme on Perceptions of the UK

Improved perceptions of the UK

The Arts Programme in SSA has contributed to improved trust in working with the UK for participants and delivery partners, with year on year increases in views of the UK for participants. The British Council is regarded as a more trusted partner, with an increase in likelihood to recommend the British Council.

“The British Council has been a reliable, thoughtful partner whose programmes deliver real value and impact for creative entrepreneurs.”

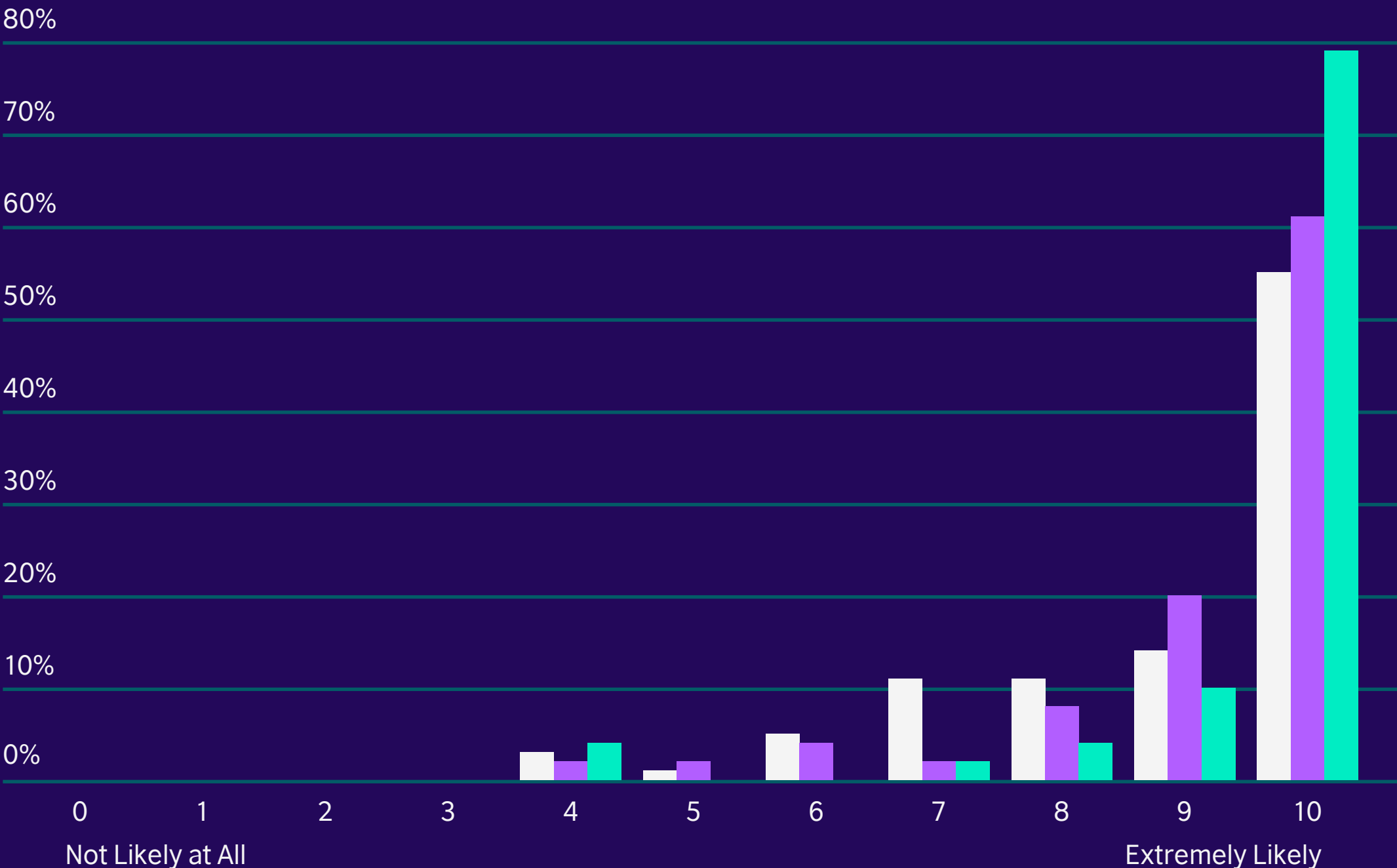
Creative DNA delivery partner, Uganda



Participants’ likelihood to recommend British Council to others, 2022–2025

Percentage of those surveyed
(year 2: n=76, year 3: n=51, year 4:n=48)

- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4



Long term impact of the Arts Programme for the British Council

Partnership working has grown in strength and frequency

Through the Arts Programme, the British Council has been able to establish significant strategic partnerships across SSA, making connections with governments, trusts, foundations, and other private and public sector bodies established and operating in the region.

Working to develop strategic partnerships also helps supports the profile of the British Council within the shifting political context in SSA. Several country teams spoke about the importance of the position of the UK within the context of working in African countries, and specifically the need to ensure that the UK can be seen as a convenor and equal partner, not a central point as may have previously been the case.

Multilateralism is an opportunity for the British Council; the less that the UK is at the top, the more there is value there

(Kenya country team)

It can be a challenge and an opportunity to recognise where the sector is at, and not be cookie cutter in how we work at the British Council (Country team Uganda)

(Kenya country team)

The Arts Programme is able to be agile to country needs

The agility of the Arts Programme was highlighted as a key strength by consulted country teams, both in terms of ability to adapt the programme to the changing context in each country and the ability to adapt to the global changes at the British Council. This allows the strengths of localised sectors to be identified and supported more fully than might be possible otherwise.

The loss of grant-in-aid following the Covid-19 pandemic has forced teams to think more innovatively about delivery and be more agile in their working. This includes using physical assets, leveraging the British Council brand, moves to increased online delivery, and creating new platforms and programmes.

The British Council has opportunities to grow the Arts Programme further

The continued benefits of increased strategic collaboration, and leveraging existing collaborations and MOUs to create further in-country synergies with key government, academic, and NGO partners.

The strategic benefits of close working with localised partners to improve cultural relations and deliver programmes that have relevance for participants.

Using the learnings from the last for years strategically as a mechanism for identifying additional and/or alternative income sources (e.g. sponsorship). Leveraging the positive impacts realised can also help to communicate the benefits of working with the British Council.

Ensuring that programmes are grounded in the place of their delivery and can respond to the local context (i.e. sub-sectors with particular strength) to ensure relevance to the local economy.

Exploring opportunities for replicating programmes that have been successful in one country in other countries in the region (as has been seen with Creative DNA), as well as exploring opportunities for inter-Africa programmes that can foster collaboration and exchange between different countries that the British Council operates in to further cultural relations in SSA.



Lessons learned from sustained engagement

Sustained engagement through the British Council SSA Arts Programme has generated some clear learnings for participants, delivery partners and British Council staff members. These can be grouped into four key lessons:

1. **Long term engagement – with participants and with delivery partners – multiplies the impacts that the British Council can create.**

Participants reported that ongoing training, mentorship, and networking kept them engaged, built their confidence, and provided repeated opportunities to collaborate and innovate. Early exposure, gained through the British Council, created leverage for participants, generating multiple follow-on opportunities such as residencies, grants, exhibitions.

Delivery partners highlighted that when British Council projects are longer-term, knowledge, networks, and economic opportunities expand more sustainably.

2. **Impact is most successfully realised when programmes are able to be responsive to country-specific contexts.**

Strong programme design incorporates flexibility and adaptability to partner feedback and changing circumstances.

This includes being flexible enough to adjust programmes to suit the sector's evolving needs and respond to local realities.

3. **Brokering connections between artists and creatives in the UK and SSA continues to be a vital part of the British Council's offer.**

The British Council's brokerage role is vital, but should be more proactive and continuous, especially in linking SSA creatives with UK partners. For sustained impact to occur, working in consortium with local partners can help overcome funding challenges, foster mutually collaborative partnerships, and support ecosystem building.

4. **The legacy impacts of engagement grow over time as participants' careers develop.**

The biggest gains come months or years after initial engagements, when skills and networks are applied to new contexts.

Recommendations

Recommendations coming out of this research were grouped into thematic areas: project design, project delivery, project processes, and project legacy.

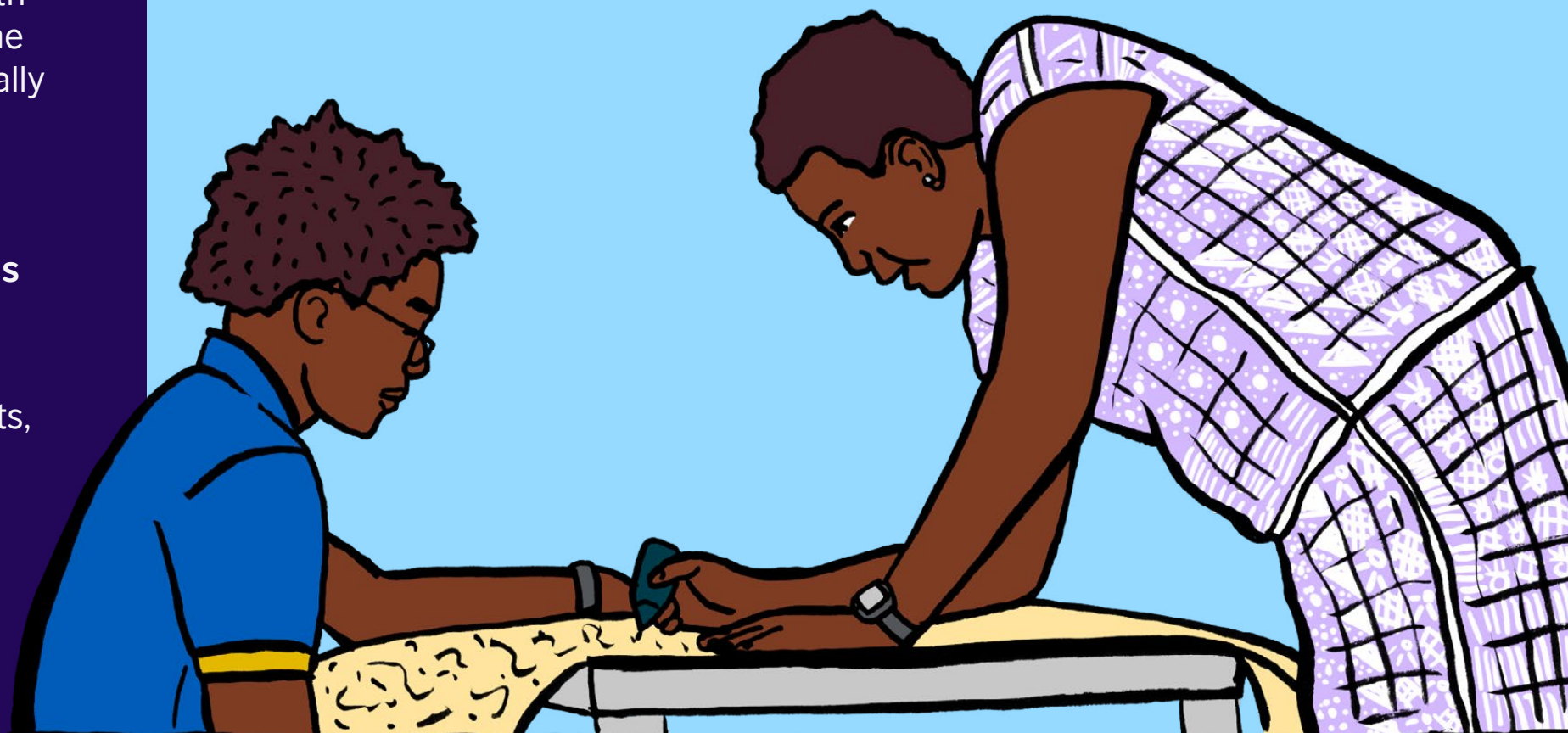
Project design: programmes designed to be adapted based on strong local knowledge and dispersed more geographically (i.e. beyond major cities) can increase impact. There are also benefits to simplifying the application processes, including for alumni who wish to reapply.

Project delivery: blended delivery, with flexible schedules and targeted training opportunities can maximise outcomes for participants.

Project processes: several different processes were highlighted as needing simplification, which could also help reduce the burden for country teams.

Project legacy: participants and delivery partners are keen for increased opportunities for legacy benefit, through ongoing peer learning and networking that can foster collaboration.

Lack of follow up: partners expressed a desire for more long-term sector engagement, as well as following up with participants to ascertain long-term impacts



Case Studies

Creative DNA

Creative DNA (CDNA) is a British Council programme that aims to support young fashion enterprises through a business incubator, unlocking the potential of a continent rich in creativity and talent, and giving voice to a new generation of designers who can shape the narrative of African fashion for years to come.

Over the lifetime of CDNA a wide range of subjects have been covered by the incubator, including: attracting the right customers, scaling to new markets, finding partners, securing investment, intellectual Property, brand identity, quality control, pricing, and sustainability.

In addition, the programme also provides opportunities for international networking and trade exhibitions, including events like London Fashion Week and Afreximbank's Creative Africa Nexus (CANEX) Platform, which serve as a networking venue for designers, as well as the British Council's Creative Economy Week platform

“I now have a consistent formula I use when it comes to pricing, which has really changed everything in terms of how I do business... I also feel like I'm such a better artist. There is a difference between my product looked like in 2017, and what I produce now. It shows the growth, because I'm really pushing myself to be a better creator”

Sharon Wendo, proprietor of Epica Jewellery.

“I was able to attend the Zimbabwe creative economy week that was organized by the British Council in Harare in March this year, where I was able exhibit my products and also has models walked down the runway with my jewellery. Last year, I was part of the Uganda Pearl of Africa Tourism Expo that happened here in Munyonyo Speak Resort... When clients see your brand under collection that is part of the British Council, It become more legitimate; they respect you more. They're like, okay, we can trust you and support, you know?”

“Through the British Council, we've been able to call on literally the biggest people we could find industry. We would ask the designers, who they wanted to meet and we would make sure people like that were in the room. ... these people had candid, open conversations, and it was good watching brands grow thereafter.”

Nunu Mugenyi,
Managing Director,
Bold Woman Fund.



Creative Showcases

The Creative Showcases programme was launched in 2022 in Nigeria, in conjunction with the Creative Hustle programme, and has since been rolled out across SSA. The programme supports local creatives and artists by giving them access to venues and exhibition spaces to showcase their work to new audiences, network and sell their products. The centre of the programme is a pop-up market featuring goods and services from a variety of artistic disciplines, including fashion, digital arts, film, and visual arts combined with activities and performances. The pop-up market is normally set up in the British Council's own spaces, although on occasion a private space is used in partnership with the British Council.

“Showcases at the British Council venue have more audiences than other venues and a lot of people turned up with the mind-set to support businesses.”

Participant, Creative Showcasing

“We really built up audiences, we are always oversubscribed – so much so that the office is no longer enough and this year we’re hoping to partner with existing platforms and markets outside the office to expand our reach.”

British Council staff member

Creative Showcases has created a platform for skills sharing and peer review of artistic works among young creatives working in different artistic genres and audiences. The programme has also contributed towards enhanced visibility of participating artists’ works and market access. For participants, being selected for showcasing at the British Council events strengthened their profiles and affirmed their work in the wider public sphere which in turn created opportunities in other platforms.

For the artists involved in the programme, the showcases are not just about what they sell immediately, they are for gaining strategic contacts who can become future networks and customers. Some respondents reported that they are still selling to customers they connected with at the showcases events in previous years.



“The showcases created a platform for me to share a live artistic experience of creating a painting from start to finish in the presence of an audience. This sparked critical conversations with audiences, with some providing me with advice on the new artistic journey that I am embarking on, transitioning from making traditional canvas works to virtual reality and immersive story telling. They challenged me to think out of the box and advance my work as I evolve into the digital space.”

Participant, Creative Showcases

I Wear My Culture

I Wear My Culture was a collaborative research project between the British Council and Paper Bag Africa in Zimbabwe. It documented the cultural aesthetics of 12 different ethnic groups through fashion and film, leading to a collection of contemporary garments and a documentary produced by Creative Mice Films.

The initiative allowed the 12 young designers from various ethnic backgrounds to visit an ethnic group distinct from their own from across Zimbabwe and the UK. The initiative focused on the Tonga, Nambya, Shona, Xhosa, Shangani, Ndebele, Venda, Kalanga, Khoisan, Sotho, Irish, and Scottish communities. They conducted research on the ways in which this group decorates their homes, personal attire, and everyday items. The focus included exploring the unique colours they utilize, as well as their use of materials such as beads and natural dyes. The research findings motivated fashion designers to produce contemporary garment sketches influenced by these insights.

The research sought to foster a sense of pride in Zimbabwe's rich cultural identities, bringing attention to the notion of Ubuntu, which underscores the interconnectedness of individual identities with those of others.

“Through this film, we aimed to foster a sense of pride in individuals’ identities, as many tend to shy away from openly stating their ethnic backgrounds, like saying, “I am Hunga” or “I am Kosa,” often feeling the need to align with larger groups. Our message was clear: individuals should take pride in their heritage. The goal our project is to encourage individuals to proudly express their identities, recognizing that they are the culmination of their ancestors’ legacies”

Gilmore Tee, delivery partner



Moving Images

Art Exchange: Moving Images is a professional development programme for early to mid-career visual arts curators from SSA and South Asia. In SSA, delivery partners LUX – a UK based arts organisation – and Guest Artists Space Foundation (G.A.S.) – British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare’s foundation – worked with creators in the region to develop a series of cross-cultural exhibition projects.

Selected from an open call process, the programme supported curators to develop new work by responding to moving image pieces held in the British Council Collection, a collection of nearly 9,000 works produced by British visual artists from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Many of those engaged attributed the success of the programme to the British Council as a convenor and funder alongside the support of the delivery partners to guide and hold the cohort together. This dynamic, despite a few contextual challenges, made for a nurturing space for ideas and dialogue to develop.

Participant and delivery partner feedback highlighted the programme’s role in nurturing cross-continental networks, as well as networks with the UK. Given the context and how challenging travel within the Continent can be, programmes such as these provide opportunities for new collaborations and the development of new ways of working. In this way, the British Council has the potential to cement its position as a convenor of regional connections.

“I think one thing that bound them all together was the fact that they were very intentional in way that they foregrounded the local audience and really thought about making it accessible and engaging for the local audience in the way that these works were presented, like hyper-local in a lot of ways, which is really exciting.”

Magda (Delivery Partner)



“Working with the collection was serendipitous. Larry Achiampong’s name stood out because the heartstrings of the project are for the Ghanaian context and for young learners in Ghana”.

Abbey IT-A, participating artist

“Being supported by Ben from Lux and Magda from G.A.S and Leah from British Council. It was a very affirming space and very much a learning space.”

Rosie Olang’, participating artist