

CULTURAL RELATIONS, DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION IN AN AGE OF COMPETITION



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1. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CI	–	Cultural Institute
ICR	–	International Cultural Relations
ECA	–	Educational and Cultural Affairs
FCDO	–	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
HC	–	Home country
HQ	–	Headquarters
OC	–	Operating Country
RIE	–	Research, Insight and Evaluation
SLT	–	Senior Leadership Team
UK	–	United Kingdom
UNESCO	–	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USA	–	United States of America

2. INTRODUCTION

The international order is becoming increasingly fragmented, characterised by intensifying competition between states over interests, norms and values (UK Cabinet Office 2021). Countries around the world face challenges in managing their reputations and relationships with each other when interests, values and systems differ. Moreover, as competition for influence in the new international order intensifies, tense bilateral relations with emerging and great powers are likely to increase and have repercussions for relations with countries in their wider region. Within this context, a key question for Governments globally is how best to manage relationships in a way which minimises tensions and keeps open channels for dialogue and cooperation.

3. THE RESEARCH

In January 2021, the British Council commissioned ICR Research and Partners to conduct a study to examine the role of international cultural relations in contributing to international dialogue and cooperation in contexts where bilateral country-to-country relations are, or risk becoming, weak or fraught.

In response, twelve case studies of programmes selected from the portfolio of work being delivered by the British Council, the Goethe Institut, Institut Français, and the US Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) (hereafter referred to collectively as 'cultural institutes', or CIs) were conducted. The countries covered by the case studies include Russia, China, Turkey, Indonesia and Libya. These countries (hereafter referred to as the 'operating countries', or OCs) were selected to reflect the diversity of conditions which can lead to challenges in maintaining international dialogue and cooperation. These include:

- historically strained and deteriorating present-day bilateral political relations
- historically limited engagement and poor present-day understanding
- divergence in terms of political ideology and systems
- civil conflict and social polarisation

Each case study was informed by a series of key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders and experts, together with a review of relevant literature and programme documentation. Interviews were conducted in two phases. Initially, interviews were conducted with key experts in each operating country in order to understand the context and bi-lateral relationship from a strategic perspective, and to identify programmes which they considered exemplary in contributing to dialogue and cooperation. These interviewees included the country directors of the cultural institutes and other senior diplomatic personnel.

When relevant case studies were identified, the key personnel responsible for delivering these programmes were interviewed in addition to their in-country counterpart. The purpose of these interviews was to provide a deep-dive diagnosis of the actual delivery of the programme on the ground, the challenges and enablers encountered and the extent to which the projects contributed to dialogue and cooperation.

4. WHY CULTURAL RELATIONS MATTERS

IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS, A CULTURAL RELATIONS APPROACH BUILDS A RESILIENT PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

As the UK's foremost organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, the British Council's experience suggests that cultural and educational activities can provide a shared platform for engagement and cooperation with governments even when relations in all other areas remain challenging and can enable people-to-people and institutional dialogue and exchange to continue and thrive. The cases studies conducted for this research confirm this view, demonstrating a range of instances in which programming by the four CIs has continued in spite of deteriorating bilateral and multilateral political relationships; conflict within and between participating countries; or accusations by factions within the country where the CI is operating that the programme runs counter to their view of the national interest. Thanks to this resilience, these programmes were able to continue in their mission to connect, build trust and understanding between, and deliver benefits to a wide range of constituencies in both countries, including Government ministries and officials; institutions, organisations and professional communities; and citizens.

A CULTURAL RELATIONS APPROACH IS DISTINCT BECAUSE OF WHY AND HOW IT LEVERAGES CULTURAL CAPABILITIES

The 'culture' that forms the basis of cultural relations may be broadly defined to incorporate language, education, and any other elements of a country's history or society that it chooses to feature, for example the arts, science and technology, sport, food and fashion. Use of these elements capabilities is not unique to cultural relations. It is also characteristic of other forms of statecraft, such as public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy (Singh 2020). The difference between cultural relations and these other forms of statecraft, therefore, is rather one of how and why, rather than what.

While no single agreed definition of cultural relations exists, definitions adopted by previous studies of cultural relations emphasise building mutual trust and understanding between actors from different countries as the basis for securing positive, mutually beneficial, long-term, and sustainable transnational relationships. These outcomes are optimised to the extent that the process embodies mutuality, a term the British Council conceptualises as "a set of values" that includes "integrity, respect, openness, and a preparedness constantly to modify one's own understanding" (Rose and Smith, 2004). Within this paradigm, bilateral and multilateral actors aspire to genuine reciprocity and mutual understanding (British Council/Goethe Institut 2008). By contrast, other forms of statecraft such as public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy may bear connotations of instrumentalism and self-interest.

THE SPECIFIC GOALS AND MODALITIES OF CULTURAL RELATIONS MATTER FOR ITS RESILIENCE

As previous research has demonstrated, the degree to which different CIs explicitly align their practice with a cultural relations approach varies (British Council/Goethe Institut 2018; ICR 2021). For example, while a cultural relations approach forms a core component of the organisational identity of the British Council and the Goethe Institut, both the Institut Français and the ECA may be more closely associated with public and cultural diplomacy.

Despite these variations, all twelve case studies attested to the fundamental importance of building **mutual trust and understanding** for delivering programmes in challenging contexts. In contexts where there is a high risk of state interference in a programme, for example, it is essential for operating and home country (HC) partners, including the CI, to trust one another and to share an in-depth understanding of the parameters of the operating environment.

The case studies also highlighted the imperative for consistently delivering **mutual benefits**, and for employing **participatory and inclusive approaches to programme design** that take into the account the needs and expectations of operating country partners and populations. In contexts where there are high levels of suspicion about the role of foreign organisations, for example, being able to demonstrate positive contributions to goals that matter to operating country partners, is vital for mitigating the risk of poor or hostile reception of programming.

Finally, the case studies show the value of enacting these processes over the **long-term**, in order to maximise the strength of the relationships that CIs build with Government ministries; institutions, organisations and professional communities; and citizens in the operating country. By engaging in cultural relations over time, the research suggests that CIs cultivate the **competency, organisational reputation, and relationships with partners** necessary to work effectively in the operating country.

THE GOALS AND MODALITIES OF CULTURAL RELATIONS ALSO MATTER FOR THE BENEFITS CIs DELIVER FOR OTHER HOME COUNTRY PARTNERS

The case studies also indicate how, by building mutual trust and understanding and ensuring mutual benefits over the long term, CIs enable the achievement of other home country partners' strategic objectives.

In Russia, for example, the British Council, Goethe Institut and the Institut Français have all been instrumental in maintaining people-to-people connections and affording platforms for positive bilateral engagement between Government officials, even at times of severe political tensions. As a result, these CIs contribute to the implementation of their countries' respective foreign policy strategies in respect of Russia, all of which recognise the need to balance robust responses on contested bilateral issues such as national security and human rights, with the imperative for positive dialogue and cooperation where possible.

In China and Indonesia, similarly, CIs are helping to advance their respective countries' strategic interests in deepening engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. Considered both geostrategically critical and a source of immense economic opportunity, the Asia-Pacific region nevertheless presents significant challenges for dialogue and cooperation. These include, but are not limited to, factors including relatively poor trust and understanding between peoples, particularly in terms of how countries in the region are perceived in the West. Within this context, CIs provide important bridges and sources of expertise for guiding home country partners, including Government officials, institutions and organisations in the higher education, arts and culture and civil society sector, and the private sector, to engage more effectively.

Finally, in Turkey and Libya, programmes dedicated to preserving cultural heritage and improving educational outcomes highlight how broad-based popular support for cooperation in these areas can supersede societal divisions and polarisation. In doing so, these programmes provide a platform for engaging with a wider cross-section of operating environment populations, helping to improve trust in and understanding of the home country at scale without compromising efforts by other partners to engage with specific groups.

5. CHALLENGES AND FACILITATORS OF CULTURAL RELATIONS IN DIFFICULT CONTEXTS

THE SUCCESS OF CULTURAL RELATIONS IN THE OPERATING COUNTRIES DEPENDS ON THE ABILITY TO NAVIGATE TWO SETS OF CHALLENGES

A key objective of the research was to inform the British Council in its strategy, programme design and the allocation of resources, as well as to inform and provide thought leadership for other cultural relations practitioners and policymakers shaping international strategy. The study uncovered two broad sets of challenges: those inherent in the operating environment in the other country, and challenges presented by the ecology of partners required to deliver cultural relations programmes in these contexts.

Within the operating environment, the challenges fell into four categories:

- **Macro challenges** – threats of state interference; political and media flashpoints; and domestic home country pressures
- **Operational challenges** - bureaucratic and complex systems, and barriers to physical interaction
- **Population challenges** – size and diversity of public audience, and negative public awareness, beliefs, attitudes and understanding of the home country
- **Competition challenges** – from other actors competing for audience and stakeholder attention in the operating country

Partner ecology challenges fell into three categories:

- **CI Home country partner challenges** – poor awareness, negative beliefs and attitudes about, and poor understanding of the operating country, as well as limited partner integration, for example in terms of objectives and ways of working
- **Operating country partner challenges** - poor awareness, negative beliefs and attitudes about, and poor understanding of the home country, limited technical expertise, and poor partner integration
- **Home country and operating country partner relations challenges** – poor mutual understanding, assumed value misalignment, absent or weak pre-existing ties, and asymmetries in expertise and resources

STAFF COMPETENCY, ORGANISATIONAL REPUTATION, RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARTNERS, AND PROGRAMME DESIGN AND GOVERNANCE ARE KEY TO NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

CIs' success in navigating and overcoming these challenges is the result of their strong performance against four interrelated areas. These are: the competency of leadership and personnel; their organisational reputation; the relationships they have cultivated with home and operating country partners; and the design, attributes and governance of their programmes. There is also a widely shared belief that, by implementing effective programmes in operating countries, CIs contribute to the creation of a more enabling environment for dialogue and cooperation in the long-term, both for themselves and other home country partners. Each of these factors is described in detail below.

1. CI personnel competency

In every case study, the intercultural communicative competency of CI leadership and personnel was central to the success of cultural relations programmes in achieving dialogue and cooperation. This competency is exemplified in the following areas: language, local and sector-specific knowledge and expertise, tenure, technical know-how in delivering cultural relations programmes, and interpersonal skills. In particular, a personal affinity for the context, the sector and the country and its people, is deemed especially valuable for competency. The case studies further indicated that CI communicative competency is concentrated within in-country teams, especially at the programme delivery level. These teams often benefit from the employment of locally hired staff with sector-specific expertise, for example in local higher education or creative sectors.

2. CI organisational reputation

Across the case studies, two core motivations driving CI-led dialogue and cooperation emerged: the promise of direct benefits yielded by the engagement, and/or a shared belief in the intrinsic value of the cooperative action. This finding underscores the imperative for CIs to cultivate their reputation in two important ways.

First, it is essential that actors with whom CIs seek to engage recognise the CI as an enabler of their own strategic objectives. This perception is a function of the actor's belief in the CI's unique selling points and competitive advantages, which may vary depending on the context. For example, interviewees cited cases in which the CI's relationship with their home country Government makes the CI a uniquely attractive partner for dialogue and cooperation. In other cases, it was the CI's perceived gravitas and standing within a specific sector, or its level of expertise and knowledge in delivering on particular goals, that made it the most attractive partner.

Second, it is clear that mutually shared values and goals matter for dialogue and cooperation with partners in particular contexts with particular types of actors. For example, there were cases in which a shared belief in the intrinsic value of international collaboration in higher education and the arts, or of the importance of an independent civil society sector, provided the foundation for engaging in dialogue and cooperation. These cases highlight the need for CIs to establish and continuously demonstrate their commitment to these professional and sector-specific values, in and of themselves and not just for strategic gain.

3. CI relationships with home and operating country partners

Across the board, CIs' bilateral relationships with home and operating country partners constituted the lynchpin for the delivery of effective programmes. In almost all cases, these relationships had been developed over time, through a history of successive, mutually beneficial engagements with the CI, contributing over time to increased mutual trust and understanding. Once established and cultivated, these relationships form the basis for future partnerships as well as a platform for the CI to broker mutually beneficial alliances between those partners.

4. CI programmes

While CI programmes varied significantly across the case studies, many of them shared common features, in terms of particular components, attributes and governance styles and characteristics. For example, in the majority of case studies, the programmes were characterised by multi-stakeholder engagement between institutions, organisations and individuals from both the home and operating countries. The approach demonstrated by CIs to this multi-stakeholder engagement foregrounded a common set of practices and principles, including the importance of direct contact between stakeholders, participatory

and inclusive programme design methods, and working level ownership of the direction of dialogue and cooperation.

5. CI contribution to the creation of an enabling environment

In the short-term, the case studies evidenced the central role of the broad bilateral country-to-country relationship in shaping the overall environment within which CIs operate. CIs are limited in what they can do in isolation to affect this relationship in the short-term, and anything they can do is far outweighed by the impact of political and media flashpoints. To mitigate these challenges, the case studies identified the strategic value in maintaining close relationships with home and operating country policymakers and officials, who can exercise greater and more direct influence on the environment.

In the long-term, however, there is a commonly held belief both at the strategic and programme delivery level that, by implementing effective programmes, CIs enable a set of conditions characterised by increased mutual trust and understanding between the home and operating countries, forming the basis for future and sustainable dialogue and cooperation.

MORE PROGRESS IS NEEDED TO CAPTURE ROBUST EVIDENCE OF THE LONG-IMPACT OF CULTURAL RELATIONS IN TIMES OF TENSION

Despite the widely held belief in the long-term contribution of cultural relations, substantiating this belief through measurement and evaluation of long-term outcomes and impact remains a widely acknowledged challenge for the field. The embryonic state of the evidence base for cultural relations' long-term success is well documented. While earlier research by ICR Research and Partners (2021) for the British Council found that CIs considered 'Research, evaluation and learning... as key to 21st-century success' and that countries were increasing their interest in data analytics, research, evaluation and building in organisational learning in order to optimise engagement, the current study identified a gap relating to the longer-term and often sensitive nature of cultural relations work. It is not clear that CIs have arrangements in place that would allow them to evaluate robustly the outcomes of their actions in contexts of tension – contexts that are among the most important. However, it is clear from the literature that substantial effort is currently being directed towards developing robust methods of capturing long-term outcomes and impact (see, for example, Thomas 2020).

COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF CI PROGRAMMING OFFER THE OPPORTUNITY TO REFINE PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING IN RESPONSE TO 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES

The insights above highlight how CIs, by building on the competence of their teams, their organisational reputation, partnership strategies and programme delivery, can operate effectively in these environments, in order to achieve these goals. To further illustrate the benefits of research to inform planning and decision-making, the tables below summarise in greater detail the seven challenge sets identified by comparing across the operating countries, and highlight the specific facilitators identified by the case studies for mitigating or overcoming these challenges.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGE SET 1: MACRO CHALLENGES

MACRO CHALLENGES			
Threat of state interference/shutdown		Political/media flashpoints	HC domestic pressures
DESCRIPTION	The threat of state interference in cultural relations programming during times of bilateral tension is not new. It relates, on the one hand, to an enduring suspicion that cultural relations programmes run counter to the interests and longevity of the existing power structure in the operating country. It is also aggravated by the option to penalise cultural relations organisations in order to send a message as part of wider bilateral competition and conflict.	In the context of fraught and tense bilateral relations, there is high propensity for political and media flashpoints to occur during programming. Such events threaten to destabilise programming, increase risk to personnel and partners, and may limit cultural relations organisations' reputation, resonance and traction within host countries.	On the domestic home front, key constituencies including diaspora populations and political factions who are opposed to engagement with specific Governments or groups may exert lobbying pressure that can affect cultural relations programming. These efforts may weaken domestic public and policy support for cultural relations engagement in the operating countries.
ENABLING ACTIONS			
CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	Cultivate favourable Gov-Gov relations	Cultivate favourable Gov-Gov relations	Leverage programme-specific public communications
	Improve OC general public awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about HC	Increase number / diversity of bilateral ties with OC	
	Increase number / diversity of bilateral ties with OC	Leverage programme-specific public communications	
	Codify cooperative agreements between HC and OC		
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes	
	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for navigating operating environment	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for navigating operating environment	
	Invest in and leverage strong pre-existing CI-OC partner relations	Invest in and leverage strong pre-existing CI-OC partner relations	
	Identify and collaborate with trusted and influential OC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	Identify and collaborate with trusted and influential OC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	
	Identify and collaborate with HC partners that increase security from interference (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	Identify and collaborate with trusted and influential HC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	COMPONENTS		
	Employ a space creation approach that minimises CI agenda setting role		
	Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure locally sensitised programming		
	ATTRIBUTES		
	Ensure transparency to reduce risk of misrepresentation of programme	Ensure transparency to reduce risk of misrepresentation of programme	Focus on programme areas that have a broad-based/diverse appeal in the HC
	Employ high cachet assets in the OC among the target audience	Maintain distance from the programme and one-sided, HC national interest	
	Ensure programme delivers clear benefits to OC state actors		
	Maintain distance from the programme and one-sided, HC national interest		
	Focus on programme areas that have a broad-based/diverse appeal in the OC		
	Design small-scale/local programmes to reduce visibility at the nation-state level		
GOVERNANCE	Engage OC state actors directly within project governance/delivery	Facilitate regular comms between working level and HQ/SLT, to anticipate and navigate flashpoints	Facilitate regular comms between working level and HQ/SLT, to anticipate and navigate pressures
	Assemble a broad-based alliance of influential partners to disincentivise negative interference		

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGE SET 2: OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES			
		Bureaucratic/ complex systems	Physical challenges limiting accessibility
DESCRIPTION		Bureaucracy and complexity of key sectors and the information environment of other countries can make operating in these contexts challenging. For CIs to overcome these challenges, they need to employ the right people for the job; identify and collaborate with the right partners; and adopt a participatory approach to programme design to optimally leverage the skills and expertise of resultant ecology of partners.	Face-to-face interaction is the cornerstone of dialogue and cooperation. However, conflict, physical infrastructure, geographic distance and COVID-19 all constitute barriers to face-to-face interaction between the CIs and relevant operating country stakeholders and audiences. In response to these barriers, the research demonstrated the importance of flexibility in programme delivery methods, and agility in adapting programming, beyond face-to-face interaction.
ENABLING ACTIONS			
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS		Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for navigating operating environment	
		Invest in and leverage strong pre-existing CI-OC partner relations	
		Identify and collaborate with OC partners who can navigate operating environment	
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	COMPONENTS	Employ methods for collaborative/ participatory programme design to ensure locally sensitised programming	Employ mediated/digital modes of delivery to maximise reach
	ATTRIBUTES		Create conditions for flexibility in the face of unforeseen events
	GOVERNANCE	Engage OC state actors directly within project governance/ delivery	

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGE SET 3: POPULATION CHALLENGES

POPULATION CHALLENGES		
	Negative public awareness, beliefs, attitudes and understanding	Size and diversity of target audiences
	Distrust and poor understanding of CIs at the level of the general public was manifest for a number of case studies. Such beliefs and attitudes may take the form of, for example, perceptions of another country as racist towards their people, or of cultural relations programmes as motivated primarily by foreign national agendas as opposed to the genuine benefit of people in both countries.	The scale of the population and the range of interest groups represented in around the world warrant engagement activities that are large-scale and inclusive. Multiple case studies demonstrated how modes of delivery that blend face-to-face with mediated and online communication, as well as large-scale, well-resourced programmes that can cover a wide geographic area, can maximise the reach and engagement of programmes on a national scale.
ENABLING ACTIONS		
CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	Cultivate favourable Gov-Gov relations	
	Improve OC general public awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about HC	
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes	Identify and collaborate with OC partners capable of reaching and engaging target audience
	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for navigating operating environment	Identify and collaborate with HC partners capable of reaching and engaging target audience
	Invest in and leverage strong pre-existing CI-OC partner relations	
	Identify and collaborate with trusted and influential OC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	
	Identify and collaborate with trusted and influential HC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	COMPONENTS	Facilitate direct contact with members of public (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding
		Employ mediated/digital modes of delivery to maximise reach
		Conduct formative research to understand the causes of and conditions for addressing negative OC public attributes
		Conduct formative research to understand audience needs and optimal modes of engagement
	ATTRIBUTES	Leverage approaches designed to maximise reach and engagement (e.g. cascade models)
		Implement process M&E to monitor audience engagement and inform necessary adaptations
		Ensure programme is affordable to OC audiences
		Target and adapt programming to align with audience preferences
		Employ high cachet assets in the OC among the target audience
		Focus on programme areas that have a broad-based/diverse appeal in the OC
		Ensure programme delivers clear benefits to OC audiences
		Leverage large-scale programmes to maximise reach of programming
	GOVERNANCE	Target and adapt programming to align with audience preferences
		Focus on programme areas that have a broad-based/diverse appeal in the OC
GOVERNANCE	Employ local/regional project coordination/governance	

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGE SET 4: COMPETITION CHALLENGES

COMPETITION CHALLENGES	
Competition from other actors	
DESCRIPTION	<p>In all of the operating countries, but in particular China and Indonesia, there was evidence of intense competition at multiple levels. First, CIs including the British Council compete with international and domestic commercial and civil society organisations for the public's attention. Second, they also compete for the attention and business of Government ministries with responsibility for public contracts. Finally, potential and preferred local partners in the higher education, arts and culture, and civil society sectors, are in high demand by CIs and their competitors. Recent research conducted by ICR also found that overseas missions from the home country, such as the FCDO, are also among cultural relation organisations' main competitors, particularly when it comes to receiving additional public funding to deliver programmes.</p> <p>Case studies illustrate the imperative to anticipate and manage operating country partners' perceptions of CIs as a competitor, as this can result in problems for the cooperative action. They also illustrate the benefits of a more joined-up, cooperative approach between CI and Government departments, including local country FCDO missions. Finally, several case studies suggested the benefits of adopting a 'post-national' approach to cultural relations. This approach involves partnerships with other CIs and Governments of open, democratic countries, both in order to communicate a common position and commitment to core values in contexts where these are contested, and to distance programmes from accusations of a national agenda.</p>
ENABLING ACTIONS	
CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	Cultivate favourable Gov-Gov relations
	Improve OC general public awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge about HC
	Increase number / diversity of bilateral ties with OC
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes
	Invest in and leverage strong pre-existing CI-OC partner relations
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	COMPONENTS
	Conduct formative research to understand audience needs and optimal modes of engagement
	ATTRIBUTES
	Ensure programme is financially competitive compared to other options
	Employ high cachet assets in the OC among the target audience
	Ensure programme delivers clear benefits to OC audiences
	Target and adapt programming to align with audience preferences
	Focus on programme areas that have a broad-based/diverse appeal in the OC
	Design large-scale programmes to maximise offering competitiveness
GOVERNANCE	
	Assemble a broad-based alliance of influential partners to maximise offering competitiveness

PARTNERSHIP ECOLOGY CHALLENGE SET 1: HOME COUNTRY PARTNER CHALLENGES

HOME COUNTRY PARTNER CHALLENGES			
DESCRIPTION	Negative partner awareness, beliefs, attitudes and understanding	Limited local context/operating environment expertise	Poor partner integration
	Negative awareness, beliefs, attitudes and understanding about the operating country among home country partners can generate anxiety about international engagement and so limit the breadth and depth of cultural relations. Case illustrate how CIs can leverage their reputation and expertise to assuage concerns and broker wider and more coordinated forms of dialogue and cooperation between the home and target countries.	Countries that are geographically distant and with whom there has been relatively little historical engagement, may present unfamiliar operating environments for home country partners. This can be due to a number of factors, including differences in language, protocol, hierarchies, social norms and values, and unfamiliar styles of governance and interaction. Across a broad range of case studies and contexts, there is evidence to suggest the CI personnel's local expertise and understanding of the operating environment makes them ideal partners for overcoming these challenges.	In the more ambitious cultural relations activities, there is an imperative to liaise with a broad range of home country stakeholders, both in order to widen the reach and engagement of the programme in the operating country, and to increase the benefits of the programme for the home country. However, these stakeholders may present diverging interests and objectives, which must be met to ensure their engagement in the programme.
ENABLING ACTIONS			
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for managing and harmonising different objectives/ways of working
	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for assuaging concerns/prejudices	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for navigating operating environment	CI to cultivate interpersonal and institutional relations with trusted and influential HC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)
	CI to cultivate interpersonal and institutional relations with trusted and influential HC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	CI to cultivate interpersonal and institutional relations with trusted and influential HC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	COMPONENTS	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding	Conduct formative research to establish consensus between partners
	ATTRIBUTES	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding	Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure programming meets needs and capacity of all partners
	GOVERNANCE	Ensure programme delivers clear benefits to HC partners	Create conditions for working-level ownership of dialogue and cooperation
			Ensure clear and simplified decision-making hierarchy

PARTNERSHIP ECOLOGY CHALLENGE SET 2: OPERATING COUNTRY PARTNER CHALLENGES

OPERATING COUNTRY PARTNER CHALLENGES				
	Negative partner awareness, beliefs, attitudes and understanding	Limited technical expertise / capacity	Poor partner integration	
DESCRIPTION	There is evidence of operating country partners exhibiting negative attitudes or perceptions of the home country. These may be due to several factors, including negative past experiences of collaboration with the home country, as well as a broader set of cultural stereotypes about the home country.	In certain countries in certain contexts, operating country partners lack the expertise or the capacity to fulfil programme requirements. This was due to factors including pervasive underfunding, a lack of appropriate training, and/or limited infrastructure and facilities. In these cases, capacity-building and resource provision can serve as an essential facilitator of productive and effective dialogue and cooperation with operating country partners.	Within specific sectors in specific contexts, for example the cultural heritage sector in countries like Libya, there was evidence of a lack of alignment in the technical systems and methods used by operating country partners. This resulted in CIs having to develop programmes that help to standardise the modes of operating within the sector, while remaining sensitive to the disparities between partners in terms of resource and capacity.	
ENABLING ACTIONS				
CREATING AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	Leverage programme-specific public communications			
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS	Harness CI organisational reputation as a trustworthy and competent provider of beneficial programmes	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for overcoming technical/capacity barriers	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for managing and harmonising different objectives/ways of working	
	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency	CI to cultivate interpersonal and institutional relations with trusted and influential OC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)		
	CI to cultivate interpersonal and institutional relations with trusted and influential OC partners (inc. Gov, where appropriate)	Identify and collaborate with HC partners who can build/supply required capacities		
	Identify and collaborate with highly reputed OC partners to provide credibility to programme			
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	COMPONENTS	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding	Employ a space creation approach to enable partners to practice and develop their own programmes	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding
		Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure programming meets needs and capacity of all partners	Incorporate capacity-building elements into programming, to address limitations	Incorporate capacity-building elements into programming, to ensure parity between partners
			Provide financial support/grants to increase partner resources	
	ATTRIBUTES	Ensure programme delivers clear benefits to OC partners		
	GOVERNANCE			Create conditions for working-level ownership of dialogue and cooperation
			Ensure clear and simplified decision-making hierarchy	

PARTNERSHIP ECOLOGY CHALLENGE SET 3: HOME AND OPERATING COUNTRY PARTNER RELATIONS CHALLENGES

HC-OC PARTNER RELATIONS CHALLENGES				
	Poor mutual understanding	Assumed Values Misalignment	Absent/ Weak Preexisting Ties	Asymmetry (e.g. expertise/ capacity/resources)
DESCRIPTION	Negative opinions and a lack of familiarity exhibited by both parties in the bilateral relationship resulted in cases where home and operating country partners did not understand one another well prior to the engagement.	Negative opinions and a lack of familiarity exhibited by both parties also resulted in examples where both parties believed they lacked common values as a basis for cooperation.	This challenge was most salient in contexts where there is a history of comparatively minimal bilateral dialogue and cooperation. In the absence of pre-existing ties, CIs essentially acted as a bridge between home and operating country partners, thanks to their relationship with both sides.	Asymmetries exist between the scale, resources, experience and expertise of home and operating country partners. These asymmetries may owe to a variety of factors, including varying levels of human development across the two countries, or differences in the historical and contemporary levels of investment and infrastructure development for key sectors such as higher education and the arts.
ENABLING ACTIONS				
OPTIMISING PARTNERSHIPS	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for facilitating process of mutual understanding	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for facilitating discussion of values and identifying common ground	CI-OC partner relations - CI acts as a bridge between OC and HC partners	Ensure, cultivate and leverage CI in-country personnel competency for facilitating new partnerships
	Communicate and leverage shared sectoral/professional values as basis for building understanding		CI-HC partner relations - CI acts as a bridge between OC and HC partners	CI-OC partner relations - CI acts as a broker of fair and equitable HC-OC partnerships
			Communicate and leverage shared sectoral/professional values as basis for building ties	CI-HC partner relations - CI acts as a broker of fair and equitable HC-OC partnerships
				Communicate and leverage shared sectoral/professional values as basis for navigating asymmetry
DESIGNING PROGRAMMES	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding	Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure programming meets needs and capacity of all partners	Facilitate direct contact with/between partners (e.g. following the CR approach) to improve trust and understanding
	Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure programming meets needs and capacity of all partners	Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure programming meets needs and capacity of all partners		Incorporate capacity-building elements into programming, to ensure parity between partners
				Employ methods for collaborative/participatory programme design to ensure programming meets needs and capacity of all partners
		Focus on programme areas that have a broad-based/diverse appeal for both HC and OC partners		Provide financial support/grants to increase partner resources
ATTRIBUTES				
GOVERNANCE	Create conditions for working-level ownership of dialogue and cooperation	Create conditions for working-level ownership of dialogue and cooperation	Create conditions for working-level ownership of dialogue and cooperation	Create conditions for working-level ownership of dialogue and cooperation

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the international order becomes increasingly fragmented and competition between states over interests, norms and values intensifies, the goal of cultural relations to build intercultural trust and understanding acquires an even greater sense of urgency. By harnessing the competency of their teams; their organisational reputation; relationships with partners; and approaches to developing and delivering culture- and education-based programmes, cultural institutes like the British Council, Goethe Institut, Institut Français, and the US Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs are well positioned to facilitate dialogue and cooperation with and between a wide range of types of actors, including Governments, institutions, organisations and professional communities, and citizens. However, to do so effectively, it is important for CIs to learn from one another, to build an understanding of what works in which contexts, and to establish positive working partnerships with stakeholders in their activities, including policymakers.

To this end, this report provides a number of considerations for CIs to optimise their ability to establish, maintain and cultivate dialogue and cooperation. These considerations are addressed to two audiences: cultural relations practitioners and policymakers.

To cultural relations practitioners:

- Ensure and nurture, for example through recruitment, training and tenure, core competencies among its leadership and personnel, in areas including local language proficiency, local and sector-specific knowledge and expertise, technical know-how in developing and delivering cultural relations programmes, and interpersonal skills
- Ground programmes in a thorough, evidence- and expertise-based understanding of the context, needs and priorities of the target audience and operating environment
- Cultivate a reputation that prompts potential partners both at home and abroad to recognise the organisation as an enabler of their own strategic objectives, for example by building a strong track record for excellence and innovation in its programming
- Continuously demonstrate commitment to the professional and sector-specific values defining the international arts, education, and civil society sectors
- Invest in long-term relationship-building with partners both at home and abroad, within Government and across key sectors including the arts, education, and civil society
- Build these relationships using a cultural relations approach that emphasises successive engagements, the cultivation of trust and mutual understanding and mutual benefits
- Continue to focus on and innovate methods for delivering programmes that facilitate direct contact and collaboration between people from different countries

To policymakers:

- Enable CIs to remain in place over the long term, so that they can continue to cultivate the competencies, reputation, and relationships necessary for them to facilitate positive international dialogue and cooperation
- Distance cultural relations from politics, to reduce the risk that flashpoints in the broader bilateral relationship will compromise the mission of cultural relations to build transnational trust and understanding between people
- Avoid and counter simplistic, reductionist narratives of and about operating countries and their citizens, both to limit the risk of flashpoints, and to reduce anxieties among partners about engaging with one another in dialogue and cooperation
- Facilitate coordinated action between CIs and other home country stakeholders, including Government departments and the private sector, to increase the scale, resources, and attractiveness of programmes
- Identify and cultivate areas of shared strategic interest with operating country governments, in order to create a more enabling environment for CIs to engage in dialogue and cooperation
- Leverage international conventions, for example UNESCO conventions on protecting cultural heritage, to establish the legitimacy of culture- and education-based dialogue and cooperation with operating countries, both at home and abroad

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