

New Narratives Pilot Programme Report

FUNDED BY BRITISH COUNCIL

Delivered by CcHub and Beatfrees

1st May 2021



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I Partners

British Council

The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

We work in two ways – directly with individuals to transform their lives, and with governments and partners to make a bigger difference for the longer term, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world.

We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

We connect the best of the UK with the world and the best of the world with the UK. These connections lead to an understanding of each other's strengths and of the challenges and values that we share. This builds trust between people in the UK and other nations which endures even when official relations may be strained.

We work on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2019-20 we connected with 80 million people directly and with 791 million overall, including online and through our broadcasts and publications.

Beatfrees

Beatfrees is an engagement and insight agency - fuelling conversations and concepts that dare people to challenge the way of the world. We connect our vital community of young creatives to brands, government and funders so they can influence how the world works.

Ultimately, we exist to serve young people. We want to ensure young underrepresented, underestimated, underserved voices influence the way stuff gets done. To do this, we work with those who have the power, the platforms, the resources who can listen to them, give them space and make their voice valuable.

CcHub

Co-Creation Hub (CcHub) is the largest innovation hub in Africa. In 2010, we started out as Nigeria's premier innovation centre dedicated to accelerating the application of social capital and technology for economic prosperity in Nigeria. We have since grown our physical presence to five cities (Lagos, Abuja, Ijebu-Ode, Kigali and Nairobi) across Africa and we play an active role in the engagement of citizens, civil society, civil servants, researchers and development practitioners to identify and nurture novel solutions to social challenges in Africa.

We have forged sustainable partnerships with key stakeholders across numerous sectors including and collaborated successfully with government & global partners to build the startup ecosystems in Nigeria, Kenya and Rwanda thus directly affecting millions of lives. Consequently, we have a reputable network of national, regional and international partners. In addition, we have supported hundreds of young entrepreneurs and have built a reputation for being pioneers of social change on the continent.

I Introduction

The New Narratives programme aimed to help contribute to changing reciprocal perceptions between the UK and Africa in order to stimulate new understanding which will unlock new connections and collaborations for mutual benefit.

The programme worked across British Council's business areas including arts and creative industries, education, civil society and social inclusion; and included both online and offline activities to present new ways for young people across Africa and the UK to see each other.

Academics, artists, activists, creatives, influencers and other digitally savvy young professionals from across Africa and the UK were convened to 'hack' the problem of singular, outdated narratives between Africa and the UK and prototype solutions that help stimulate more plural and diverse narratives across both locations. The expected outcomes were:



New connections
between young people
in the UK and Africa



Greater collaboration
between young people
in Africa and the UK



New knowledge
shared between young
people in the UK and Africa



New reciprocal insight
and understanding between
and about both locations



New and diverse
content about Africa
and the UK

This document entails a comprehensive report of the entire programme, the activities that took place, outputs and challenges and the extent to which the programme outcomes have been achieved as well as recommendations for future programmes.

Overview

Overall, the feedback gained from the pilot programme was overwhelmingly positive, both related to the programme principles and the experience of the young people on the programme.



British Council, Beatfreeks and CcHub successfully delivered four stages of the New Narratives Programme: the pre-residential, the Kigali lab, the mid-residential and the Digital lab. Partners were agile and adjusted the programme following a global pandemic.

40 young people from across Africa and the UK were recruited by British Council, **39 took part** in the Kigali lab, **30 participants** took part in the digital lab to varying levels and **23 young people** completed the full programme.



This resulted in the creation of five co-created solutions to the dominant narratives portrayed of and between Africa and the UK.

Participants rated delivery partners' support and help to plan and reiterate their ideas an average of 8/10.



100%

of participants said that the programme had improved their knowledge about the dominant narratives, messages and themes depicted across Africa and the UK.

100% of participants agreed that New Narratives provided them with opportunities for greater collaboration with young people across Africa and the UK, with 83% strongly agreeing.



92%

of participants felt like they had made connections with young people across Africa and the UK.

83% of participants said that they had experienced reciprocal insight and understanding between and about both locations. The remaining 17% said that they had 'some understanding' all participants left the programme with a good to strong level of understanding.



83%

felt strongly that they would share and apply what they have learnt about the dominant narratives depicted in the UK and Africa, beyond the New Narratives programme.

I What We Delivered - Pre-Residential:

Monday 3rd February, 2020 - Sunday 16th February, 2020

The pre-residential led the following outputs:

6

pre-residential virtual meetings

40

participants from Africa and the UK engaged ahead of the Kigali residential

The aim was to introduce the delivery partners and participants to each other through short, informal discussion and activity related to narratives in order to ease nervousness, improve relationships and speed up the process of work.

The pre-residential were virtual sessions held to connect the participants with each other, the British Council team responsible for the project and the partners. It was also an opportunity to get a deeper understanding of the New Narratives programme, including the themes and objectives.

The sessions were held via Zoom. During these sessions, the tone for the residentials was set and involved a get-to-know-you icebreaker where everyone was asked to bring an object or share an image that tells a story about them and/or where they were from and to watch and reflect on the 'Danger of Single Story' TedTalk from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Grouping for these sessions were set to bring together participants from across the different regions and with different interests and backgrounds.

Following these initial sessions, the delivery partners created a Whatsapp group for the whole cohort. This group was used through the programme timeframe and individual group Whatsapp group chats were also set up in parallel. As a result, participants began to build connections with each other.

Kigali Residential

Monday 17th February, 2020 - Sunday 23rd February, 2020



39 young people from both the UK and Africa connected, shared knowledge and deepened their understanding of each location, especially of Africa

Young people from both the UK and Africa collaborated and co-created six ideas that aim to disseminate new narratives of Africa and the UK



10,071,498

individuals were reached through online engagement of #NewNarratives2020

3 immersive visits to help explore and challenge existing understanding and narratives of Africa

03

150

young people attended a public pitch event to help validate the six ideas

The first residential was held in Kigali, Rwanda for a week. The aim was to use the Human Centered Design (HCD) methodology to invite participants to develop user-centered ideas and solutions to change the narrative between Africa and the UK. This residential was led by CcHub led, supported by BeatFreaks.

Monday:

The first day was focused on setting the expectation for the week and ensuring there was a shared understanding of what was to come from the week ahead. An essential part of that was also having participants agree to creating a safe space to share their ideas and opinions in keeping with the mindset of HCD.

There were introductory sessions by British Council on the New Narratives programme, and on the research and

findings that had been done by M&C Saatchi on what the narratives about both locations was at that time.

Following the introductory sessions, the participants were introduced to the mindsets of HCD which were important to creating the solutions that will help change the narrative between the UK and Africa, and in building new perspectives that can deepen the understanding of the narratives and inspire the creation of new ideas. The rest of the first day focused on creative methods to conduct design research to help achieve that.

Tuesday:

In order to continue building new perspectives and to inspire the participants in having a creative and productive co-creation session, the second day of the residential was for immersion sessions where the participants had the opportunity to visit some selected local organisations. The participants were taken to see Zipline Rwanda, a company using drone technology to deliver medical products, including blood, to hospitals in more rural areas of Rwanda, AC Group Rwanda to learn more about Tap&Go, a tailor-made, smart transport payment solution and Inema Arts Center, an art gallery championing contemporary art from across the African continent.

Wednesday:

Following sessions on research and immersion sessions in different local organisations, it was time to develop solutions to challenges identified based on insights the participants had gained from research findings, visits and their own broader experience.

The activities of the third day focused on framing the design challenge, taking the context into account and allowing for a variety of solutions. The participants were officially split into groups based on their areas of interest and/or focus and spent the majority of the day in their groups co-creating various solutions which they presented to the general group, after which a consensus was reached on which ideas were to be taken further.

Thursday:

With the ideas to be taken further finally agreed upon, the next phase was the context-based development of these ideas through rapid prototyping. The participants had a guided prototyping session where each group was supported in using tools to bring their ideas to life. Participants spent the day building prototypes of their ideas in preparation for pitching them to the general public for their feedback.

Friday:

A public pitch event was held where the participants shared their prototypes and their learnings so far with a wider group of up about 150 young people. This was an opportunity for them to test their ideas and get feedback from end users to help them improve their solutions.

The feedback was generally positive, and the teams were able to get detailed feedback from the guests on ways to make their ideas stronger and sustainable.



I Mid-Residential

Monday 2nd March, 2020 - Sunday 22nd March, 2020

In line with expectations, the mid-residential led the following outputs:



More than 30 relevant Birmingham/UK-based stakeholders were identified ahead of the second residential for stakeholder meetings, pitch sessions and focus group discussions

6 virtual sessions held with teams on building the Business Model Canvas for their idea



1 follow- up session with each group to help them progress their ideas.

The groups were encouraged to keep refining their ideas and further build them into more tangible solutions. CcHub held virtual sessions via Zoom to prepare participants for the second residential that was to be held in the UK. During these sessions, the groups were supported in continuing to improve on their solutions, and in developing a business case using the business model canvas tool. In addition, participants were encouraged to begin considering the stakeholders they would need to engage with during the residential in the UK. At the same time, Beatfreeks was continuing to plan the Birmingham lab, reaching out to stakeholders to set-up meetings and workshops.

Digital Lab

Thursday 8th October, 2020 - Wednesday 31st March, 2021

In line with expected outcomes, the digital lab led to the following outputs:



32 young people from across Africa and the UK connected, shared knowledge and deepened their understanding of each other during a five month digital co-creation lab

23 young people from across Africa and the UK completed the programme from start to finish

23

46

sessions (a total of 35 hours) were delivered as part of the digital lab, including knowledge, skills and stakeholder engagements.

Another 20 stakeholders (in addition to the 30 leads from the physical Birmingham Lab planning) were identified for stakeholder sessions



05

ideas that aim to disseminate new narratives of Africa and the UK were validated and iterated, using Human Centred Design as a mechanism

11 stakeholders engaged to support five groups bring their ideas to life, this ranged from one off stakeholder meetings to mentoring relationships.



21,550 reached through content generated by each group to share their plans using #NewNarratives2021

05

groups submitted an application to British Council

4 groups pitched to senior members of British Council staff

04

The purpose of the digital lab was to continue to support the groups through the Human Centred Design process, by introducing them to stakeholders of interest and providing opportunities for them to gain feedback, validate and iterate their ideas. This was originally planned to take place between the 17th February - 21st February 2020, and would have brought the 39 participants from across Africa and the UK together for a week-long exploration in Birmingham. In the weeks leading up to the residential, the spread of COVID-19 was increasing and a swift decision from delivery partners was made to postpone the residential in order to ensure the safety of participants.

A 6-month period of inactivity followed whilst partners and participants dealt with the impact that COVID-19 had on the world. In this time, some virtual meetings led by British Council were held with participants and bursaries were provided so they could continue to collaborate where possible. After this, Beatfreeks began consulting with participants to assess their needs, and we began developing the digital lab.

The re-imagined programme consisted of online programming that took place over a five-month period and was constructed taking into consideration, the new online context and the feedback provided from participants through a survey. Throughout, partners remained agile to support the needs of the participants during unprecedented times. Beatfreeks led the digital lab, supported by CcHub.

Below is the breakdown of activities for the digital lab:

Welcome Session

A whole cohort session to give everyone a chance to reconnect with each other and to (re-)familiarise everyone with the programme principles and the new programme format.

Narratives Development Session

This was a discussion based workshop around the idea of narratives with colleagues from the National Lottery Heritage funded-programme, Don't Settle. Participants explored the narratives of Africa and the UK in relation to bias with young people of colour from the UK.

Tailored Group Consultation

Each group had an individually tailored meeting with delivery partners to discuss their motivations, their challenges and the type of support they may need in order to continue iterating on their project idea.

Skills Session: Teamwork

This session happened with the whole cohort and was a chance to explore how they might best work together digitally, including some useful insights, tips and tools.

Knowledge and Inspiration Sessions

Each group was introduced to up to three stakeholders of interest to connect with, learn and gain feedback from experts in their chosen field.

Mentoring

As part of the programme, each group had the opportunity to connect with a mentor who would support them and their project's idea for a period of up to six months. Three out of five groups were matched to mentors.

Digital Content Creation Sessions

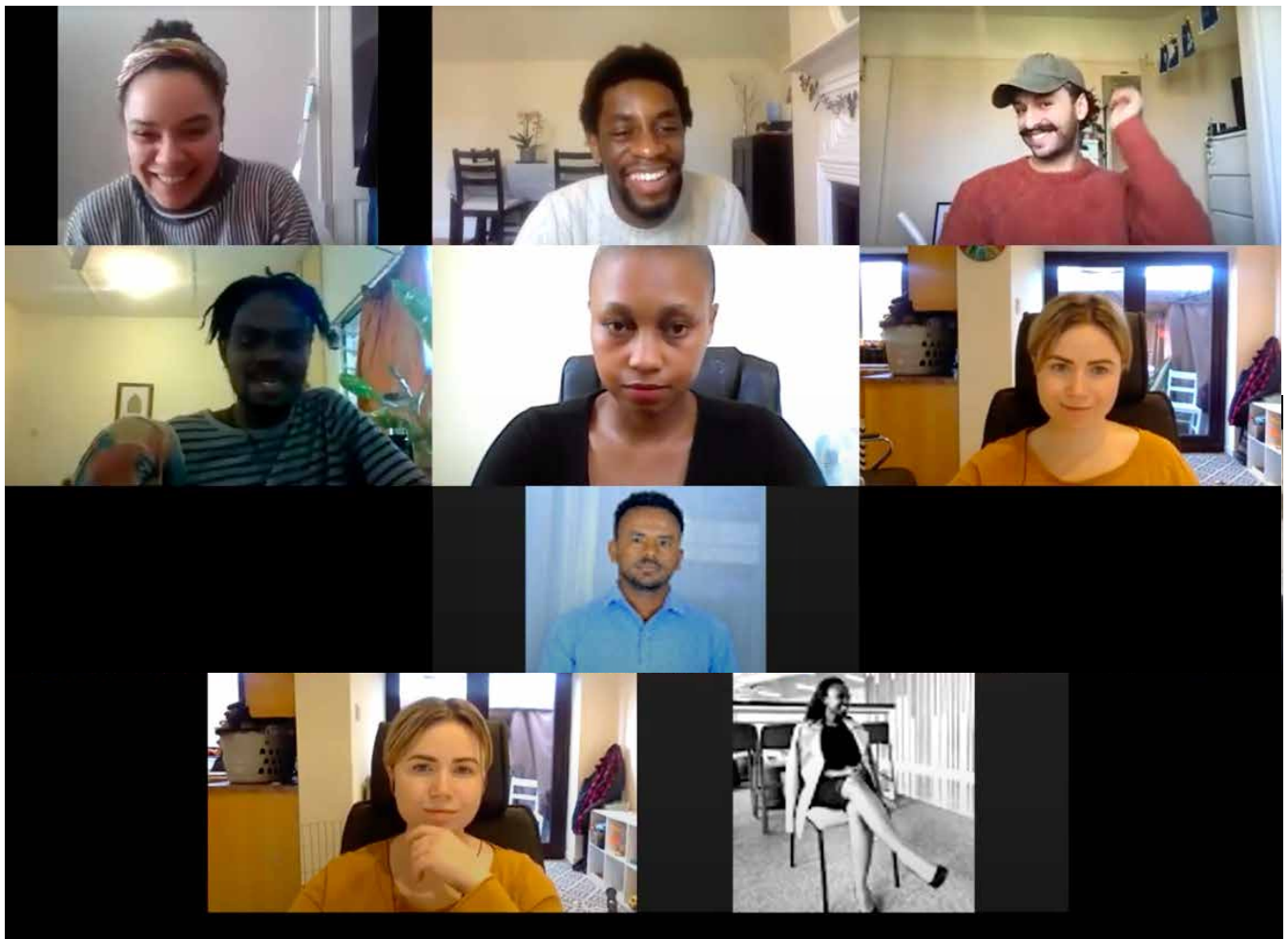
With various delays putting pressure on the programme and its participants, delivery partners agreed that the planned online campaign would better serve participants if it was used as an opportunity for groups to gain further understanding of their end users. These sessions helped groups to think through key strategic communications questions in order to generate digital content to help them spread the message of their project idea. Three out of five groups successfully developed and shared content through their own social media channels, including one group running a webinar. Beatfreaks also offered paid ad support and also created content using highlights from the M&C Saatchi report.

Skills Session: Pitching

There was an initial session with the whole cohort to explore what they'd need for their project pitch, and generally what makes a strong pitch. This session was followed up with tailored one-to-one sessions with each group, which were a chance for them to gain feedback and further tips.

Pitching Session

As part of their application process, participants were to be invited to a pitch event with senior members of the British Council, where they could further expand on their projects feasibility. In the lead up to this, we held practice pitch sessions with each group to support their readiness for this.



I How We Collected The Evaluation Data

The New Narratives programme sought to convene academics, artists, activists, creatives, influencers and other digitally savvy young professionals from across Africa and the UK to 'hack' the problem of singular, outdated narratives between Africa and the UK and prototype solutions that help stimulate more plural and diverse narratives across both locations.

The aim was to achieve the following five outcomes:



New connections
between young people
in the UK and Africa



Greater collaboration
between young people
in Africa and the UK



New knowledge
shared between young
people in the UK and Africa



New reciprocal insight
and understanding between
and about both locations



New and diverse
content about Africa
and the UK

Beatfreeks and CcHub collected data from participants throughout the programme to gain feedback on the outcomes above, through the following methods:



An online survey which
was distributed to participants
at the start, in the middle and
at the end of this stage
of the programme



A virtual evaluation session with a
focus group of participants at the end
of this stage of the programme, hosted
by an external consultant



Ongoing informal verbal and
written feedback collected
throughout the duration of
the programme

The data collected is weighted towards retained participants and therefore there will likely be some bias towards those who were more actively engaged in the programme. Where possible, Beatfreeks and CcHub liaised with British Council to ensure participants who withdrew from the programme had the opportunity to feedback through written or verbal communication and this was often communicated and documented at the time of their withdrawal.

I Programme Principle Outcomes

New connections between young people in the UK and Africa

We periodically surveyed participants and asked them how connected they felt to young people in African and the UK, the findings suggest that the programme helped young people from Africa and the UK to feel more connected.

- Participants who felt they had connections (some connections, quite a few connections or lots of connections) to the respective other countries rose from 47% at the start of the programme to 92% by the end
- Participants who felt they had 'no connections' or only felt 'a bit connected' to the respective other countries reduced from 53% at the start of the programme to 8% by the end.

"I really enjoyed working with my team, and we have maintained positive communication"

"After the residency in Kigali, I was able to facilitate collaborations between local Sudanese artists and participants who were promoting the art scene in Africa through their platforms"

"We created connections beyond the programme. People to people connection is a very good one"



Devina Iobine @devina_iobine · Mar 25, 2020

Meet my friend Rhys [#NewNarratives2020](#)



Co-Creation Hub @Cc_HUB · Mar 24, 2020

Meet the [#NewNarratives2020](#) participant - @BuglerRhys

Rhys is a Film & Theatre graduate with a keen interest in dramaturgy and producing.

His practice is centred around the importance of culture & heritage.

[Show this thread](#)



1



4



13



Greater collaboration between young people in Africa and the UK

We periodically surveyed participants and asked them to rate how much New Narratives provided greater opportunities for collaboration between themselves and other people from different countries. The responses suggest that the programme increased collaboration between young people in Africa and the UK.

- At the mid point of the project, 94% of participants felt that the project had positively impacted the number of opportunities to collaborate in some way.



"I liked how you kept the environment very friendly and welcoming, it encouraged participation and collaboration. The outlines of the different online sessions were also great as they were centered around the participants' group work and collaboration"

"You ensured that each group consisted of participants from different countries and also created opportunities for social connections and fun, outside of the normal programming"

"I appreciate the collaboration I got from my peer colleagues on the programme, collaborations with other BC programme participants across the continent and in the UK"

"The fact that we got the chance to work in groups was a great way to make the members network more with each other"

| New knowledge shared between young people in the UK and Africa

At the end of the programme we asked participants to answer yes or no, to whether the programme improved their knowledge about the dominant narratives, messages and themes depicted across Africa and the UK. The feedback suggests that the programme was an enriching experience, providing more knowledge sharing between Africa and the UK.

- At the end of the programme, 100% of participants said that the programme had improved their knowledge about the dominant narratives, messages and themes depicted across Africa and the UK.

"The programme helped me dig deeper into the research on how narratives influence UK-Africa relationship and to come up with solutions to problems around incomplete and outdated narratives"

"I had to do lots of learning and unlearning during the program regarding the narratives between Africa and the UK. Unbeknownst to me, I believed in narratives that were not true due to the news or social media content I'm exposed to. The great thing about the program is that it brought African & British people together to start the discussion. Learning about the narratives was not only theoretical but we had to go through the experience which contributed a lot to our learning process; the knowledge was not passively handed to us, we were actively included in the process of acquiring that knowledge"

"The way a country or continent sells its image across borders will determine a lot for its development or regression. I would say that, for example, the African continent is treated in an "old-fashioned" way because that is how people think Africa is. However, a strategy to improve Africa's image would significantly strengthen the continent's progress on different fronts - this is the main takeaway for me"

"Through the new narratives program, I actually did intensive search on innovation happening in Africa and the UK and I was very surprised to see Africans are very innovative with less resources they have"

The programme "connected me to information and people from the UK to better understand more about the UK... yes it is the end of the programme for some participants, however, please continue with the network ie dont delete our whatsapp group"

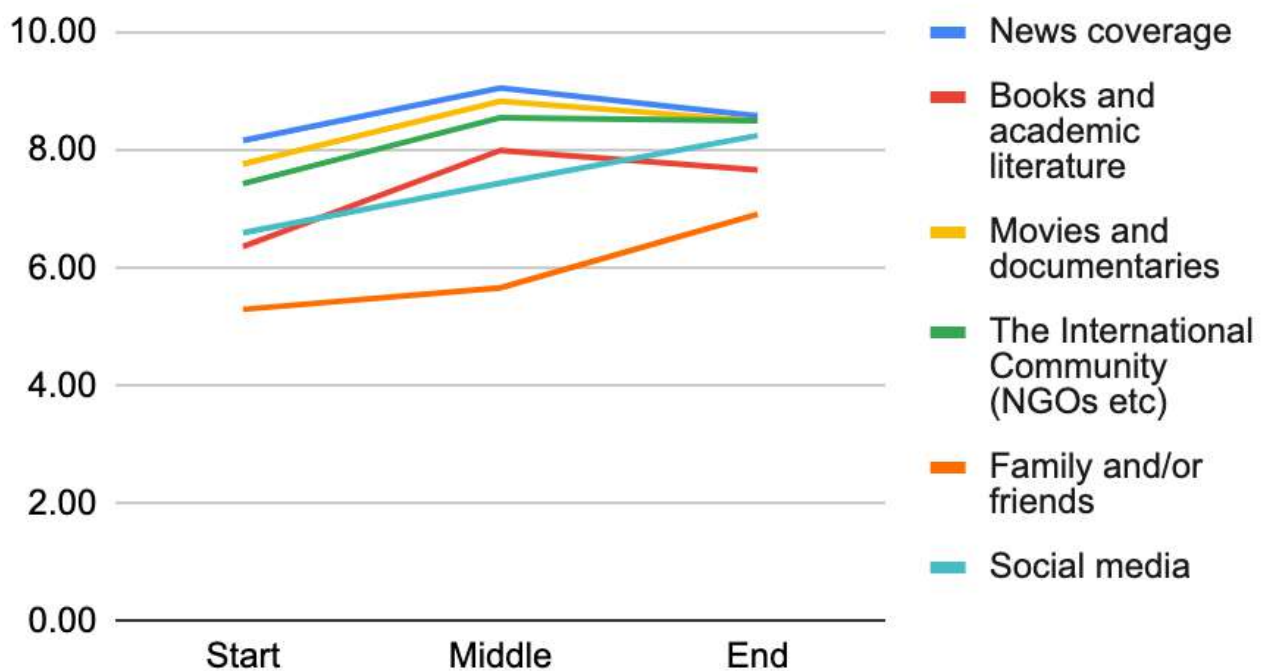
| New reciprocal insight and understanding between and about both locations

Throughout the programme we asked participants to rate their understanding of the relationship between the UK and Africa. The feedback suggests that the programme was an valuable experience that improved the reciprocal insight and understanding between and about both locations.

- At the start of the programme, 20% of participants said that they had a strong understanding of the relationship between the UK and Africa - selecting either 'Quite a lot of understanding' or 'Strong Understanding'. By the middle of the programme, some improvement was seen, with 62% feeling like this. At the end of the programme, nearly all participants (83%) said that they had a strong knowledge. With the remaining 17% saying that they had 'some understanding' all participants left the programme with a good to strong level of understanding.

We asked participants to rate from 0 - 10 (0 being not at all, 10 being the most) how much influence a certain outlet or group had over the dominant narratives around the UK and Africa. When comparing the averages of how people answered at the start and then at the end of the programme, we saw an increase in all cases. In short, as the programme went on, the participants learnt about the extent to which these groups control narratives.

Influence over the dominant narratives



the programme.

| New and diverse content about Africa and the UK

The programme has been effective in disseminating new and diverse content about Africa and the UK. We tracked this in a number of ways throughout the programme; the creation and the development of the participants proposed solutions, through social media engagement with the programme and by asking participants how much they intend to share, or act upon, what they have learnt beyond their project ideas.

Participants shared online content across the programme, especially during the Kigali lab. Groups were encouraged to develop digital content ahead of their practice pitch session to help validate their idea with end users they could not otherwise reach. A brief summary of some of the content groups created themselves is noted below:

- **Azombwe (Youth activism/Education):** Had planned to design and share a survey to better understand the target audience (s). Individual group members shared call-outs through their social media channels in early March 2021 to elicit further connections with stakeholders. They created a 30-second video ahead of the pitch. Connected with British Council's Connecting Classroom colleagues and the Black Curriculum.
- **Eureka (Technology/Use of tech to share innovation stories):** The group created two Instagram posts to sense check end users' interest. Connected with a freelancer working in the space of technology and gaming.
- **No Label (Gender/Portrayal of gender in the media):** Created a short video explaining their idea during the Kigali lab. Liaised directly with end users in respective countries to gain greater understanding of the issue (particularly in Sudanese context) and created a 30 second video ahead of pitch. Connected with Beatfreeks' colleagues working on Be Internet Citizens.
- **Mav-Rix (Youth culture/Narratives in advertising):** Individuals within the group had liaised with various potential end users and done research in their own contexts. Launched social media platforms ahead of final pitch and submission of grant application and hosted a webinar focused on tourism in the Sudan and South Sudan context to test proof of concept. Connected with Caleb Femi (UK-based artist and creative), Story Comms (PR agency) and Africa No Filter.
- **Legacy (Decolonisation/Role of history and heritage in relation to narratives):** Reached out through own networks to inform the development of the idea. Connected with Prof. Corinne Fowler (University of Leicester, Lead on National Trust's Colonial Countryside project) and JC Niala (Acting Keeper of Anthropology and African Collections Researcher at the Horniman Museum).

We asked participants how they intended to apply what they had learned in the future? (1 not at all, 10 in every way). 83% felt strongly (answering 7/10 or above) about sharing and applying what they have learned about the dominant narratives, messages and themes depicted in the UK and Africa.

We went further and asked participants how, or in what spaces, they might do this. The answers were quite enriching.



"In my young people network, and entrepreneur's network, I have already started enlightening people about how the UK is a great place to start and incorporate tech startups"

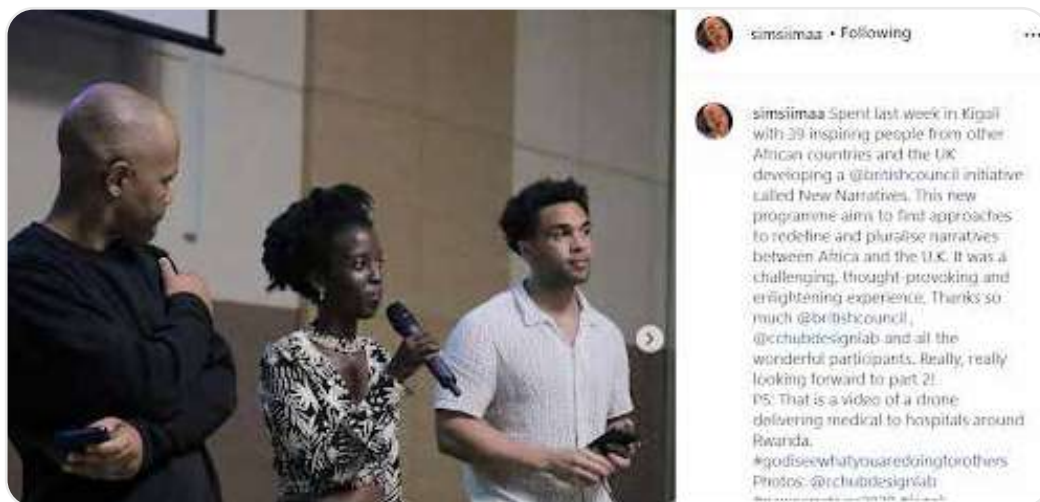
"I'm currently working on a project that helps change the narrative of remote cities in Sudan and Tunisia"

"Inspired by the learning I had during the New Narratives Programme, I created a platform called YOUTH REFERENCE HUB. The number one objective of this is to deconstruct the idea that in Africa there are no good references. Another objective is to train young Africans, mainly from rural areas, to be equipped with essential tools to face the challenges of the future."

"Carrying on with the research we've been doing is what I really would like to do. I got closer to the educational field and being an academic myself I am willing to share at least what I learned with local organisations to help out in creating a deeper understanding of the narratives between Africa and the UK. Since the beginning of the program I have been actively trying to unlearn what I thought I knew and share the process with my surroundings so that's definitely something I would carry on doing"

Between the start of the Kigali residential until mid-summer 2020, content shared under the #NewNarratives2020 hashtag has reached more than 1.3 million across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook from over 800 posts. This peaked during the week in Kigali when the cohort were sharing daily updates of their immersive experience in a new city.

The most popular posts were shared on Instagram by two participants. They exemplify much of the content shared during this period where participants highlighted and reflected on the immersive experience they had in Kigali.

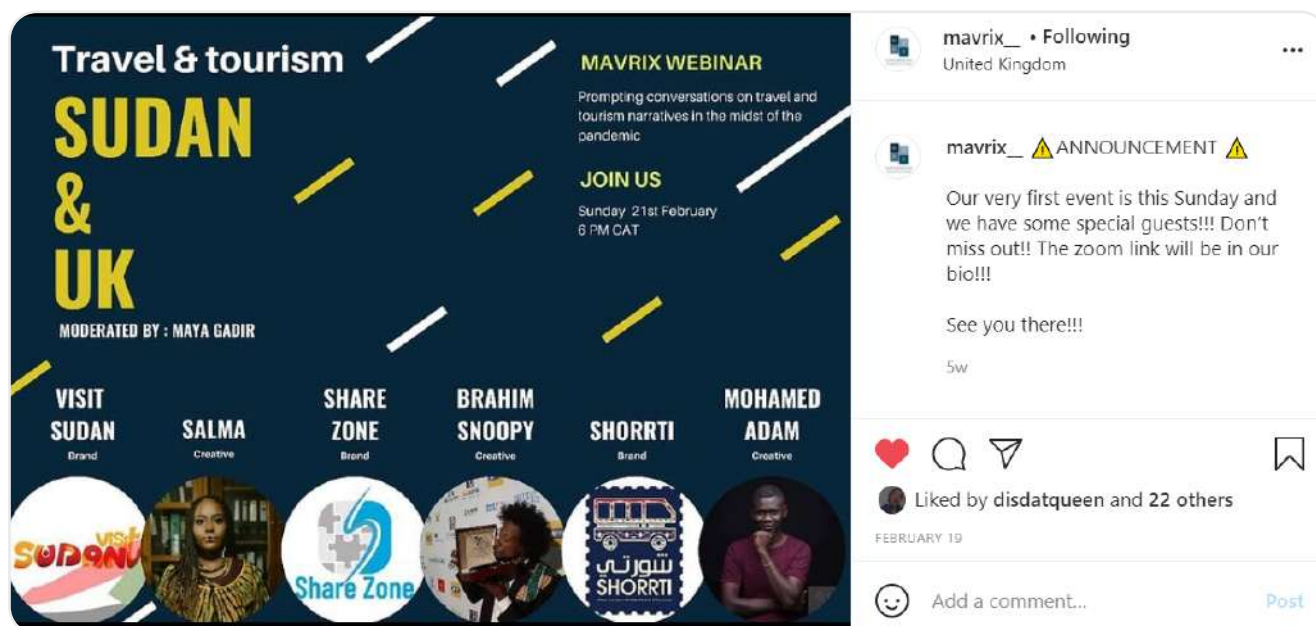


Between 20th February and late March 2021, content shared under the #NewNarratives2021 hashtag had reached more than 21,000 across social media channels, largely Instagram, from approximately 20 individual posts. This peaked during the final week of February, which had been the end of the original timeframe for this activity given to participants.

The most popular post during this period came from a Twitter call-out from Team Azombwe, who were exploring more potential partners.



Other groups curated a panel discussion, focused on one of the countries they represent, to test one element of their idea ahead of the pitch.



I Feedback on Programme Delivery

This section highlights key findings from the 2-hour virtual focus group discussion, conducted by an external facilitator, commissioned by Beatfreeks, to understand the reflections of participants. This session provided the opportunity for participants to reflect and provide constructive, and impartial, feedback on their experiences. Dr Joyti Panesar, the independent researcher commented that the feedback suggested that the programme had been an extremely enriching experience which had promoted new opportunities for participants. (See Appendix)

Appreciation for continuous and committed pastoral support from partners but this could be strengthened

During the evaluation session, participants highlighted their appreciation for the pastoral support they received throughout the programme and encouraged British Council to continue to work alongside youth centred delivery partners.

“Your availability at all times, the attention you pay to all our requests, your contribution to our ideas, your motivation to provide us with the best mentors/partners/opportunities”

“Getting organisations like Beatfreeks and CC hub on board was a great idea, I think going forward finding organisations who are already there working with young people with lots of experience to develop facilitated programmes for young people.”

“Without them there may have been some difficulty, they are the best facilitators of online sessions that I have ever seen”

Several noted how it helped them and their groups to stay motivated and continue pushing, however some feedback suggested that more individual support may also be helpful:

“Checking in groups is one thing, but checking on people and their mindset. It is very important to find out what is happening in all areas not just on a group level”

The majority of person-centred support from partners arose when an issue of low engagement was flagged up and so the support could also include a more intentional person-centred approach to support for active and engaged participants in the future, and could help to mitigate retention and engagement rates

Recommendations

- Allocate more resources to project management and support to ensure participants feel supported and have a clear mechanism to reach out if they have questions or issues they wish to discuss which they don't want to raise in other settings. This should be considered a priority if labs are to continue in a digital format. Although one-to-one support was made available to groups, there wasn't a formal process for participants to book this in regularly. These one-to-one sessions may focus on personal and professional development.
- Continue working with youth-focused delivery partners and learn from good practice on engaging with young people

Partner support to participants in helping them to achieve their aims was good, but should be sharpened.

After both the Kigali and digital lab's we issued surveys, in which we asked participants to rate how well they felt delivery partners supported them to build, develop and iterate their project ideas. After each survey participants rated an average of 8/10 (1 being not at all and 10 being in every way). Overall, this is a very high and consistent rating following both labs.

Feedback suggests more task-specific support would have been useful.



"The group consultations should continue. Keeps the team on their toes"

"The group feedback and consultation sessions made it a lot easier to get clarity on some issues that were unclear"

"The first part of Kigali was spent looking at stats instead of getting to know one another and deepening the conversations around narratives. The data shared was ineffective if people were still asking questions such as; "Do women in the UK work?"

"From a Beatfreeks and CC hub perspective a little more work needs to be done in terms of the quality of support, if I could give an example of the financial excel template. There was so much information which they could have assisted with".

Recommendations

- Incorporate practical application of the HCD process into a format that participants can work with from the outset. Some groups were more proactive than others in making progress and a workbook, for example, would complement sessions with delivery partners, reinforcing next steps and encouraging them to move forward at their own pace.
- Give more time to introductory and familiarisation activities with other participants to provide a firm basis for them to build connection and to provide spaces for discussion and engagement in narratives. Give more time to sensitising participants to available research and data and for collecting and analysing this themselves. This would help to ensure that the groups' problem statements are clear and focused, strengthen their confidence in their idea and ensure that the solution they develop has a higher chance of success - meeting the needs of end users and being exactly what British Council are interested in investing in.
- Establish regular check-ins with groups to ensure they are on track and able to develop more robust project ideas in line with programme principles. Delivery partners had an open door policy encouraging groups to get in touch outside of set sessions and activities as needed. However, monthly sessions from the outset may have provided greater structure and enabled partners to give or source additional support where gaps were clear.
- Introduce the grant application and pitch practice template earlier in the process, to help frame what groups are working towards.

Participants enjoyed the opportunities for collaboration and connection, but would have liked more formal opportunities for this outside of the group work

100% of participants felt like New Narratives provided them with opportunities for greater collaboration with young people across Africa and the UK and 92% felt like they had made connections with young people across Africa and the UK.

"After the first lab, I could say that creating the connection between people from across the UK and Africa was a success, the cohort got along together smoothly which is a proof that the selection process was well studied, and it made it easier to transmit the Narratives and it created a safe environment for discussions, as for the projects we are working on, despite the fact that personally I am working on something new to me, but within my team I can say that we've been making considerable progress and we're all learning in the process about different narrative"

"Spending time with other participants in the hotel, outside of the planned activity was enjoyable, the visits in and around Rwanda were enjoyable. Meeting new people was a highlight"

"I like that we had the evening sessions where we were connected"

There was also an echo of comments that suggest that more time to get to know one another would have been valued, especially before being settled into groups.

"We still need more platforms to get to know each other and to develop trust"

"Collaboration could have been strengthened by having more space at the residential to learn about everyone's interests, expertise and skills, so that we could group ourselves accordingly to work on projects that we could realistically sustain"

"The groups were formed way too quickly, it was not very diplomatic, leading to long lasting issues"

"The only flaw was that when we first were assigned to groups, the classification that happened was very quick and not well studied. In the Kigali lab I remember answering some questions that made us get classified into groups, not taking into consideration how each and everyone was able to contribute to the projects that were developed right after"

Recommendations

- Continue with informal opportunities to connect outside of planned, group/solution-focused activities, either through optional evening activities as for the Kigali lab if a physical lab, or the narratives discussion session set-up with NHLF-funded Don't Settle team for the digital lab.
- Allocate more time for participants to get to know each other through icebreakers and facilitated conversations during the pre-residential and first week of delivery, with a real focus on team dynamics. The pre-residential introductory sessions were valued but probably not enough to lay the foundation for connections.
- Consider other mechanisms for forming groups. More time spent on participants getting to know each other could lead to a more natural process of self-selection based on themes they see are emerging in the conversations they are having or in engaging them more actively in the process of assigning group - in a similar process to an open agenda mechanism where the parameters are made clear from the outset. This could take the form of pre-assigning participants into groups before the first residential and then testing dynamics and allocating time for group dynamics to form before finalising group assignments, leading to stronger bonds, improved personal experiences and better outcomes for the programme.

Participant retention and engagement differs greatly between UK and Africa-based participants

Overall retention rate was over 55%. However, it was much lower for UK participants (10%) than for participants from across Africa (75%). Of the 40 participants recruited, 39 (of which 9 from the UK) participated in the Kigali lab and 30 began the digital lab. 23 'completed' the programme with only one UK participant remaining.

We do not have data on the extent of the effect of COVID-19 on participant's ability to continue and fully engage in the programme but participant's reasons for withdrawal and low engagement highlights the complex and uniquely personal effects of this period, as does feedback given during the final evaluation session:

"I was a bit overwhelmed with everything, I wasn't always mentally present"

"Couldn't fully engage- so much happening"

Participants who withdrew from the programme cited issues related to work, mental health and changes in personal commitments and circumstances. Participants who felt they could not fully engage cited political disruption, a lack of understanding of the time commitment that would be required and changes in personal circumstance such as marriage. On a purely logistical level, the shift in the timeframe and delivery mechanism of the programme may have meant participants faced a greater number of commitments and shifts in priorities, which they had not had to initially factor into their decision to participate in the programme.

Feedback from participants at various moments through the programme indicated that the balance between participants from the UK and Africa was weighted more towards the latter. This came up at various check-ins with groups because of the practical implication of how they could fulfil the criteria of collaboration between both locations. One participant noted feeling uncomfortable to seemingly "speak for" a UK experience, particularly when their counterparts did not necessarily have any other points of reference to draw on.

"Maybe involve more young people from the UK? I feel that there are more insights from the African perspective than from the UK"

"Felt like UK participants were just there to fill spaces in groups, were outnumbered in groups, which led to difficult conversations around representation of the UK"

It is difficult to pinpoint one specific factor that led to a higher rate of UK participants to withdraw, but the awareness and perception of British Council amongst UK participants (and young people more generally) should be considered a contributing factor. In the UK, British Council operates in a somewhat crowded space of national and regional organisations who engage with and offer opportunities to young people. Confusion between British Council and the British Youth Council from a participant during a workshop session, for example, points to British Council's visibility and positionality within the UK compared to other contexts.

"Being from the UK myself, I didn't know the British council worked with young people...It just didn't reach me - I just didn't know about it."

Recommendations

- Consider recruiting a higher number of participants if designing and delivering labs again based on previous retention rate and understanding of the context the labs are delivered in. It isn't possible to know the extent to which the shift of the programme's time frame due to COVID-19 underpins the reasons participants provided, however over-recruitment could help to mitigate participants withdrawal and possibly even the impact of withdrawal and low participation within group dynamics.
- Recognise (potential) participants' awareness and perception of British Council and the role that plays in their motivation. Factor this into framing of recruitment and ongoing programme communication.

Communications channels were good but greater clarity on expectations would be helpful

This section focuses on an overarching trend depicted by participants in their feedback, so some elements have been repeated from earlier sections of this report. There were lots of positive comments about the communication throughout the programme.

"Communication channels went well"

"Constant communication from NN and BeatFreeks. I am grateful for how available they were to answer anything"

"Communications with the stakeholders (emails, whatsapp) kept us motivated"

It is worth noting that when the pandemic began, participants understandably felt overwhelmed, confused and a bit left in the dark whilst delivery partners consolidated a way forward, but they did feel like it was handled well. As a result, this may have impacted morale and in turn, participation:

"Covid threw me off balance-struggled to commit dealing with home and work stress"

"NN team adjusted the pace of the programme to match the circumstances"

"I think the mid-residential went as best as it could with all things considered"

"The partners really handled the pandemic in the best way possible, as people were losing motivation they kept sending emails and checking in on everybody. I don't think there is anything negative or anything there is to be changed in the way the team dealt with the pandemic"

The wider feedback around communication can provide useful insights into ways in which this pilot could be improved upon for future programmes.

"It would be great to have clear guidelines from beginning of the programme, because I believe the experiences we had to go through, the pandemic and everything, some of us were a little bit lost of where the programme was going, what was the final outcome was that we would get out of it"



"I remember how most participants were a little confused at the Kigali lab because we didn't know that creating projects is what we'd be doing"

"Consolidating project data related to the specific financial templates would have helped. Receiving the grant application forms and financial templates at the beginning of the project would have made work easier and created more quality output than when we are already at the end"

"The expectation to create and implement business plans is quite overwhelming, and represents a level of work which I do not feel was communicated clearly at application stage"

Recommendations

- Clearly define the roles, responsibilities and time commitment to potential programme participants upfront. While the shift to digital delivery was unforeseen, feedback in the summative evaluation as well as through verbal feedback with groups with delivery partners and British Council throughout the programme highlighted that greater clarity around expectations from British Council at the outset would have further helped sensitise participants to expected contributions and participation. In doing so, the issues of compensation and benefits of participation can be presented upfront and participants can choose to engage in the programme with more complete information, potentially improving retention and participation.

Clarity on responsibilities, expectations and time commitments were interconnected with feedback related to compensation.



"I would have also loved for participants to have been told what financial compensation they would be given at the start of the programme. If I remember correctly, we weren't told about this and "grants" were given to participants later in the programme. At the end of the day, this was labour. It's only fair that there is some kind of financial compensation"

"In terms of getting paid for the programme, intentions will need to be clear from the beginning - was it consultancy or youth engagement? Was the British Council strict in terms of time lines and holding people accountable in terms of spending. There would need to be more clarity about the rules of engagement"

Stipends and bursaries are valued as means of support and recognition of participant's efforts, but the mechanism for delivery should be smoother and quicker to better meet participant access and participation needs

Monetary compensation during the Kigali lab, the period when the programme was paused, and to help with digital access needs during the digital lab was generally well received and helped participants engage.



"This helped with data usage and was important to allow us to participate in the programme. It was a very good initiative, thank you to British Council, Beatfreeks, CcHub"

However, some felt the processing time and the amount available should be looked at again given the amount of time participants dedicated to the programme and the lengthy process of payment. This was also raised as reason for limited participation from one group and as a factor in two participant withdrawals from the programme.



"When arrived in Kigali, not all participants had received bursaries leading to some uncomfortable conversations"

"Bursaries took a long time to arrive for some people which led to mistrust and a general lack of being able to engage because of internet"

Recommendations

- Process stipends and bursaries to participants through delivery partners. The stipends and bursaries are valuable means for improving equitable access to the programme, in either a physical or delivery partner organisations, who may have a smaller organisational set-up and less complex payment process, may be in a better position to ensure participants receive this financial support in a timely manner and reduce the burden on British Council internally to chase payments through different country offices.

I Partners' Reflections

Taking this report as a whole, it is clear the pilot programme made significant progress in achieving its ambitious remit. As a pilot, a lot was unknown and further complicated by a pandemic halfway through programme delivery. With a new understanding of what the programme looks like in practice, the recommendations from this report and the learning from the programme as a whole will help to inform how this element of British Council's New Narratives programme moves forward.

Emerging Theory of Change: "If young people in Africa and UK are supported to engage with each other in new ways and to develop new content, around themes and areas of interest, to share with their peers, there will be new reciprocal knowledge, new opportunities for connection and collaboration and the Africa / UK relationship will be strengthened, leading to mutual cultural, social and economic benefit"

The theory of change held true to the extent that the young people from the UK and Africa engaged with each other and developed new content, collaborations on creating new ideas around themes and areas of interest. Through the Kigali lab participant's had a unique opportunity to meet new people and learn new things through an intense, immersive experience of a new place - a fair trade for their time. This immersive element should be retained if the programme is delivered in this way again.

COVID-19 presented unforeseen challenges for participants personally and in the context of the programme, as well as for partners. Navigating how to re-package materials and translate sessions to deliver the rest of the programme digitally, while maintaining strong levels of participant engagement, connecting groups with stakeholders (who were also experiencing shocks and challenges related to COVID-19 in their own work) required more time and project management than anticipated.

While the digital lab could not, by its very nature, offer a similar experience to Kigali in a UK setting, there were unexpected benefits. Participants were able to learn about new collaborative, digital tools, meet more and varied stakeholders and have more time to reflect and consider their ideas between sessions. It is not possible to say which elements of the feedback would have emerged even without COVID-19, or the extent to which the feedback would be different.

Continued, consistent support for groups who successfully granted funds should be established to help secure the potential of their project idea in achieving its stated outcome(s) and the potential of the New Narratives programme more widely. At the bare minimum, this should take the form of a monthly check-in but more comprehensive support could see external, dedicated support brought in at key moments. For the wider cohort, British Council may want to set-up a mechanism that keeps them within a network/on a mailing list where they can access opportunities to connect with others around new narratives and the New Narratives programme.

The second part of the theory of change is longer-term and beyond the scope of a short-term programme as the pilot has been delivered. The extent of the New Narratives programme's contribution to strengthening relationships between both locations leading to mutual cultural and social economic benefit, could be explored in follow-up interviews and discussions with individuals 3/6/12 months after the programme, and with groups as they use the grant funding.

In terms of the programme structure, should the labs, or an iteration of them, be run in the future, British Council may want to consider breaking the programme into two parts to strengthen the programme outcomes in relation to the overall theory of change:

- 1 A (series of) workshops that bring young people together from across different contexts to explore what narratives are, how they are shaped and their implications on relations between the UK and Africa
- 2 An open fund that young people can apply for to deliver a project that seeks to challenge, change or explore narratives. There may be overlap between participants in the workshops and those who apply, but there does not have to be.

I Appendix

The data used as the basis for this evaluation was collected at three points during the programme. Other references to participant feedback collected at other points over the course of the workshop, in whole cohort sessions, are clearly referenced as such.

The first round of data was collected between the 16th and 24th February 2020. When we refer to findings from 'the start of the programme', this is the data we are referring to. At this point of data collection, we obtained information from 30 participants, 3 of which were from partners in the UK, 27 of which were from partners in Africa.

The second round of data collection took place between the 24th March and the 2nd April 2020. When we refer to findings from 'the middle of the programme', this is the data we are referring to. At this point of data collection, we obtained information from 18 participants, 3 of which were from partners in the UK, 15 of which were from partners in Africa.

The final round of data collection took place between the 23rd March and the 25th March 2021. When we refer to findings from 'the end of the programme', this is the data we are referring to. At this point of data collection, we obtained information from 12 participants all of which were from partners in Africa.

All data was collected securely via typeform - and then stored in line with Beatfreeks Privacy Policy.

It should be noted that not all participants from the programme filled in the evaluative survey. The programme began with a total of 39 participants, 30 of which filled out the initial evaluation. The programme ended with a total of 23 participants, 12 of which filled out our final evaluation.

[Link to:](#)

- Raw Data and Analysis
- Evaluation Session Report
- Evaluation Session Infographic
- Photos
- Social media analytics

CONTACT

Co-Creation Hub Nigeria,
6th Floor,
294 Herbert Macaulay Way,
Sabo, Yaba, Lagos.

T: +234 (01) 295 0555
E: info@cchubnigeria.com
W: www.cchubnigeria.com

Beatfreeks,
Zellig, Gibb Street,
Birmingham, B9 4AT

T: 0121 794 0207
E: info@beatfreeks.com
W; www.beatfreeks.com