

The Climate Connection

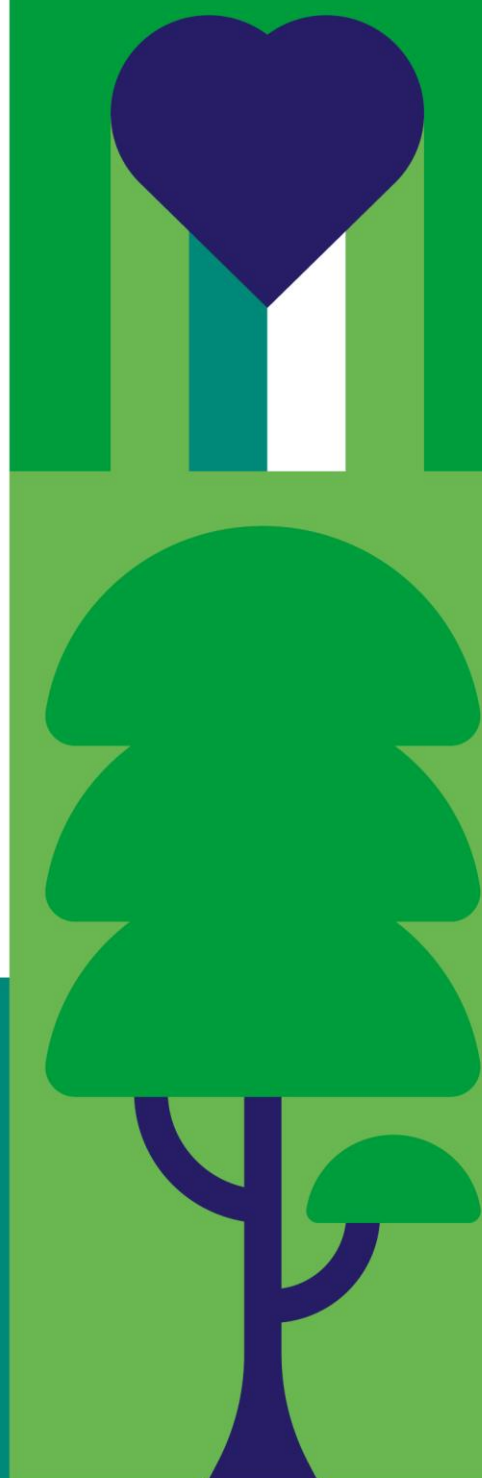
Creative Commissions

**External Evaluation Report
Activity from 2021 to 2023**

January 2025

#TheClimateConnection

www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection



Contents

About the British Council	3
About The Audience Agency	4
Acknowledgements	5
Foreword	6
Executive Summary	8
Infographics – Summary of Key Findings	16
Scope, approach and methodology	21
Brief	21
Scope and Project Profile	23
Timeframe – Creative Commissions Delivery 2021-2023	27
Location	27
Evaluation Methodology	30
Evaluation questions	31
Evaluation research & development process	32
Data sources	32
Limitations	33
Findings	34
Project Goals	36
Audiences and Reach	39
Partnerships & Collaboration	45
Climate & Environment themes	51
What creativity and culture bring	53
Role of social justice and equality in projects	62
Legacy of Projects	74
Strategic and policy context	81
Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals and Action for Climate Empowerment Framework	92
Reflections and recommendations	98



About the British Council

The British Council supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide.

We uniquely combine the UK's deep expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language, our global presence and relationships in over 100 countries, our unparalleled access to young people, creatives and educators, and our own creative sparkle.

We share our values and explore ideas. We have difficult discussions and find common ground. We create mutually beneficial relationships between the people of all four nations of the UK and other countries. This helps strengthen the UK's global reputation and influence, encouraging people from around the world to visit, study, trade and make alliances with the UK.

We work directly with individuals to help them gain the skills, confidence and connections to transform their lives and shape a better world in partnership with the UK. We support them to build networks and explore creative ideas, to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications.

We work with governments and our partners in the education, English language and cultural sectors, in the UK and globally. Working together we make a bigger difference, creating benefit for millions of people all over the world. We take a long-term approach to building trust and remain at arm's length from government.

We work with people in over 200 countries and territories and are on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2022–23 we reached 600 million people.

Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body.



About The Audience Agency

The Audience Agency is a UK-based not-for-profit organisation which delivers high quality specialist research and evaluation, policy and strategy advice and capacity building projects for the arts, culture and heritage and wider creative sectors. Evaluating international cultural, arts and education programmes is a central part of our work, having worked in over 40 countries in the last few years.

We were the evaluators of Galway 2020 European Capital of Culture and British Council projects including the 2021-23 UK/Australia, 2023 UK/Viet Nam and 2024 UK/France seasons and spotlights. Other international collaborations include: the ADESTE+ Audience Centred Experience Design approach; the ASSET multi-country audience segmentation model; and HAMLET exploring the role of AI in performing arts production.

As the sector partner to and co-directors of the UK Centre for Cultural Value hosted by the University of Leeds, we helped to devise their Evaluation Principles and are co-leading the ESRC-funded Towards a Blueprint for National Cultural Data Observatory project for the UK, including considering the potential for future international collaborations on evidence for cultural policy and practice.

www.theaudienceagency.org



Acknowledgements

This evaluation was commissioned by the British Council from The Audience Agency. The views expressed here are of the authors.

The Audience Agency team: Caitlin Wagner, Fran Blythe, Jonathan Goodacre, Patrick Towell, Sophia Woodley.

Special advisors: Bernice Lee OBE, Dr Agustina Gradin, Dr Cecelia Dinardi

British Council advisory group: Rosanna Lewis, Nikki Locke, Ian Thomas, Sarah Giles.

Thank you to Creative Commissions project partners and British Council team members who took part in the evaluation.



Foreword

When we launched the Creative Commissions for Climate Action in 2021, little did we know what an incredible impact they would have: on the partners involved, on the communities engaged, on the wider cultural sector, and on the British Council. So far, the projects have fostered international collaboration between more than 175 partners from the UK and over 45 countries, engaging meaningfully with nearly 300,000 people around the world.

The combination of arts, science and technology has been at the heart of the Creative Commissions, finding innovative ways of addressing diverse climate challenges at a global scale and bringing to life the data. They highlight the personal stories and local contexts of some of those most affected by climate change, humanising an otherwise overwhelming and complex narrative of the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. At a time of increasing crisis, be it environmental, societal or economic, there can be a strong sense of global anxiety, fear and hopelessness. Through diverse artforms and culture-led initiatives, the Creative Commissions build understanding and increase dialogue between communities, artists, scientists and digital innovators, and inspire hope for a brighter future.

The Creative Commissions reflect an internal momentum at the British Council to strengthen our commitment in the space of climate and environment. Our participation at COP26 (United Nations Climate Change conference – the Conference of Parties), which was hosted in Glasgow, Scotland in 2021, was a catalyst moment as we supported the UK's ambition for a 'whole of society' COP. Through the Climate Connection Programme, we highlighted the impact of a cultural relations approach to address climate challenges through education, English, and arts and culture.

Since then, we have continued to advocate for the role of education and culture at UNFCCC COPs, working with strategic partners and young people, and sharing learning from good practice globally. Our Strategy to Address Climate Change, which was published in November 2024, sets out the British Council's response to the climate crisis by engaging with people globally through our three sectors of Arts, Education and the English language and to demonstrate our commitment to operating in an environmentally responsible manner, with the ambition to become Net Zero by 2040.

There is an organisational commitment to tackle the climate emergency across our work in arts and culture. Since the first global open call in 2021, the Creative Commissions have evolved into bilateral offers (UK-Egypt in 2022, and UK-Korea 2021 to 2023), regional partnerships (Anhar with Art Jameel 2023-25) and regional programmes (Climate Futures in South Asia 2024-25). Furthermore, we are protecting cultural heritage at risk from conflict and climate change through the Cultural Protection Fund, led by British Council in partnership with the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Other programmes focus on sustainable practice such as the Cultura Circular programme in Latin America to support greater environmental sustainability of festivals, and the New Landscapes: Fashion, Textiles and Technology programme in India, in partnership with University of Arts London.



And this commitment goes beyond British Council's internal policies, operations and programmes. Each year, the stories and partners behind the Creative Commissions have been platformed at UNFCCC COPs, through our own initiatives and partnership with others including the UK Government, Julie's Bicycle, the International National Trust Organisation, local and international partners. British Council is a Knowledge Partner to the Group of Friends on Culture-Based Climate Action, an informal coalition of Parties and non-Party stakeholders dedicated to championing the comprehensive integration of culture into the UNFCCC agenda. Following COP28 in Dubai, we are collaborating with the Ministry of Culture in the UAE to carry out joint research to map the current state of climate-related initiatives in the cultural sector, assess the awareness, attitudes, and practices regarding climate action, and provide recommendations to embed culture into climate policies, including the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the National Adaptation plans (NAPs) in the UAE. The aim is to support countries globally to advocate for and implement Culture-Based Climate Action.

This external evaluation of the Creative Commissions enables us to capture some of the journey since 2021. It serves to provide evidence of the impact and value of such projects when arts and culture are at the heart of climate action. It also helps us to reflect on the process, and learn from the experience to improve future initiatives. We hope that it inspires others to explore what role they can play to tackle the climate emergency, and that it shows support and solidarity to those who strive to do so under challenging circumstances.

We will continue to share the stories, evidence of impact, and lessons learnt in our networks; develop our offer and support to the sector; and work with partners to jointly tackle the climate emergency and biodiversity loss through arts and culture.

Rosanna Lewis, Senior Relationship Manager, Culture Responds to Global Challenges

Monomita Nag-Chowdhury, The Climate Connection Programme Lead



Executive Summary

The Creative Commissions for Climate Action programme is a series of British Council-supported projects across the world that combined art, science and climate action/activism to address climate change and related environmental crises.

- Awarding a total of £1,278,923 worth of grants to 38 projects between 2021 and 2023.
- Involving more than 260 artists and creative practitioners and 100 scientists, researchers and academics in 46 countries across 176 partner organisations.
- Reaching an estimated 26,000 people in person and 266,000 digitally.

Climate themes addressed ranged from oceans and land use, through circular economy, recycling and sustainable consumption to water, food and clean air. Project partners ranged from arts organisations to local heritage partnerships and organisations specialising in disability, gender and social action. UK and international stakeholders have involved – in various ways – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Julie's Bicycle, Women of the World and state governments.

This evaluation of the Creative Commissions programme aims to examine the value of creativity and culture in humanity's reaction to nature and the climate emergency, exploring how they might:

- bring a different and valuable perspective to science, technology, policy or academia
- move 'beneath and beyond the science', demonstrating climate change's effects on people's lives by humanising and creatively interpreting scientific data
- raise climate awareness and inspire change, and
- demonstrate to people that they have agency and the capacity to act in response to the climate emergency.

The Creative Commissions projects have produced a legacy of:

- extended cultural forms and practices
- new and reusable knowledge
- creative and artistic works, and
- lasting intersectoral and interdisciplinary partnerships and networks.

They have intrigued and engaged activists, policymakers, creatives, scientists, academics, technologists and communities around the world and stimulated discussions between new combinations of people. As a result, people have framed both climate problems and potential climate solutions differently.

The projects engaged with people as audiences and as active participants, for many of whom the theme was new. This engagement ranged from using large exhibitions, installations and film screenings to local participatory workshops and educational initiatives. Projects actively encouraged participants' and



audience's thinking to go beyond their experience of a single artwork, exhibition, event or performance and consider the long-term scalability of their own climate action responses.

Whilst planning for, realising and evidencing yet wider and deeper impact from the Creative Commissions in the longer-term is an area for development, these projects have helped to build climate awareness, improve the quality of public and policy discourse, and broaden the diversity of voices in such discourse.

Creativity bringing something new to science and technocracy

The Creative Commissions brought creatives, scientists and others together in novel ways to facilitate holistic and nuanced conversations about climate change – bringing the data and graphs 'alive'. Many of those working in this way for the first time were keen to repeat the experience.

Creative and artistic forms featuring significantly within projects' process and outputs were moving image, music, digital arts, visual arts and the written and spoken word. Digitally replicable forms suited the circumstances of the pandemic as well as the imperatives for projects themselves to tread lightly environmentally whilst collaborating internationally. Featuring – but with potential to grow and be further explored in the future – were performing arts, public and outdoor arts, immersive/games, audio in its various forms, museums and archives together with design, fashion, craft. Heritage could be further explored, be that through natural heritage and its links to environment, built environment and architecture's role in changing society through where and how we live – or archaeology giving us a window on how humankind and nature co-existed in the past.

By drawing together such a diverse range of perspectives and applying a variety of creative and cultural practices and methodologies, the projects were able to address – predominantly – the following environmental and climate themes: oceans (including coastal erosion, acidification, sea level rise), land use and management, recycling and circular economy.

Whilst governmental and media reporting on climate science and climate action tends to concentrate on numbers and data, the Creative Commissions used a range of collaborative and people-centred storytelling, creative media and interactive methods that involved local communities and subject matter experts in topics directly related to their social and geographic context.

The resulting commissions were of high quality. They also brought empathy and emotion to the climate crisis, making it relatable and relevant to people's daily lives and, in turn, inspiring action. Instead of it being about something 'somewhere else', 'someone else' or vaguely in the future, it made a real connection between people and nature that is in the here and now.

Bringing new voices and perspectives to climate debate and action

As set out in the [Strategic and Policy Context](#) section below, global climate debates tend to concentrate on the actions of governments, national targets for net zero and financial contributions from developed countries to those most impacted by climate change. These do not naturally include society at large or the



views of the diverse communities affected. As the recently published British Council climate change strategy¹ states:

... climate change exacerbates global inequalities, disproportionately affecting developing countries that have contributed least to global emissions. Vulnerable and excluded groups, including women and girls and indigenous communities, bear the brunt of these impacts. Our approach bridges cultural divides, brings diverse and underrepresented perspectives to climate dialogue and embeds respect for cultural diversity.

The Creative Commissions projects respond to this by setting the ambition to engage with cultural actors of all kinds, including artistic and cultural practitioners, civil society groups and communities currently underrepresented in climate change conversations and those who are disproportionately affected by climate change. The connections and intersections between climate and the environment on the one hand and diversity, gender equality and social justice on the other, were frequently made. The experience of communities dealing with the consequences of climate change supplements the detail and explanations that science provides – bringing them to life, providing different perspectives and highlighting gaps.

- The British Council encouraged grant proposals from projects to include youth voice or intergenerational exchange, resulting in 23 (58%) of the 38 projects having this element
- 53% worked with indigenous communities
- 50% explored interculturality
- 42% addressed gender equality.

Amplifying the voices of young people to express their ideas, hopes and concerns around climate change reflects a new international priority to hear the ‘Voices of Youth’ in climate action and more broadly in global policy development.²

The involvement of indigenous peoples and cultures provided different perspectives, world views, concepts and language for 20 of the 38 projects. These projects connected with Traditional Knowledge and practices surrounding biodiversity, ecology, land and water. The Creative Commissions demonstrate how such ancestral knowledge and practices – highly specific to place and embedded within communities’ culture – are an asset to climate action. The relationship between communities and the environment generates knowledge systems on environmental care which can address climate change in a way that Western science and the kind of technocratic management adopted by most public administrations and global industries cannot.

¹ The British Council, [Our Strategy to address climate change to 2026](#), October 2024

² With initiatives such as this from the UK headquartered School of International Futures supporting implementation of the [UN Declaration of Future Generations](#)



In common with many British Council initiatives, Creative Commissions were mainly developed as collaborative projects with the partners often coming from different job roles, cultural contexts, and backgrounds. By bringing artists, scientists, researchers, governmental bodies, students, activists of different types and places together, they frequently produced distinctive innovative results which benefited from this interculturality.

Many of the projects explored the reality that the climate crisis is not gender neutral. Women and girls suffer the worst effects of climate change, exacerbating existing gender inequality and threatening livelihoods, health, and security. The climate crisis makes the care tasks disproportionately borne by women – such as supplying water or energy for cooking in the home – more difficult. Some other negative impacts include increased risk of early marriages, human trafficking, and loss of education. Women and girls represent almost 70% of the working class in agriculture and their incomes are the most vulnerable to climate change. Women can also face additional burdens because of their class, race, disability or age. Climate policies could go further in considering gender as an area of policy action, and funding for women-led climate action projects is also often limited.

Women are often considered change agents and civil society leaders, including in climate action, with recognised experience in mitigating and adapting to climate change in day-to-day life. Women are also leaders in the conservation of indigenous cultures that consider the preservation of nature to be fundamental. Often these gender roles are derived from traditional roles in care tasks within families and the community, as well as the environment³. Recognising this often-invisible labour, and its value, is part of recognising the key role women and communities play in responding, adapting to and mitigating climate change.

A legacy of capacity and partnerships

Project partners were satisfied with their involvement in the programme and appreciated the funding, institutional support and opportunity to participate. Most were already engaged in the theme, but the Creative Commissions provided the opportunity to try out ideas, work with new partners and engage with different audiences. They provided an impetus for interdisciplinary innovation and to create greater relevance; for scientists delivering and communicating their knowledge in imaginative ways and for creatives the power to use climate science as the inspiration for relevant creative work.

Most project partners were keen to continue and build on their projects:

- 10 projects received additional funding in the COP26 round through an internal procedure

³ Mellor, Mary (2000), "Nature, (Re) Production and Power. A Materialist Ecofeminist Perspective", en Fred P. Gale y Michael M'Gonigle (eds.), pp. 105–120.



- A small number of project teams received additional funding from other British Council programmes such as the UK / Viet Nam Season and the UK / Korea Creative Commissions.

However, many encountered difficulties in raising additional financial support for the continuation of the work begun during their projects. Addressing this is an area of potential development in the future of the programme. For some projects, the relationships and partnerships developed and nurtured were the most significant legacy. Many project partners indicated that they planned to continue developing these relationships and create new projects.

The Creative Commissions have also inspired other British Council arts programmes such as the Anhar programme in the Middle East and North Africa, in partnership with Art Jameel; Human Nature in Malaysia, and the Climate Futures programme in South Asia.

Making climate action more people-centred

The Creative Commissions are situated within the wider context of worldwide efforts initiated by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This original 1992 convention of the Rio Earth Climate Summit was a result of scientists prompting governments to act. The 2015 Paris Agreement saw a shift to framing the necessary change away from purely science- or technology-led approaches to a more holistic view of **economic and social transformation informed by science**.

It introduced [Action for Climate Empowerment \(ACE\)](#) mechanisms to empower all members of society to engage in climate action with a strong focus on the public and broader civil society. It also highlighted **capacity building** and **public awareness** raising as a category of support that more developed countries are required and encouraged to give to climate adaptation alongside finance and technology.

In this global policy context, the Creative Commissions programme and its projects:

- Have focused on transformation which is predominantly **social and environmental**
- Built **capacity** in the cultural and creative sectors and with other sectors
- Sat within **Actions for Climate Empowerment** focus areas, which range from public engagement or access to information to education and training.

The Creative Commissions were, however, developed in a policy and diplomatic context in which the value of creativity and culture to climate action was not yet explicitly recognised. Artists and creatives have long engaged in socially based practices addressing contemporary societal, economic and environmental issues. Their work has often drawn on and represented experience of the environment, nature and climate. Their ways of working have long been borrowed – often through the lens of design – and applied to develop innovation in policy, public services and enterprises (see research from Nesta and Innovate UK). However, the potential of these practices to more broadly impact climate action in a positive way is a proposition that is new to many outside the cultural sector.



The launch of the Group of Friends for Culture-Based Climate Action (CBCA) at the 2023 COP28 in Dubai by UAE and Brazil aimed to change awareness of the power of creativity and culture as a driving force in climate action through securing policy recognition and resources for this area. In so doing, the Group advocates for the development of culture-based responses to the climate emergency and the sharing of best practices between countries. The Global Call to Action for civil society and policymakers continued through the 2024 COP29 in Baku into the preparations for the 2025 COP30 in Belém.

This recent development is a strategically important shift in the policy landscape for the British Council's work in environment and climate generally, and the Creative Commissions programme, in particular. Creative Commissions have been significant 'early adopters' of the CBCA approach, before even the term was coined. By paving the way with bold creative research and development (R&D) – affording a variety of specialists in different fields the time and space to experiment in the projects – the programme and this evaluation now represent a valuable evidence base to advocate for the value of CBCA.

Enhancing public and policy debate

This evaluation explored the way in which the Creative Commissions had – or could have – a wider impact on public debate and policy discourse. Many of the different grant rounds were organised around the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COPs), recognising that these conferences set the rhythm of global climate diplomacy. One of the programme's aims was to present or involve projects in and around these diplomatic events that galvanised tens of thousands of participants/observers, including some fifty thousand most recently in Baku in November 2024.

Project leaders and partners appreciated the opportunity to influence in new or different ways through profiling the Creative Commissions in and around the COPs. 14 projects were featured in some way, for example as part of film screenings, exhibitions, performances, and panels. Some of the projects had a more substantive involvement such as the showing of the **Songs of the Earth** and **Nine Earths** film at COP26; or **The Earth Turns**, which was performed at the Falaki Theatre in Cairo and in the blue and green zones of COP27.

Where it worked well, it was felt that they had been able to demonstrate their ideas and discoveries at the COPs in new and engaging ways. This included being introduced to key stakeholders such as cabinet ministers of the Egypt Government at COP27. At COP26, for **Phone Call to the World** there was an exhibition and performances at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow, and a Climate Portal container connecting the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with locations around the world, as well as a projection of images from **Trees for Life** around the city. These were not within the formal Blue and Green zones of COP, but garnered a great deal of interest from locals, tourists, campaigners and delegates staying in the town for the event. Some projects felt their impact on opinion-formers and decision-makers was always going to be limited in the lobbyist-dominated COPs.



Nevertheless, the projects demonstrated the value of the British Council's cultural relations approach. Both within and outside of the COPs, useful connections were made with the potential to influence agendas. As an internationally recognised 'brand', the British Council also helped projects to reach a wider range of people giving greater credibility to the projects and attracting international attention.

What next? The future of Creative Commissioning for Climate Action in a rapidly changing context

This evaluation of the Creative Commissions programme provides significant learning on how the British Council can use its platforms to foster much-needed cultural exchange and creative climate action, showing the world that creativity and freedom are not just abstract ideals and liberal values, but essential tools for addressing this most pressing issue of our time. This is only the beginning.

Here follow recommendations on future strategic direction and alignment with wider strategies and policies – together with more operational recommendations on how best to commission and support projects within such programmes.

Strategic focus and alignment

- **Culture as a global public good.** The evidence in this report and from future evaluations should be used by the British Council and made available to others to argue for the value of Culture-Based Climate Action, emphasising the value that creativity brings alongside culture. This can contribute to and be aligned with wider efforts to make the argument for culture contributing to sustainable development and deserving a place within the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Culture as how we live.** The level of ambition for the impact of the programme and future – and past – projects can potentially be raised above building climate awareness, fostering a more diverse and better quality of public and policy debate around climate action and building capacity for change. They could – with greater focus and support – influence policy and foster concrete climate action, potentially changing the behaviours of consumers, businesses or public services.
- **Culture for social change.**
 - Specific climate themes could be selected as the focus of future programming. Those underrepresented in the programme and under-debated in public and policy discourse include climate migration and climate adaptation and resilience.
 - Climate issues identified with specific geographies – such as coastal areas and polar regions – alongside partners in South America could feature more.
 - Social equity focus could build on the work with gender and youth and both specifically address, for example: disability, neurodiversity, LGBTQIA+ people, older people, younger people outside formal education settings and refugees – whether through climate change, conflict or otherwise. Intersectionality, featured in some projects to date, could be more explicitly addressed.



- **Climate innovation through the diversity of cultural forms.** Although digital production and creative forms naturally provide legacy assets and suited the pandemic period, the different ‘in real life’ audience and participant experience afforded by live performing and outdoor arts, craft and design could be used more in future programming. The UK and British Council’s cultural sensibilities could complement existing UN activities leveraging the extensive and youth-tilted reach of games with climate-related content.

Commissioning and support process

- **Culture as communications for change.** The future commissioning process could better set expectations on projects and project partners from the British Council (and any co-commissioning partners) and, in turn, help them specify and plan for the change they want to make as clearly as how they produce their creative outputs.
- **Building reach and audience development into projects.** To maximise the reach and impact of projects, support to audience engagement and development, marketing and dissemination – especially via digital channels – could be increased and tailored. As well as the British Council providing – or buying in – such specialist support, the commissioning process should require projects to include cultural marketing and audience development activities within project planning, budgets, partners and team.
- **Supporting financial sustainability.** To foster the ongoing realisation of benefits from the legacy of projects, their creative outputs and the project partners need to be more financially sustainable. Projects would benefit from advice on financing and commercial issues in their projects, from Intellectual Property in what they commission through potential future business models for their projects and future climate-related work to additional potential sources of funding.



Infographics – Summary of Key Findings

Projects

38

projects



£1,278,923

worth of grants provided to partners to deliver Creative Commissions from 2021-23



21 projects were commissioned in relation to COP26

Glasgow, UK, 2021



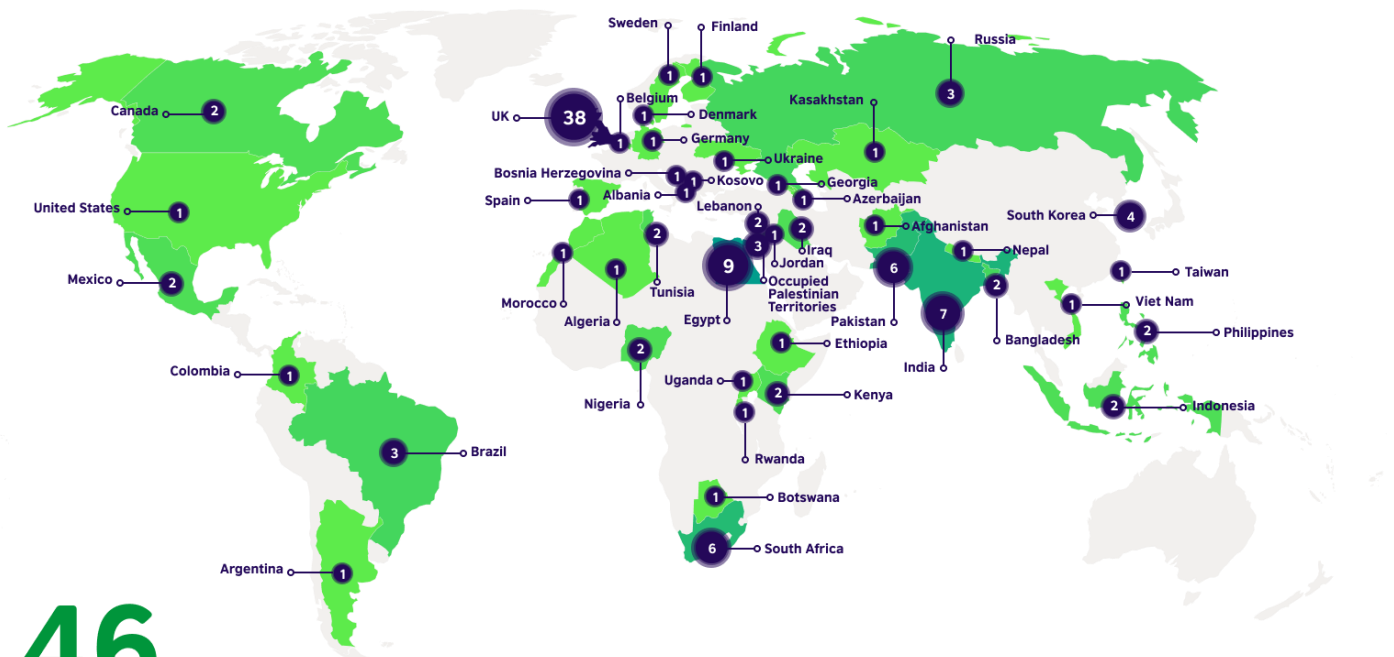
10 for COP27

Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, 2022



7 for COP28

Dubai, UAE, 2023

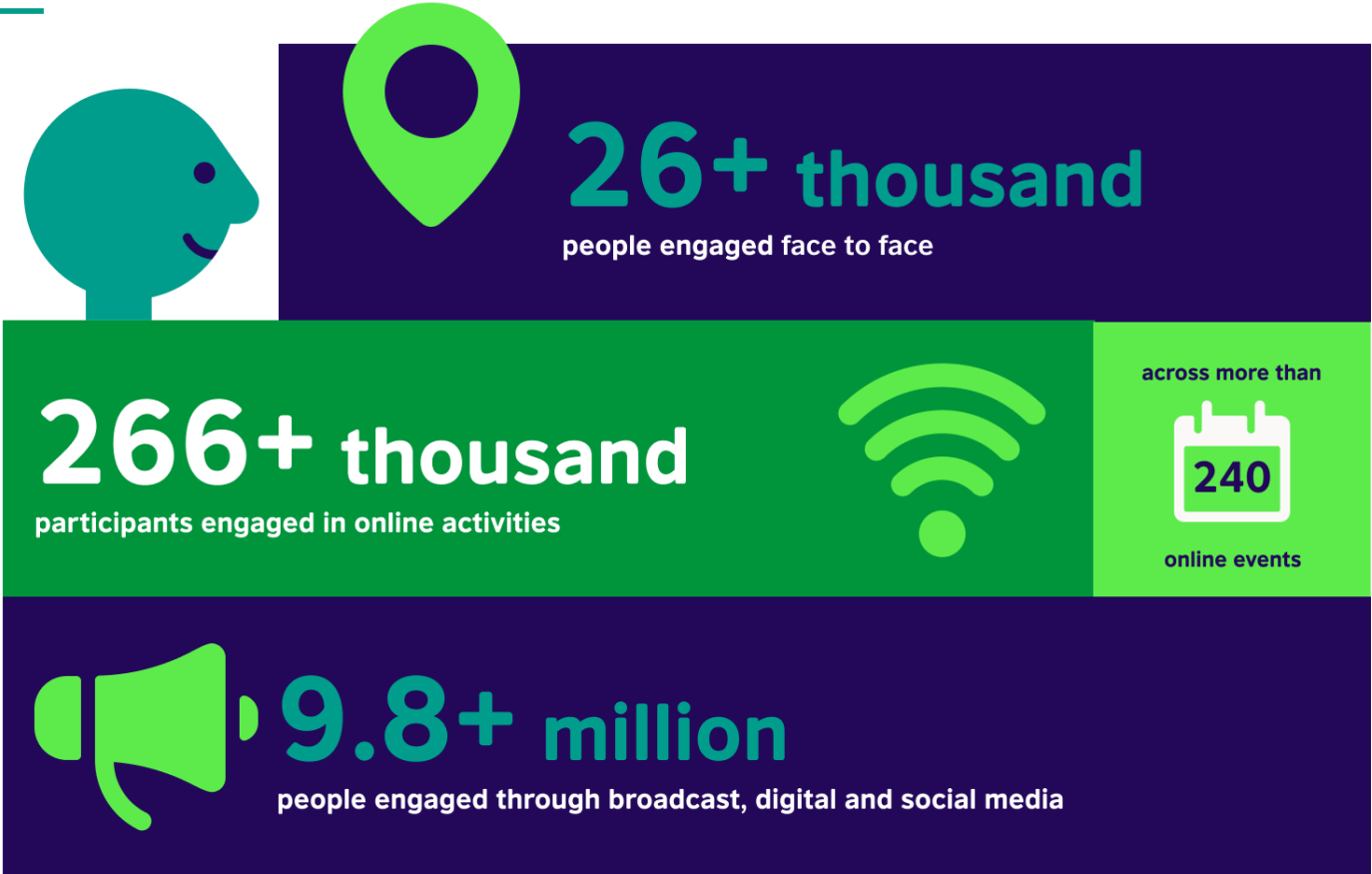


46

countries where activity took place



Key Findings & Outreach



Themes

Climate Themes



100% Climate Action /
Activism



32% oceans (including
coastal erosion, ocean
pollution, sea level rise,
acidification)



32% land use and
management



32% recycling, circular
economy and innovative
design



29% carbon footprint/
sustainable consumption



29% water



29% food and
agriculture/dietary shift

Social Justice Themes



61% youth voice and
intergenerational exchange



53% indigenous
communities



50% interculturality



42% gender equality



Action for Climate Empowerment



All 38 projects

(100%) constituted activities under the UN's Action for Climate Empowerment around public awareness, international cooperation and public participation

Project Contributors



260

artists



100

scientists, researchers and academics



Creative or Cultural Forms



74% worked with film/TV/video



47% included music



45% included digital arts



42% included visual arts

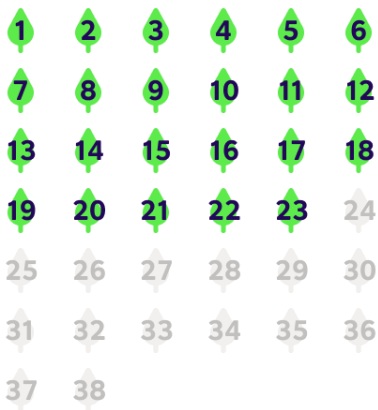


34% included literature/poetry/spoken word

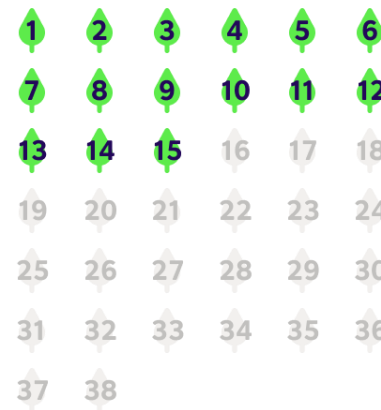
Project Goals



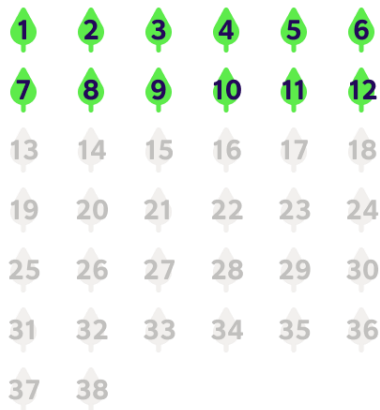
100% raising awareness and understanding of climate issues, action and science



61% change the discourse as well as empowerment and motivating people to take action



39% create or encourage climate solutions



32% encouraged people to adopt changes or take action against climate change



11% emphasised the benefits and impacts of taking climate action



Scope, approach and methodology

Brief

The British Council commissioned The Audience Agency to conduct an impact evaluation of the Creative Commissions for Climate Action.

The Creative Commissions are a series of collaborative grants for projects involving the UK and countries around the world, that combine arts, science and technology to tackle the climate crisis. Since their launch in 2021 when the UK hosted COP26 in Glasgow, over 30 such projects have been supported, and this number continues to grow.

The purpose of the programme is to support new work and international collaboration to engage partners and communities in responding to the climate crisis, igniting conversations and inspiring climate action, with a focus on public engagement and awareness raising.

The projects address many of the climate themes that appear in public and policy discourse:

- The 'natural capitals' on which humanity depends – the oceans and fresh water, the land, forests, air, glaciers and the diversity of nature itself
- The adaptation of humanity to a changed climate – and communities' resilience to further climate change
- Climate mitigations actions by humanity to reduce its impact on environment and, thereby, the climate
- 'Loss & Damage' suffered by countries and communities – including to their settlements and homes, natural resources and cultural heritage
- Business and economic factors impacting climate action – such as green trade, subsidies and skills.

The evaluation has considered:

- Past projects funded under the Creative Commissions open calls (2021-2023) and other relevant British Council initiatives including Gender Ecologies (2022-2023)
- How these sit within the British Council's wider Climate Connection programme, Culture Responds to Global Challenges programme and the overall Climate strategy (published October 2024)
- Their position within the global context of the UN 2030 Agenda and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)⁴ objectives, including the Action for Climate Empowerment.⁵

⁴ [What is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change?](#)

⁵ [United Nations Action for Climate Empowerment \(ACE\)](#)



The relevance, impact and sustainability of the initiative was considered through the following dimensions:

- **Value** – of the grants made; of cultural relations partnerships between the UK and other countries; of the sharing of knowledge and practices at intersections between arts, science and technology.
- **Reach** – in terms of direct beneficiaries (receiving grants), project partners and audiences and participants in cultural and creative activities – including underrepresented groups.
- **Impact** – on individuals and communities; creative, cultural, scientific and other organisations; aligned to British Council strategies and UK and international policy.
- **Legacy** – medium- to long-term outcomes; assets and/or capabilities remaining after the funded project which continue to be available to the project partners and others to create benefits aligned with the programme and wider British Council objectives.
- **Learnings** – for the British Council to inform the future focus and design of Creative Climate Action work including commissioning, British Council climate initiatives and advocacy in general and wider cultural relations and arts learning – and potentially for others commissioning or supporting similar work.



Scope and Project Profile

See **Appendix II** for full descriptions of each funding initiative and project.

Some projects have been considered which, although not formally managed under the Creative Commissions umbrella, have, due to their themes and approach, become part of the Creative Commissions 'family'. The scope of this evaluation covered the following funding initiatives:

Creative Commissions for COP26, March – November 2021

17 grants with support from £30,000 - £60,000 and top up grants of £10,000

These inaugural projects brought together art, science and digital technology to offer innovative, interdisciplinary and collaborative responses to climate change, forming part of the cultural programme ahead of the November 2021 Glasgow COP26.

UK-Russia Creative Commissions, November 2021 – February 2022

Grants with support from £10,000 - £30,000 – Three projects have been included in this evaluation

Advertised at the time as the UK-Russia Creative Commissions 2021-22, five were commissioned by the Cultural and Education Section of the British Embassy in Moscow and British Council (no longer active) as part of the People-to-People Links project funded by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Only three were able to deliver activity before they were suspended.

Creative Commissions for COP27, July 2022 – March 2023

2 grants of £75,000 each

Following the success of the COP26 commissions, two grants were awarded in the lead up to COP27 in Egypt for international collaborations, selected from the international collaboration grants open call.

UK/Korea Creative Commissions, August – November 2021, July – November 2022, August – November 2023

3 grants over 3 years, funded by the Korea Foundation up to £44,000 (2021 and 2022), £18,000 (2023)

The Korea Foundation and the British Council commissioned three rounds: for the 2021 Partnering for Green Growth and Global Goal 2030 Seoul Summit and COP26; in 2022 for COP27; in 2023 for COP28.



UK/Egypt Creative Commissions for COP27, July 2022 – March 2023

7 grants, with support up to £20,000

Part of the cultural programme of the British Council's Climate Connection activities organised before and during the Egypt COP27 in November 2022, these brought together partners in the UK and Egypt.

MENA-wide project “From Ink to Action” in collaboration with Lakes International Comic Art Festival for COP28, April – December 2022

1 MENA-wide grant

Building on ‘10 Years to Save the World’ Creative Commission for COP26, this grant brought together twelve artists from the Arab region to tackle pressing environmental issues through comic art, presented in an immersive exhibition ‘From Ink to Action’ in Beirut, Lebanon and which travelled to the United Arab Emirates as part of COP28.

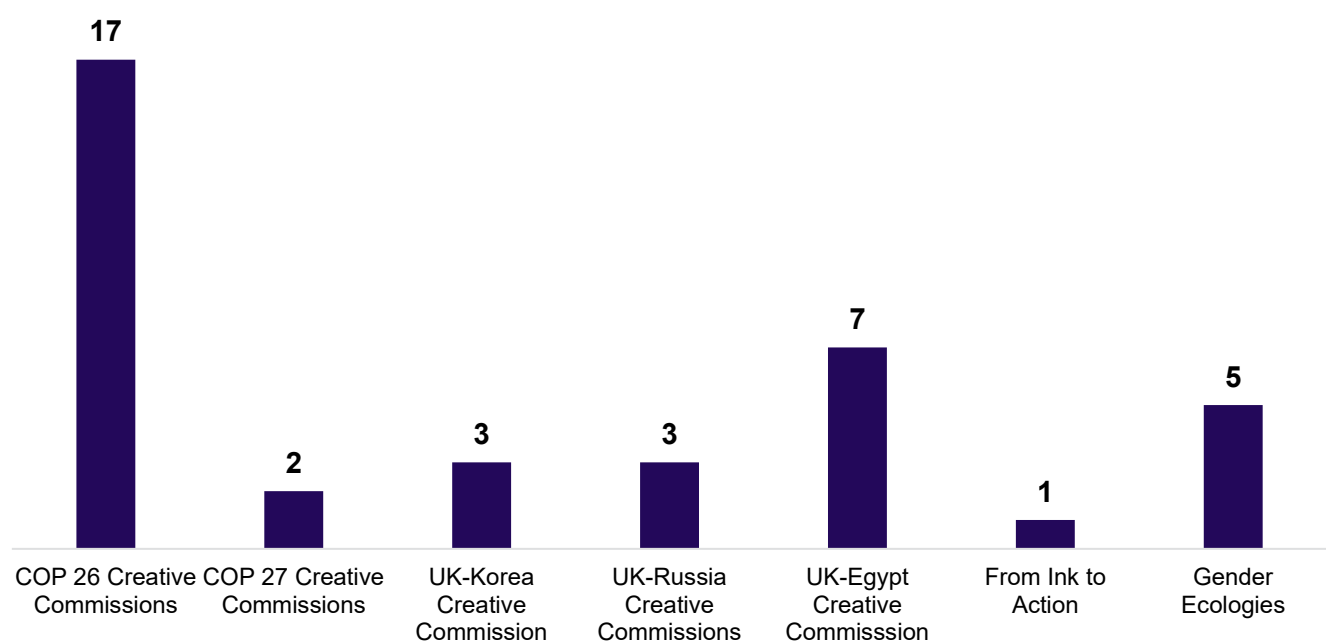
Gender Ecologies grants for COP28, January – October 2023

5 grants, up to £30,000

Developed as part of the 2022 Pakistan/UK Season and commissioned in the lead up to COP28 in the United Arab Emirates, Gender Ecologies explored the intersections of gender, climate, sustainability and heritage through community and built environment.



Count of projects by grant programme

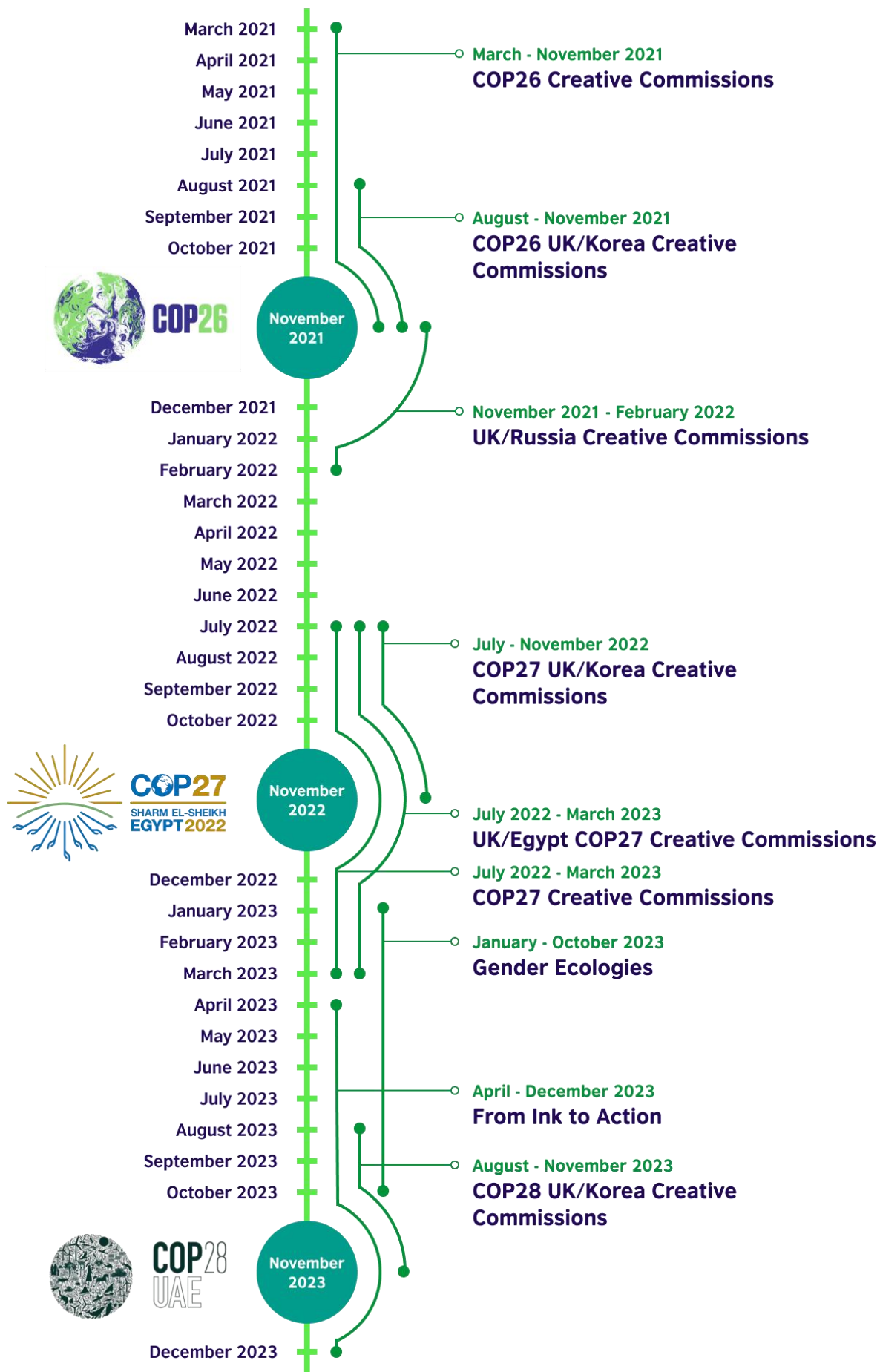


Base: 38 projects



Image: COP26 Creative Commissions, Living Language Land presentation at COP26 Green Zone on 3rd November 2021, Glasgow, Scotland © Gaëlle Beri



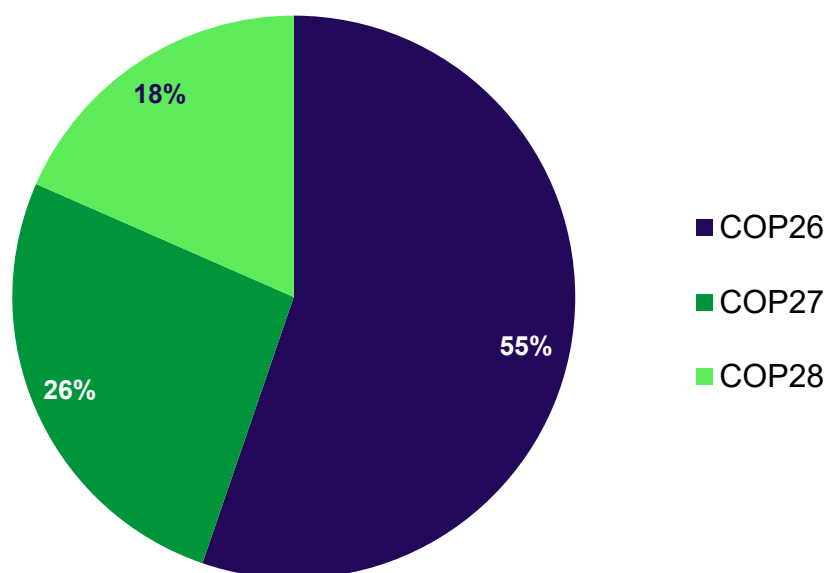


Timeframe – Creative Commissions Delivery 2021-2023

Creative Commissions projects took place from 2021 onwards, with many projects still (in 2024) continuing in some capacity. For projects covered in this report, 21 (55%) projects were commissioned in relation to COP26 in November 2021 in Glasgow, UK, 10 projects (26%) for COP27 in November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, and 7 projects (18%) for COP28 in November 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The seven grant programmes covered in this report had varying timescales and durations. The COP26 Creative Commissions and Gender Ecologies grants had the longest duration, taking place over roughly nine months, while the UK/Russia and the UK/Korea Commissions had the shortest duration, taking place over three months and four to five months, respectively.

Proportion of projects commissioned in relation to COPs

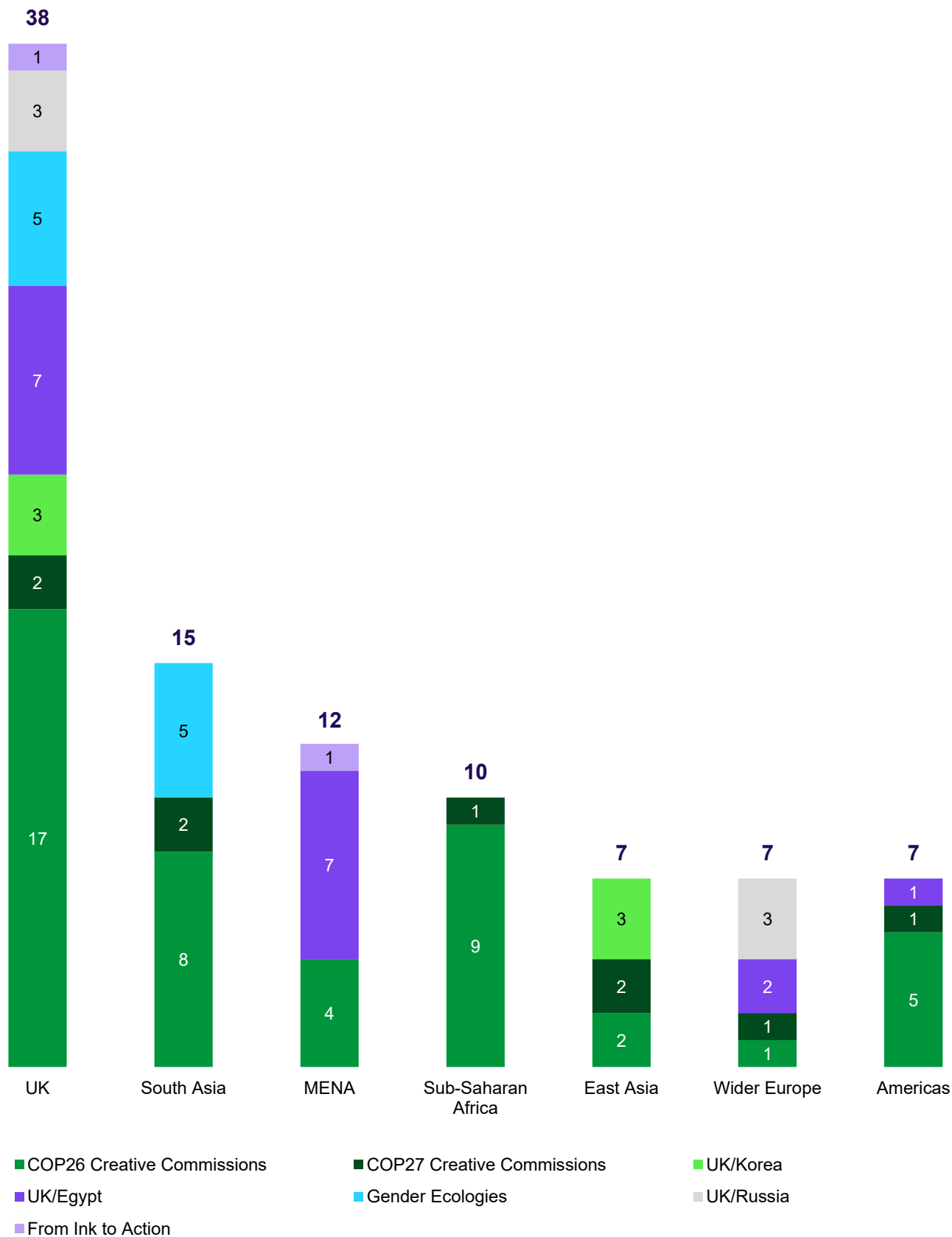


Location

As all projects involved at least one UK-based partner, all projects had some activity taking place in the UK. South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were the regions with the most project activity, as there were 15 projects that had activity take place in South Asia (8 from COP26 commissions, 5 from Gender Ecologies and 2 from the COP27 Commissions) and there were 12 projects with activity in MENA (7 from the UK/Egypt Commissions, 4 from the COP26 Creative Commissions, 1 From Ink to Action and 1 from the COP27 Creative Commissions). East Asia, Americas and Wider Europe had activity from 7 projects each.



Number of Creative Commissions projects by region

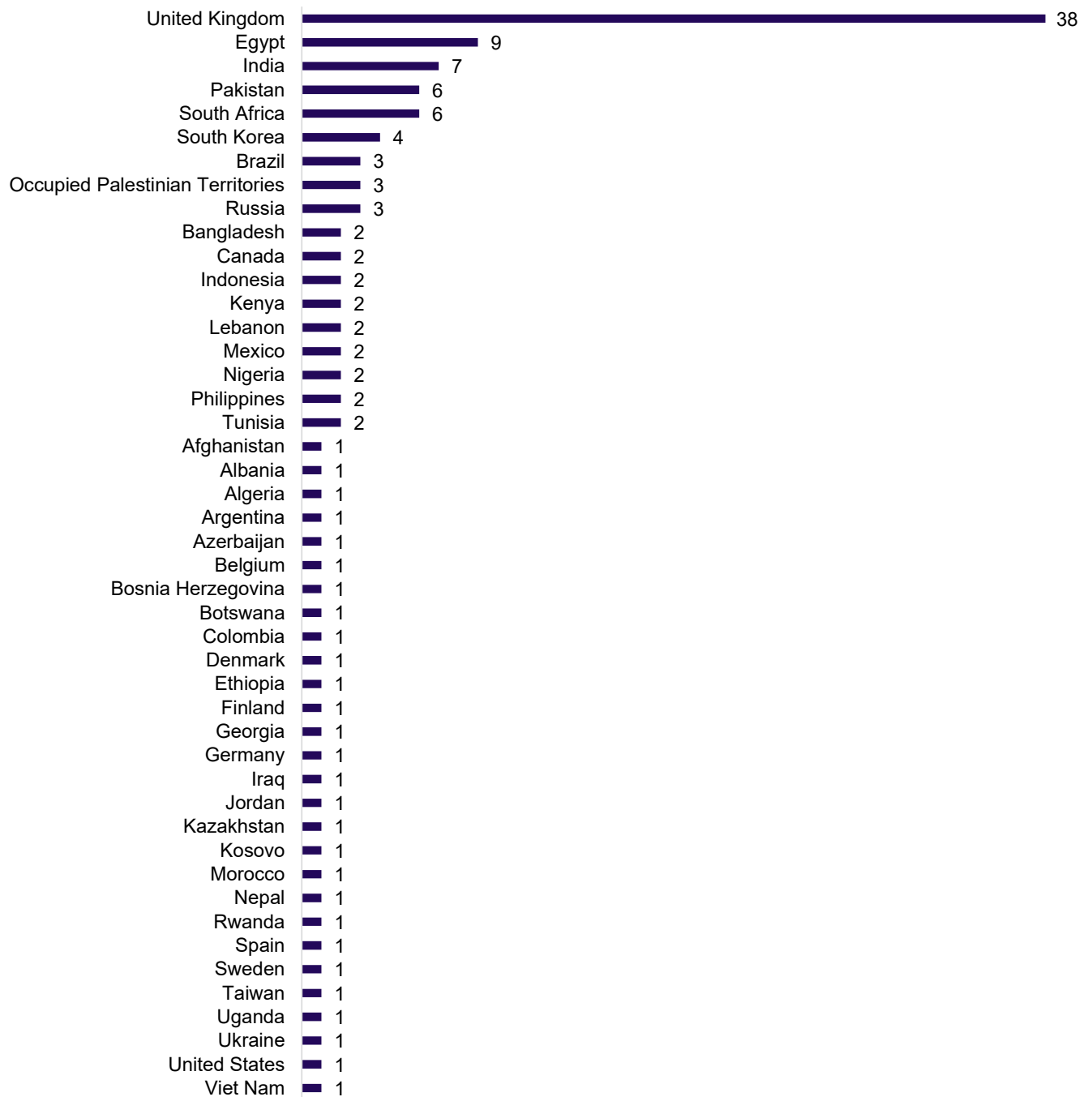


Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1



Creative Commissions projects took place in 46 different countries. There were 9 projects in Egypt (of which 7 were from the UK/Egypt Commissions), 7 projects in India (5 from the COP26 Commissions and 2 from the COP27 Commissions), 6 projects in Pakistan (of which 5 were part of Gender Ecologies), 5 projects in South Africa (5 from the COP26 Commissions and 1 from the COP27 Commissions) and 4 in South Korea (of which 3 were from the UK/Korea Commissions).

Number of Creative Commissions projects by location



Base: 38 projects

More details are available in **Appendix III**.



Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation conducted by The Audience Agency examined activity as a whole programme, bringing together the different funding calls and the portfolio of projects across all those calls. It used the existing monitoring and evaluation – as well as wider programme design and administration – information and documentation, analysing these. These were supplemented with further research including a survey, interviews and focus groups.

The Creative Commissions programme was initiated as an exploration to combine arts, science and technology to tackle the climate emergency. Whilst it did not have a formal logic model⁶, monitoring and evaluation was in place. This is a common strategic approach to engaging with fast moving and varying contexts – as was the case during the pandemic. Doing something and testing reactions to it is a way of developing, over time, a more focused and closely argued intervention.

Outline of initial logic model

- **Inputs from the British Council and others** – resourcing and support – networks, infrastructure and existing creative assets and methodologies
- **Processes and activities** – putting out funding calls, selecting projects and project partners, creative research and development, creative production, marketing and audience engagement
- **Direct outputs from these activities** – which range from tangible outputs like films and artwork, live performance and other events, and levels of participation and engagement
- **Shorter and longer-term outcomes** – benefits – to those participating, engaging and other stakeholders – together with specific ‘legacy’ elements remaining after a project that can be argued to be likely to generate further impact over time.

See **Appendix I** for the Logic Model used in this evaluation.

In considering the outcomes and impacts of the programme, the process had two stages:

- First stage, bottom up: for **evidence-based evaluation** considering pragmatically what can be measured retrospectively, given the available data, along the dimensions of evidence required in the brief – value, reach, impact, legacy, learnings.
- Second stage, top down: considering **additional potential strategic benefits** in the British Council strategic context beyond this programme and the wider global policy and climate context.

⁶ See [Using logic models from the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, March 2023](#) for a useful explanation



The **Strategic and Policy Context** of the programme is:

- the UN 2030 Agenda⁷ through its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- relevant themes and outcomes in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and subsequent developments (Kyoto and Doha Protocols, 2015 Paris Agreement) including Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE)⁸ and the emerging Culture-Based Climate Action (CBCA) movement
- relevant themes and outcomes from the British Council's Climate Connection and Culture Responds to Global Challenges programme and overall Climate, Environment, and Sustainability strategy.

These last wider strategies have been developing - responding to rapidly shifting climate and development contexts – during the Creative Commissions programme and even continuing as this evaluation has been conducted.

Evaluation questions

Based on the strategic framings explained above, the brief and the programme documentation supplied, the evaluation questions that the research aimed to answer were distilled to the following:

1. How can creative practices and arts, culture and heritage contribute positively to **public and policy discourse** and subsequent **action on climate**?
2. In what ways is the British Council – drawing on the strengths of the UK – able to add most value to **public engagement in climate policy, science and action** through creativity and culture?
3. What **knowledge, skills or connections** have the Creative Commissions programme and projects contributed to – in the UK and globally, including **connecting arts, science and technology** together towards collective climate action?
4. What is the **legacy** of the Creative Commissions to date? Including what **knowledge can be captured and shared** across the network of projects – and prospective applicants to create greater legacy?

The following different types of impact were considered:

- I. Which were **intended and planned** by the projects?
- II. Which were the **unexpected outcomes** of the projects – either positive or negative?
- III. Which impacts accrued through **individual projects**? Which came through being part of a **larger cohort** – or **ongoing programme**?

⁷ [United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda](#)

⁸ [United Nations Action for Climate Empowerment](#)



Evaluation research & development process

The evaluation process worked through the following stages

1. Design phase

- Literature review of relevant policies, strategies, academic and grey literature
- Desk research reviewing documentation and data provided by the British Council
- Development of a conceptual framework mapping the intersection of creativity and culture, social justice and climate action (see [Strategic and Policy Context](#) section below)
- Development of a research and data collection framework – with data collection tools such as surveys and topic guides for interviews and focus groups alongside a project log of all available data about projects and project partners

2. Delivery phase

- Interviews and focus groups with:
 - Selection of the project teams
 - Staff at the British Council and its co-commissioning partners
 - Stakeholders, including some not involved in the programme but operating in the climate policy, action and creative areas
- Collection, collation, summarising and categorisation of data provided by and about the projects and project partners
- Additional social media 'listening' analysis done on an experimental basis⁹ to gauge online engagement with the projects and their impact on public and policy discourse
- Synthesis of information gathered from other stakeholders and ongoing review of policies and strategies, academic and grey literature

3. Conclusions and recommendations

- Drawing together of reflections, conclusions and recommendations
- Refinement of evaluation framework for ongoing and future projects.

Data sources

The data used was based on:

- Publicly available information about the projects online, within social media
- A survey of projects with a sample of 21 responses from 14 projects
- 13 interviews and 3 focus groups with 31 people from 22 projects

⁹ This was not part of the brief for the evaluation. It was done on an experimental basis to test whether social media analysis could contribute to answering research question 1 (the extent to which the projects and their creative practices contributed to public and policy discourse around climate action) more fully than would be possible with the other research methods. See [Appendix IX](#).



- Data provided by the British Council on:
 - funding rounds and process
 - open calls and applications
 - the projects selected and their partners and focus
 - monitoring and evaluation data
 - interim and final reporting of projects
 - marketing and communications briefings
- Focus groups and interviews with British Council staff
- Interviews with stakeholders not involved in the programme but operating in the climate action, social justice and creative space

Limitations

This evaluation and review of the Creative Commissions is based largely on existing documentation and reporting. To this end, many of its elements rest on ‘meta-evaluation’, that is, analysing monitoring and evaluation that has been carried out previously and which, therefore, comes with its own existing conclusions.

This has efficiency benefits in that it reduces the amount of direct primary research to be done, avoiding unnecessary duplication of data. It also means that the projects can be examined with greater reflection and with consideration for their long-term impacts. However, it also presents its own challenges in that

- There are uneven and varying types of monitoring and evaluation which makes comparisons, agglomeration and standardisation difficult.
- It was more complex and time-consuming to source the data and reporting from and about the projects than expected. As a consequence, the logic model (**Appendix I**), evaluation framework and data collection tools had to be developed prior to being able to conduct a full audit of the available data and documentation.
- There were gaps of up to 2.5 years since some projects finished, and as a consequence, some project participants were no longer with the organisations – or had forgotten details about their project’s delivery.
- There was very little information available about applicants who were not successful.

Suggestions for ways of avoiding these limitations are included in the recommendations for future monitoring and evaluation.



Findings

The success of the Creative Commission projects rests on the different ways that they generate value:

- Artistic and cultural value
- Raising awareness of global connections, differences and contrasts
- Cultural relations
- Community-based approaches driving engagement and innovation
- An activist approach which leads to change.

The projects demonstrate a remarkable sense of imagination and creativity:

- It's not just that these are artistic representations of scientific ideas for practical effect; it is also that the science and creativity combine in new and unpredicted ways.
- Many projects have 'listening' in their titles or refer to sound, which is interesting for the scientists as well as creatives. It is not just about interpreting science imaginatively – but a recognition of the way they can work together.
- They demonstrate what is possible by opening up new creative vistas and artistic worlds (eg. trees grown and arranged so they can be seen from space on Google Earth).
- Many comment on going 'beyond the graph' – the projects enable people to feel what is at stake rather than being bombarded with data and science about the situation.

The projects 'show rather than tell' the consequences of climate change and environmental damage – for example, examining the impacts on communities around the world – the way it affects such important everyday things as growing vegetables, cooking, well-being and health. It's not an abstract concept. For example, as part of the Creative Commissions project **Doing Zero**, community members in Nairobi and Manchester took part in joint workshops with creatives and climate experts and looked at the intersection between mental health, poverty and climate change in the context of food.



Image: UK/Egypt Creative Commissions, To Begin the Dance Once More, Traditional Dance Forum of Scotland



Many projects highlighted differences in **awareness of the consequences of climate change** and **awareness of climate change science and policy** and between so-called 'developed' countries and Lower- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), where climate change impacts can be more extreme and with a consequent need for more urgent attention. These different positions and experiences are exemplified by many of the Creative Commissions projects.

It's more obvious here [Nepal] the impacts of climate change. But our children... were not so exposed to why [they have come about]. For them, the landslides were normal... When we started this project... they had to interview the older generation... and understand [what had changed].
(Connecting the Climate Challenge, partner from Nepal)

I generally always think we're not on the cutting edge of such things. I don't think I'd ever heard of COP before... And then hearing from those... in the UK, it was such a contrast of the way we look at these things. (Phone Call to the World, partner from South Africa)

One of the things that we talked about was... that kind of concern about environmental issues and climate and sustainability was a lot more prevalent in the UK than it was in South Korea.
(Gathering Moss, partner from UK)

The community-based and people-centred aspects of many of the projects is a key differentiator to more science-, policy- or business-led activities – and is one of the factors of their success. They are not just artists and scientists working together in a vacuum. The projects also sought to create a space where the perspectives and experiences of local communities - including indigenous groups, young people and schools – could be heard.

Many of the projects come from a position of **activism** – actively wanting to find a way to argue for the ideas, fight for change and demonstrate its importance. This point of view has helped to make strong powerful projects which are beyond 'merely' doing a project 'about' climate change and the environment. For instance, **Green Spaces Atlas** worked with young urban planners, artists and designers to present ideas and solutions for greening urban spaces in Gaborone, Botswana, with the goal of inspiring city planners to design urban environments that work for both the people and planet.

Storytelling is a vital ingredient. Either as artists or as active participants, the ability to be able to share the problems narratively is a big element of the way the projects worked. It enables people to understand the issues at a deeper emotional level that goes beyond the theory. Film and video representation seem to have worked very well in telling this story – it can be used locally, globally and in the COPs. Especially powerful are the short, clever films like **We Still Have A Chance** which uses animation to show Exeter and Cairo city centres being converted into green oases.



We are sensory beings in a wider sensory ecosystem... instead of art and culture being increasingly co-opted to achieve ecologically destructive economic targets, it can surely be more powerfully harnessed to inspire a re-evaluation of our deeper feelings and needs as a society, and in doing so help us tackle root causes of our current crises. (Nick Bridge CMG, former UK Special Representative for Climate Change under five Foreign Secretaries)

Project Goals

Projects sought to engage audiences, ignite conversations and inspire climate action through creative and artistic responses. Many of the projects aimed to bring empathetic, human, and relatable responses to the climate crisis, acknowledging the power of art and culture to add new, beneficial dimensions to raising awareness and catalysing change.

One project pointed out how their purpose was to ignite a spark in the audience:

Our messaging and our projects are about engaging the audience; to start thinking [for] themselves...we want to enlighten people through their involvement...make it very easy for people to talk about these issues and the challenges [of addressing climate change] that comes with it. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

Below is a 'ladder' of potential goals that can realistically be achieved through the engagement of different publics with the outputs of projects such as those commissioned by the Creative Commissions. The first rung of awareness – of any communications campaign – then builds through higher impact, and harder to achieve goals of solutions ultimately leading to action and its benefits. This ladder of project purposes draws on different models of change used in or relevant to international development settings¹⁰ as well as the Action for Climate Empowerment thematic goals, and language drawn from global climate and cultural policy and with input from expert advisors.

In the context of climate change and environment, this kind of change model is relevant in moving beyond 'talking' about climate – of which there has been much since the UNFCCC in 1992, a common criticism of the COPs and other such gatherings – towards climate action. All projects clearly had some element of building awareness and understanding of climate issues, action and science.

¹⁰ Such as [Learning for Sustainability – Communicating for Change](#)



Ladder of Change

1. Building of awareness ('there is a problem') and understanding ('what is the problem') – of climate issues, action and science, of which public engagement with science¹¹ forms a key part.

Example: Ten Years to Save the World and **From Ink to Action** used comic art to address the climate crisis, producing anthologies and public exhibitions.

2. Discourse ('what is said') - which includes activities such as facilitating international dialogues on climate change, promoting intersectoral dialogue on national level, creating new narratives, activism and protest and advocating for climate justice.

Example: Everything Change created an international forum for generating debate and new ideas around global issues.

3. Empowerment ('motivation to do') – through sense of hope and agency

Example: Project arCc and **Connecting the Climate Challenge** empowered young people in assuming responsibility towards saving the planet.

4. Solutions ('what is to be done') – including imagining alternative collective responses

Example: Trees for Life fostered skills development and sharing around tree management and supported community efforts to restore local water and bio-systems through tree care.

5. Adoption ('getting it done') - including activities such as driving change, influencing consumer behaviour, shaping attitudes, promoting green practices/inspire sustainable consumption and mobilising and provoking people to act.

Example: Tales of Care and Repair worked with local communities to create Repair Declarations to adopt local repair mindsets.

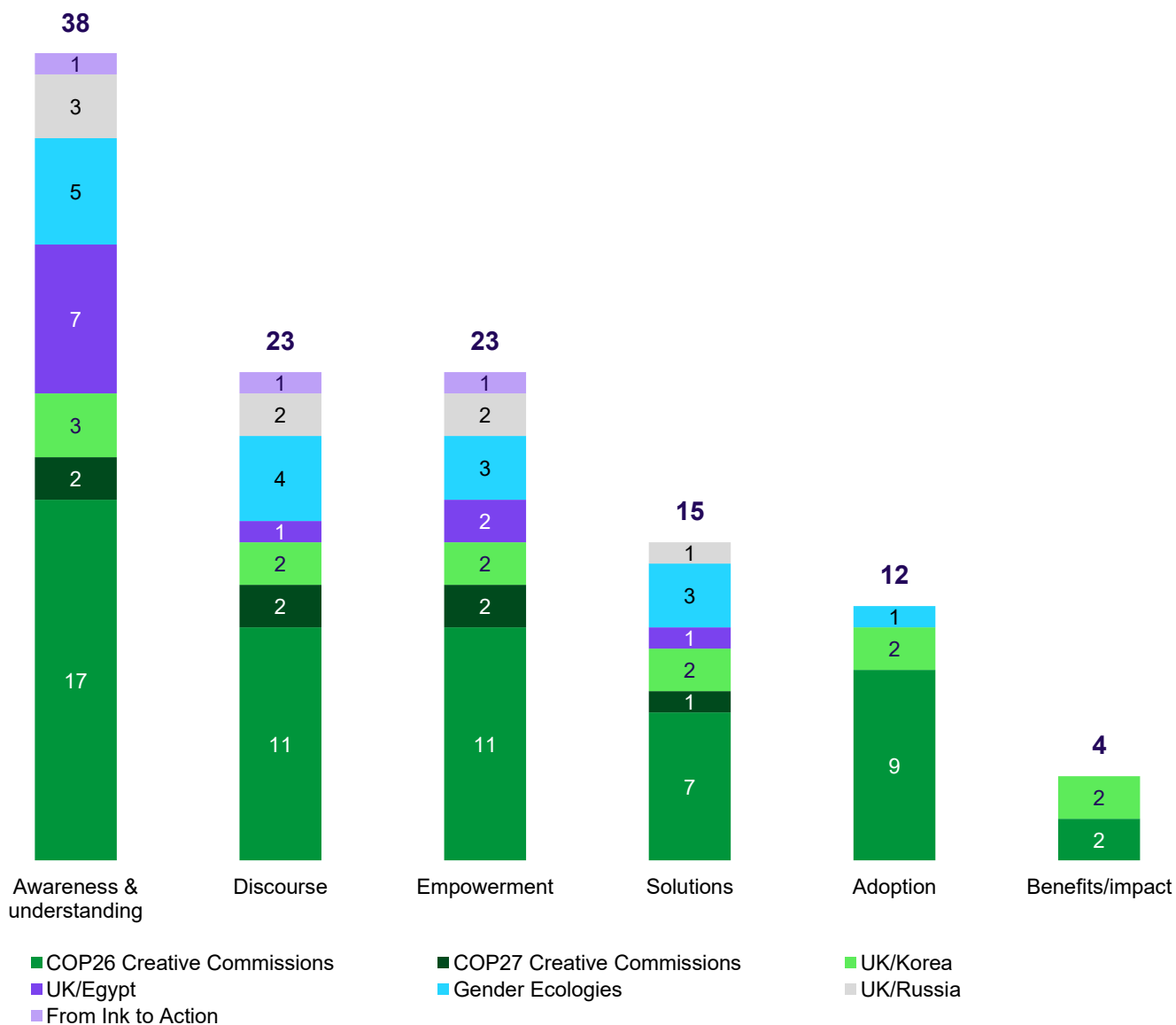
6. Realising benefits ('impact of doing it') – including direct benefits to project audiences, participants and practitioners, improving audience wellbeing through sustainable lifestyles.

Example: The Green Spaces Atlas implemented community projects and measured environmental and social benefits of urban green space.

¹¹ Which many scientific researchers will see as part of their role, see [Cambridge Elements | Public Engagement with Science](#)



Analysis of types of project goals



Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1

This ladder then forms a framework against which projects' range and level of ambition for their intended impact are categorised (see above). When asked to self-select project goals in a survey, project partners tended to 'overcode' them – selecting most or all categories. This categorisation was manually reviewed by researchers based on project documentation and, where possible, conversations with project partners.

Specific recommendations regarding project goals have been included in [Recommendations and Reflections](#). As explained in more detail below in the [Strategic and Policy Context](#), Action for Climate Empowerment emphasises the shift in debate around public policy and sector strategies when policy, technology, science and business stakeholders listen to civil society. 61% (23) of projects had a goal to change the discourse as well as empowerment and motivating people to take action.



Already, 32% (12) of projects to date, encouraged people to adopt changes or take action against climate change and 11% (4) of projects emphasised the benefits and impacts of taking climate action.

What really is interesting, is their [young people's] viewpoint, not someone who's sitting on the city council or whatever, yeah, you're really getting people who are going to be enjoying those spaces for decades. Their input on what they actually should be like. (Green Space Atlas, partner from UK)



Image: COP26 Creative Commissions, Collection of images from Millipede, National Theatre of Scotland and Think Arts

Audiences and Reach

The Creative Commissions sought to engage audiences and communities in response to the climate crisis and the majority of projects put their audiences and participants first when designing and delivering their projects. One project emphasised the importance of putting the audiences and communities at the centre of their project:

An important theme about the project was the interactivity...the technology, how we interact with the audience and how we can bring our audience into the centre of the conversation. (Gathering Moss, South Korea partner)

Across the 7 funding rounds, there were at least:

- **26,221** people directly engaged face-to-face
- **270,002** actively engaged online



- **9,862,429** audiences engaged through broadcast, digital and social media¹²

Due to data limitations, gaps and inconsistencies across the different funding rounds, the actual direct reach of the 38 projects will have been significantly higher than the totals that emerged from the evaluation.

Analysis of self-reported audience reach figures

Funding Round	Face-to-face	Online	Broadcast, digital & social media
Overall	26,221	270,002	9,862,429
COP26 Commissions	5,319	265,351	7,807,119
COP27 Commissions	2,067	940	372,118
UK/Korea	5,149	388	56,548
UK/Egypt	8,499	323	320,636
Gender Ecologies	5,187	3,000	1,306,008

Of the 18 projects which did report engagement figures disaggregated by gender and age, there was a relatively representative split across gender and age. For example, the COP26 projects engaged face-to-face:

- with 1137 men and 1285 women
- at least 900 individuals under 15
- 964 individuals aged 15-24
- over 720 individuals over 24.
- online engagement with 1479 women, 1301 men and at least 1606 people under 15.

Whilst the limitations in the data do not allow for the evaluation to provide a comprehensive quantitative summary of the reach, the qualitative research conducted through focus groups, interviews, surveys and desk research reveals a wide range of audiences that were engaged by the projects. 20 out of the 38 projects worked with local communities, 19 projects worked with young people and 10 projects worked directly with indigenous peoples.

¹² Self-reported media reach numbers by projects.



I know the British Council is always [focused on] the younger people, but we're trying to get everybody from the whole spectrum... Some of the people we wanted to work with were in prison because of their activism...mostly our audience was students. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

20 projects worked locally and internationally to bring communities together to respond to the climate crisis:

This project was... all about engaging and getting stories and communication with the wider community. We did have a real challenge in engaging with the really poor working-class community in North Manchester and [them] feeling that the... conversation around climate change and food was relevant to them ... we managed, nevertheless, to put a group together, which included... students and... local community members. In Nairobi this was much, much easier. (Doing Zero, UK partner)

There was a wide range of types of engagement with individuals, from large exhibitions and installations such as **From Ink to Action**, to film screenings at COPs with over 200 attendees such as **Songs of the Earth**, to local participatory workshops such as in **Permaculture – Gardens of Resilience/Gender Ecologies**.

Many projects reached audiences through screenings of film or video in person or online:

[W]e managed to produce two different audio-visual public performances. Each was performed twice in two different cities in Egypt. We had a total audience of 1,500+. (Listening to the Sea, Egypt partner)

[The] screening of 'Songs of the Earth' received positive response from a diverse audience during the launch of the Climate Skills-Seeds for Transition India project. The screening had over 200 attendees...the audience including founders, directors and CEOs... as well as professors, students, researchers, and professionals working in the climate and youth engagement space. (Songs of the Earth, UK partner)

A core emphasis of the Creative Commissions was on digital innovations and solutions, and projects found unique ways and new styles for audiences to engage. This was particularly important as many of the projects were developed and delivered in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, with many countries still having lockdowns and restrictions when activities were taking place.

Because the interface of our whole entire project is on Google Arts and Culture, it does give an opportunity to people to dip in or not on an informal basis. (Trees for Life, UK partner)



Other projects used innovative digital methods to engage with participants and audiences, producing different types of presentation. This included virtual reality, augmented reality or imaginative ways of thinking about the issues. For example, **Museum of Plastic** used the concept of thinking about a future time when plastic no longer existed and therefore a museum would need to exist to explain what it was:

What we felt was important about the virtual reality side of things. And I think partly, virtual reality is still quite new, you know, that's not new in the greater scheme of things. [...] and it's the kind of idea that you know, this is the Museum of plastic. You could have a museum of climate change. You could have a museum of lots of different environmentally or socially related things. (Museum of Plastic, South Africa Partner)

Experimental social media 'listening' research – described in more detail in **Appendix IX** – took data from 10 of the COP26 Creative Commissions tracked posts by the projects and engagement with them. The projects stimulated 140 'user-generated' posts – retweets, replies, comments etc. The analysis of the accounts posting such user-generated content suggests that two thirds of engagement in the projects sampled came from people working in culture, climate or journalism – and a third from people looking like 'unaffiliated individuals' likely to be members of the public.

Engagement on Twitter/X was more substantial – i.e. written text – than on other platforms, whereas Facebook and Instagram reactions tended to be positive reactions and congratulations. Across all the projects, 72% of user-generated content reacting to posts from projects was positive in sentiment – mostly joy and optimism – with 22% neutral and 6% negative. Even where projects inspired negative responses, this did not mean that they were negative about the project – it could be a negative emotion to the subject matter. Only 1 of the 140 user-generated posts was disparaging about a project.

The conclusion from the experimental social media listening research was that it is possible to build a picture of the online discourse stimulated by projects. With more project data – social media accounts, hashtags used – and paid-for access to social media APIs it would be possible to create a much more comprehensive overview.

As an international brand, the British Council helped projects to reach a wider audience, give them more credibility and attract international attention. The relationship opened doors for them, and they were able to leverage the British Council's support further.

We would never have got this project off the ground without the support of the British Council.

...we definitely reached a wider audience because [the British Council] have a bigger channel...posted about our event [under]... British Council Arts. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

They were also instrumental in clearing so many of the bureaucratic red tape that surrounds not only Egypt, but also COP. (The Earth Turns, Egypt Partner)



Having British Council as our funder and as our sponsor would give us more credibility of the events, and also, in turn reach more audience. (Nine Earths, UK Partner)

People listen to you if you get a [British Council] grant, taken seriously, gives weight and credibility.

Theatre in [our country] is not well-supported ... So having their [British Council's] upfront trust monetarily was able to open a lot of doors for us ... They also made sure that the right people knew about it, saw it, came to it, and supported it, getting us into the British Embassy, meeting the ambassador, meeting the right gatekeepers that could open doors for us and then connecting us with other Creative Commissions artists. (The Earth Turns, Egypt Partner)

Within the creative briefs of the open calls for the Creative Commissions, the British Council encouraged projects to foreground the voices of individuals and communities already experiencing the consequences of climate change. For instance, **Littoral Chronicle** from the UK-Korea Creative Commissions worked with coastal communities and ecological migrants in South Korea to capture their experiences and illustrate climate change's human impact. In another instance, **To Begin the Dance Once More** (previously titled **Isis and Danu – part of UK-Egypt Creative Commissions**) choreographed a performance that centred the experiences of climate refugees.



Case Study

Songs of the Earth

<https://bit.ly/EDNTeachersHandbook>

https://youtu.be/UerChOwsjq0?si=xrJyKOE_Z9gH_a1y



Soumik Datta Arts (UK)

Earth Day Network India (India)



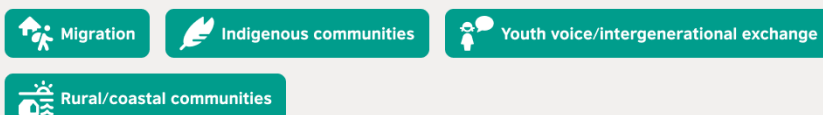
CREATIVE & CULTURAL FORMS



CLIMATE THEMES



SOCIAL JUSTICE THEMES



Songs of the Earth was a project that planned for longevity of its outputs to ensure that the work they did on the project had long term impacts and reached as many people as it could globally. The project created a climate change animated film and music album that tells a global story, addressing issues such as climate migration, extreme weather, ocean pollution and deforestation. The project launched and screened their film and music album at COP26 and performed at No. 10 Downing Street, Royal Albert Hall and Southbank Centre. In addition to the film, accessible on YouTube, Songs of the Earth Developed a handbook for Teachers: 'What is Climate Change? Innovative Ways to Engage Students.'

“

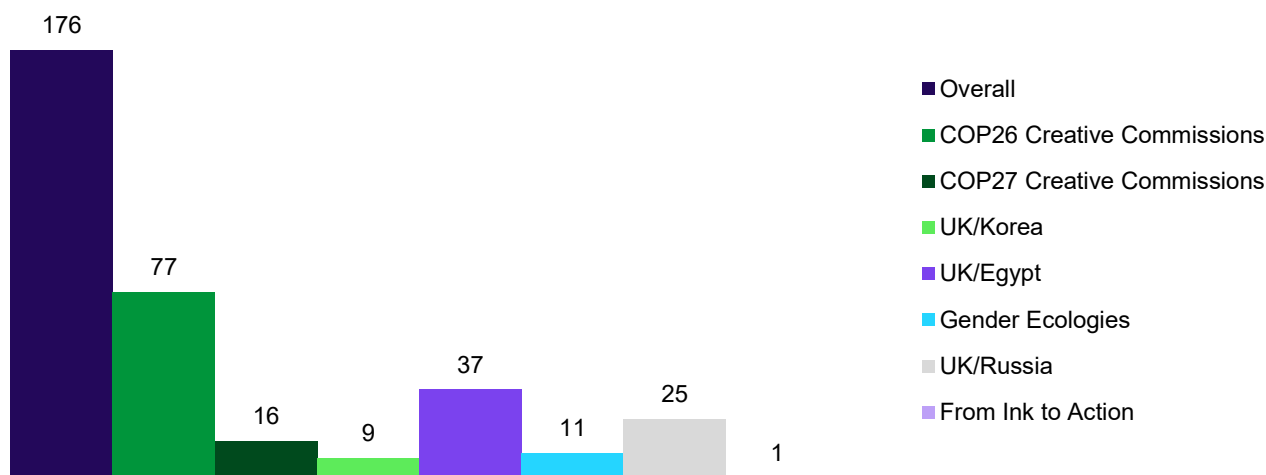
We've also included the links to the film as well as to the music videos in an e-book that we've come up with on climate change, ways to teach students. So this has various chapters on how art can be used to teach climate change, whether it's through puppetry, through songs, through animation.



Partnerships & Collaboration

Partnerships and collaboration were at the heart of all Creative Commissions. There were a total of **176 partners** across the 38 Creative Commissions projects, with a median of 3.5 partners per project. Some projects had a large number of partners, such as **Project arCc** with 14 partner organisations. All projects consisted of one UK partner and at least one partner beyond the UK.

Number of partners in Creative Commissions projects



Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1

Number of Partners

Number of partners	Overall	COP26 Commissions	COP27 Commissions	UK/ Korea	UK/ Egypt	Gender Ecologies	UK/ Russia	From Ink to Action
Per funding round	176	77	16	9	37	11	25	1
Average per project	5	5	8	3	5	2	8	1
Median per project	3.5	4	8	3	3	2	9	1
Most common per project	3	3	-	3	3	2	-	-
Minimum	1	2	5	3	2	2	6	1
Maximum	14	14	11	3	10	3	10	1
Base	38	17	2	3	7	5	3	1

For most funding rounds, all projects were required to include at least one partner based in the UK and at least one overseas partner. For instance, for the Gender Ecologies open call, projects were required to be led by a partner based in Pakistan, for the UK/Egypt open call, applications were required to include at least one partner in the UK and one partner in Egypt and for the UK/Korea open calls, there had to be at least one partner in the UK and one in South Korea.



Although international partnerships were a requirement for the proposals, the partnerships had to be in place at the time of applying. The British Council did not provide support to partnership building by connecting applicants to potential partners.

The range of countries from which partners originated varied with each funding round. For instance, for the COP26 and COP27 Creative Commissions, there was a wide range of countries represented, often with at least one partner in every country in which the project had activity taking place. For these two funding rounds, the commissioning process encouraged global partnerships. However, in the UK/Egypt, UK/Korea, Gender Ecologies and People-to-People Links commissions, as these were country-specific commissions, there tended only to be partners from the UK and the target partner country. For a list of all locations of partners by grant programme, see **Appendix III**.

Overall, projects strongly emphasised the value and impact of cultural relations partnerships. The dynamics between partners, including their adaptive and resilient natures, their motivation and dedication to the aims of the programme, made the collaborations possible. Partnerships in Creative Commissions projects were both new and existing, though the projects themselves had to be new and original. For instance, in **Listening to Ice**, the partners built upon prior multi-year research while **Everything Change** brought some partners together for the first time.

Through this, I met [our UK partner], [and] we paid for him to come to Dhaka. So, we actually met him, and that was a fantastic relationship that we were introduced to through this Creative Commission. Otherwise, I wouldn't have known him, and we wouldn't have had this amazing partnership. (Everything Change, Bangladesh Partner)

The British Council plays a critical role of convener and connector, bringing people together from around the world to collaborate, learn, create and take action.

The value of the British Council is in connecting our creative sectors around the world ... connected culture ... connected creative industries... connected communities, and these projects do all of those things. ... individual creatives, artists ... also...networks, partnerships, institutions... so that the sector and the individuals in the UK have an opportunity to be connected with like-minded others, and to co-create and co-design with them, at the community level and at the sector level. (Doing Zero, UK partner)

Digital technologies were essential in developing and building relationships, connecting partners globally to collaborate on their projects. This was particularly relevant for a funding programme focused on the climate challenge; digital solutions to creative collaboration at a distance offered partners the ability to connect globally with a low carbon footprint.

My feet didn't need to do the walking to travel the world and build those relationships.



[Our project] was made with teams in each country, each working together online to produce their own parts of the film. This feels like a way forward for new creative processes that are environmentally sustainable... [the] possibility to collaborate internationally in new ways.
(motherEarth, UK partner)

Another key accomplishment has been the creation of a collaborative online space/web-based platform where artists, creatives, and audiences can engage in meaningful dialogue. (Gathering Moss, South Korea partner)



Image: COP26 Creative Commissions, Connecting the Climate Challenge, Wellcome Centre for Cell Biology, Tribhuvan University, Teach for Nepal, Midlothian Council

Projects stressed the ‘collective nature of the Creative Commissions as a whole, a unique community of grantees.’ The British Council organised online sessions for COP26 grantees on safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, and communications. They also hosted two gatherings in London, one just before COP26 to share experiences and insights, and the second as a post-project reflection workshop. Most UK partners took part, as well as contributions being made online from partners around the world.

That's one of the nice aspects of it. You get to meet other organisations in the same situation. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

[The British Council] has nurtured something pretty amazing - all of the other projects' work. Hard to get a full grasp of how much has been developed.



Everyone we meet through the British Council is incredible. And I think there are a few British Council networks already. I just was on another one ... as a virtual residency, and we always meet amazing people. (Doing Zero, Kenya partner)

Much of the most vital and meaningful outcomes of the project are the intangible conversations and exchanges that took place not only in the organised online workshops with all participants but that continued informally between individuals to develop the final artworks and texts, over emails, zoom calls and occasionally in person. (Deep Ecologies, UK partner)

Whilst some projects felt like they were part of a network or cohort alongside others in the same funding round, others called for more opportunities to get to know others who were designing and delivering Creative Commissions.

...during the initial webinars, we had the opportunity to meet and greet online, but not everyone is engaging that much, people turn off their camera... The only time we meet [people from] our cohort in person was at the very end... if we could meet them a bit earlier, that would be great. It did feel like we were in the same gang as it were, but we didn't really get to know them that well, only fleeting moments. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

Beyond the partnerships and collaborations within the project, individuals and organisations were able to establish relationships outside of the main project team, including with local communities and scientists.

Our collaboration with our international partners and local communities on the ground...have been essential...connections that we've made. Because there are, frankly, very few people who are actually doing what we are doing. (The Way We Ate, Pakistan partner)

[An] Inspirational amount of positive responses during project – scientists coming to us, willing to contribute – fuelled our will to make it bigger and better.

Looking forward, connections established during the Creative Commissions laid the groundwork for future collaborations and relationships.

[Our organisation] was able to establish valuable connections with international companies in the creative industry, fostering potential future collaborations. (Ring the Bell/Stop These Games/Street Art Opera, UK partner)

While the partnerships and collaborations that were forged through Creative Commissions programmes were overwhelmingly positive, projects did encounter some challenges and setbacks. One of the important learnings for UK-based partners was being mindful of post-colonial dynamics and ensuring that their partnership was not seen as exploitative, rather ensuring that the partnerships were mutual and reciprocal. Working internationally means navigating and respecting different cultural and political contexts.



Although workshops and information on safeguarding were provided to COP26 and COP27 projects, some partners said that they would have benefitted from additional insights and instruction about safeguarding, particularly in different cultural contexts, including outlining the minimum legal safeguarding requirements and duty of care. Partners, primarily partners based in the UK, also expressed a desire to understand better the rules of engagement with partners and audiences, welcoming advice from local British Council country teams, including about political contexts, equality, inclusion, diversity, gender and engaging with different socio-economic groups.

In some instances, partnerships were described as uneven, with variable capacity that put stress on one or multiple other partners or with a discrepancy between UK-based and overseas partners in terms of fair pay. Logistically, language barriers and time zones were also frequently cited as challenges in international partnerships and collaborations.

...the basis of the grant was that we had to find a UK partner... and we were very excited about that collaboration. However, [it] did break down, and despite our best abilities, we were not able to have regular communication. (The Way We Ate, Pakistan partner)



Image: COP26 Creative Commissions, City of London Exhibition, British Council.

Beyond the Creative Commissions grants themselves, the British Council forged a number of key partnerships and collaborations to amplify the outcomes and impacts of the projects. For instance, the Creative Commissions exhibition that took place from November to December 2021 in partnership with the City of London Corporation as part of their Outdoor Arts programme ***A Thing of Beauty***, showcased the work of nine Creative Commissions projects. COP26 Creative Commissions were also featured in



various media, thanks to partnerships developed by the British Council, including a BBC article, One Earth science magazine, Harrison Parrott podcast, and Barbican International Enterprises engagement.

These sorts of exhibitions and gatherings offer the opportunity to enable greater attention for the projects, attracting different audiences and visitors and providing a forum for the projects to network and discover what others are doing.



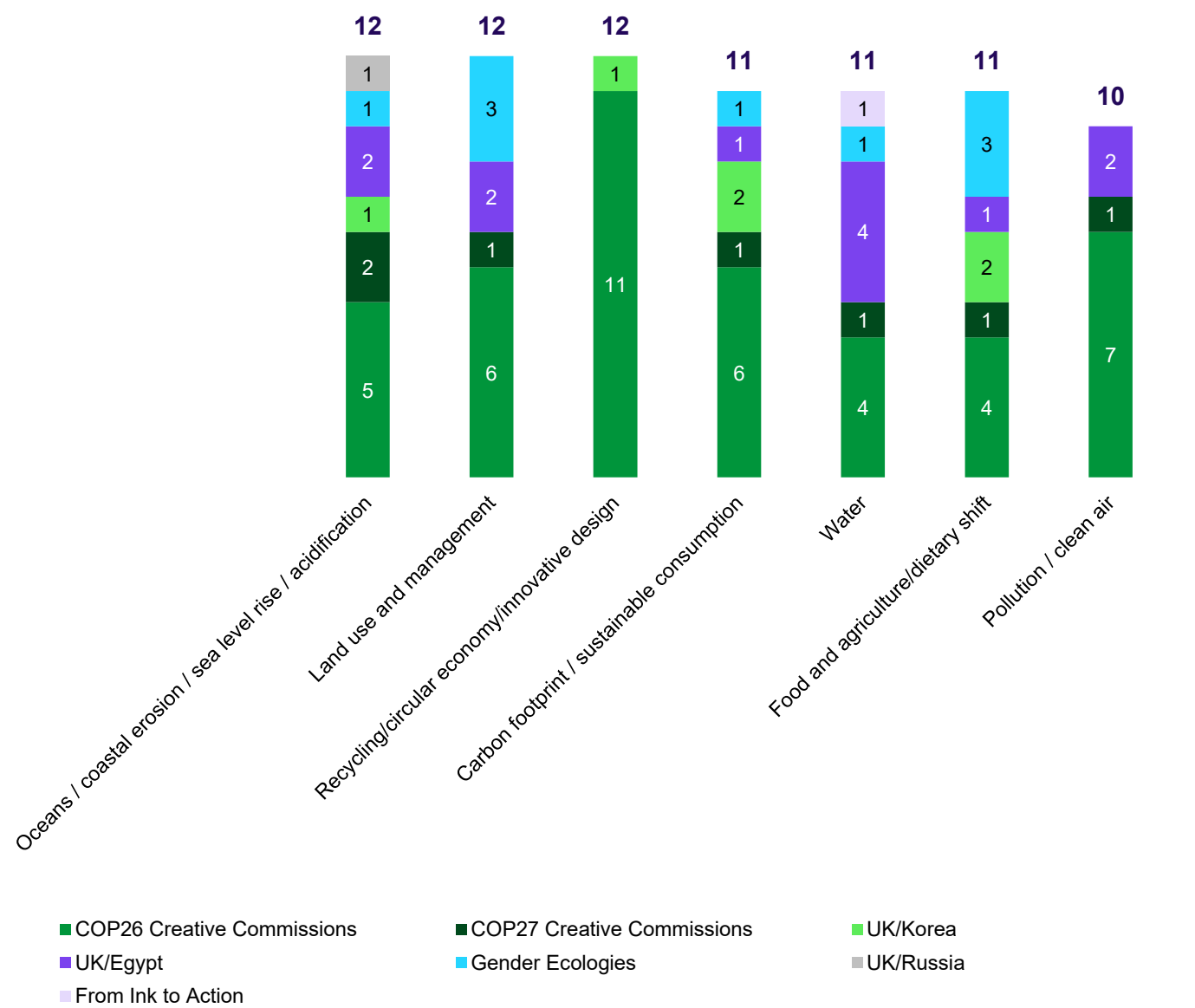
Climate & Environment themes

Projects addressed a wide variety of themes related to climate and environment. Given the nature of the programme and calls, Climate Action / Activism was a theme across all 38 projects.

- Topics relating to oceans (including coastal erosion, ocean pollution, sea level rise, acidification), land use and management, and recycling, circular economy and innovative design accounted for just under one third of projects (32% / 12 projects).
- Topics relating to carbon footprint/sustainable consumption, water and food and agriculture/dietary shift were also addressed by a substantial number of projects (29% / 11 projects).

Top Climate & Environment themes addressed by Creative Commissions projects

N.B. This chart includes themes addressed by at least 10 projects. For all themes by project, see **Appendix V**.



Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1



When looking at the climate and environment themes addressed by each grant programme, some patterns and differences emerge, including the following:

- For the 17 COP26 Creative Commissions, 65% (vs. 32% overall) of projects addressed **recycling/circular economy/innovative design**, 41% (vs. 18% overall) **renewable energy/energy efficiency** and 41% (vs. 26% overall) **pollution/clean air**.
- Both of the COP27 Creative Commissions addressed themes related to **oceans** and **forests**.
- Two of the three (67%) UK/Korea projects addressed **carbon footprint/sustainable consumption** (vs. 29% overall) and **food and agriculture/dietary shift** (29% overall).
- Of the 7 UK/Egypt projects, 57% (vs. 29% overall) addressed themes related to **water**.
- Three of the five (60%) Gender Ecologies projects addressed **land use and management** (vs. 32% overall) and **food and agriculture / dietary shift** (vs. 29% overall).
- Two of the three (67%) UK/Russia projects addressed **permafrost / melting glaciers** (vs. 16% overall).

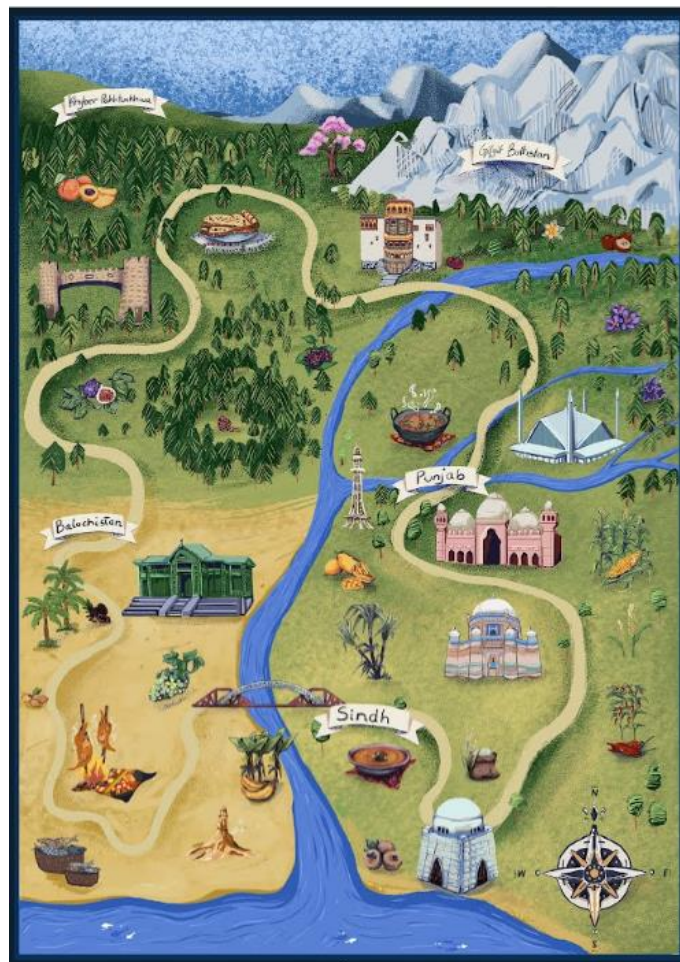


Image: Gender Ecologies, The Way We Ate, Pakistan's Food Regions, 2023, SOC Films

Multiplicidade



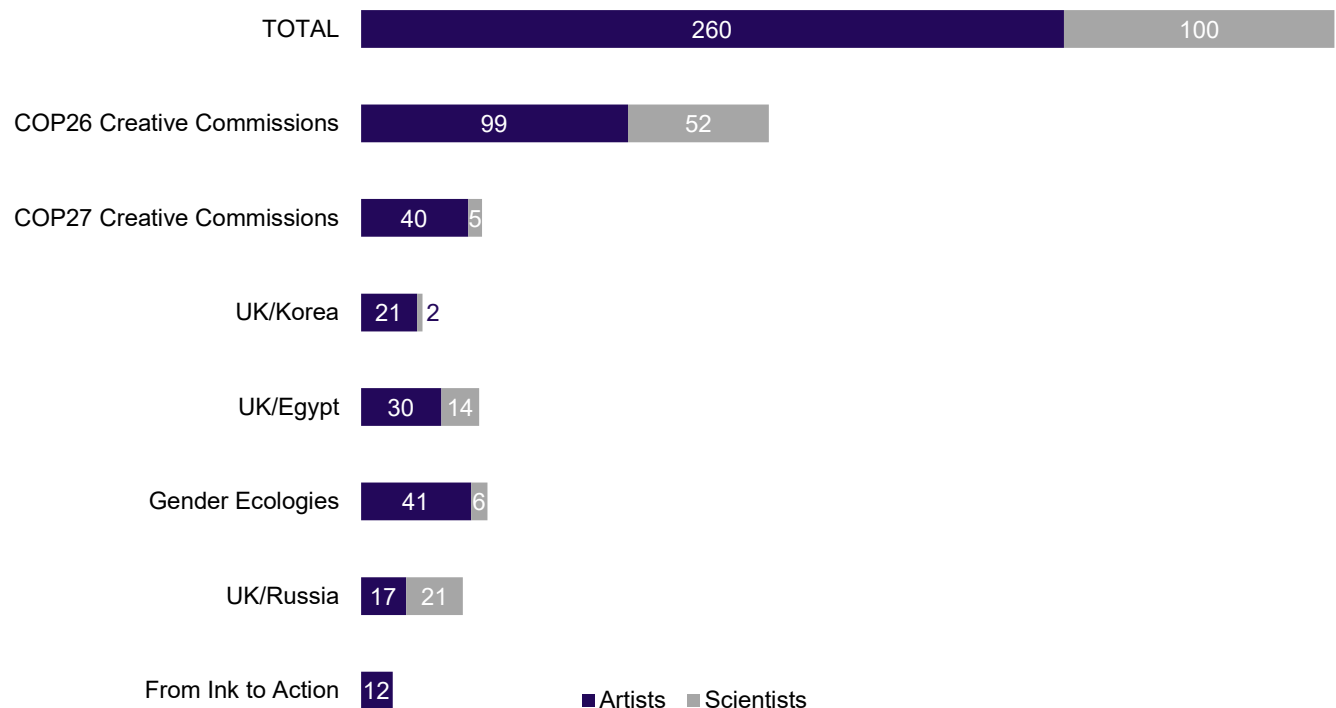
What creativity and culture bring

This section explores the artistic and creative approaches employed by the projects to address the climate and environment themes.

Mix of practitioners and experts involved

Across the 38 projects, there were more than **260 artists/creative practitioners** and over **100 scientists** or other researchers/academics, often from the social sciences, involved in the development or delivery of the project. A significant number of these artists and scientists/researchers were involved in the two COP27 Creative Commissions, which had 40 artists. UK-Russia Creative Commissions also had a large number of scientists, with 21 scientists and 17 artists working across the 3 grant projects. It is important to note that not all funding rounds put an emphasis on this type of collaboration, such as Gender Ecologies and From Ink to Action.

Count of Artists and Scientists/Researchers



Cultural forms, media types & creative activities

Projects used a diverse range of cultural and creative practices, with the most common being:

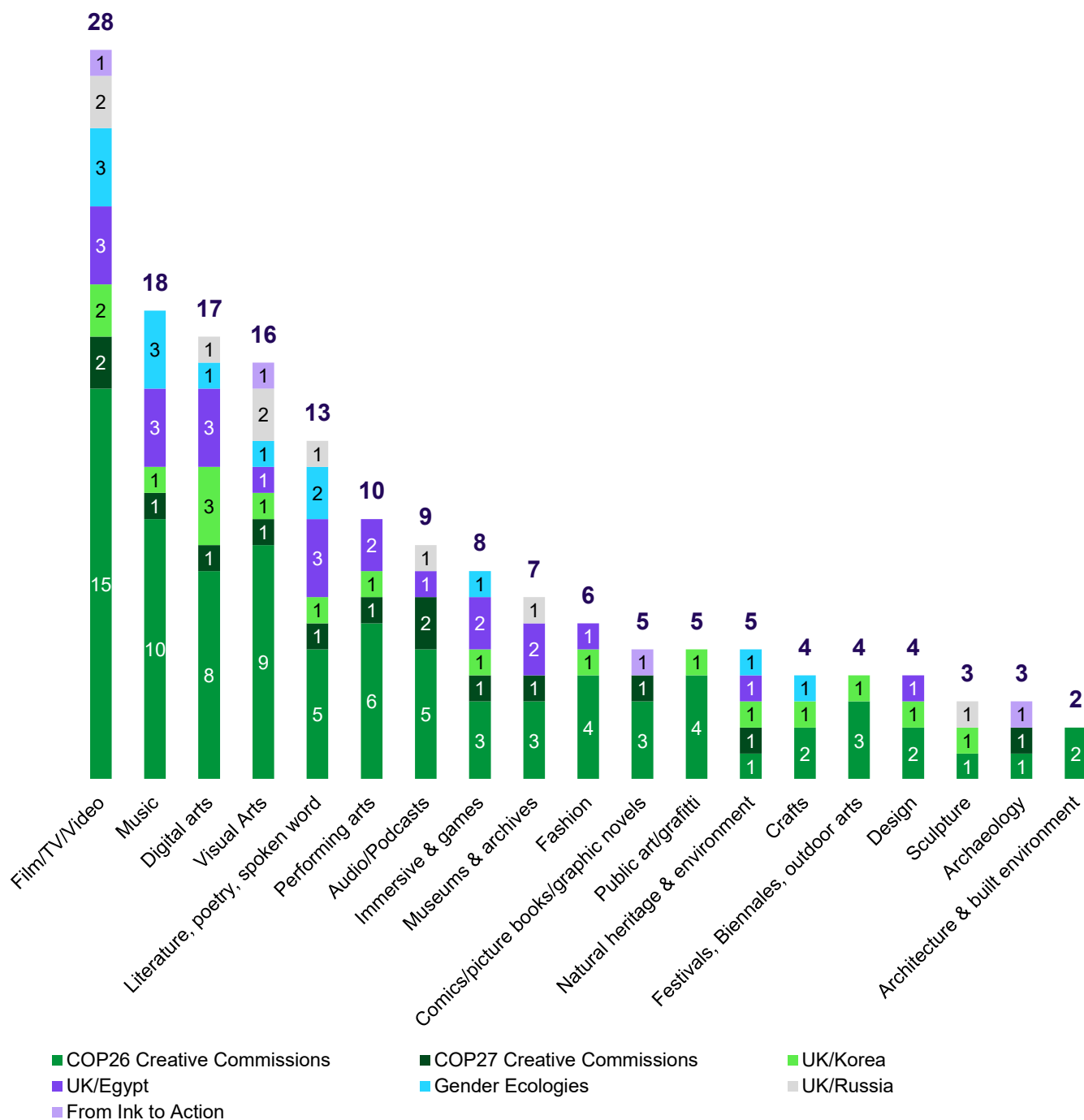
- nearly three quarters of the projects (74% or 28) worked with film/TV/video
- nearly half (47% or 18) worked with music
- 45% (17 projects) used digital arts



- 42% (16 projects) included visual arts (including photography).

Considering the global context when the projects were commissioned, in the wake of Covid-19 when international travel was limited, many of these forms were ones that could be created online. These were also the cultural forms that had the ability to reach diverse audiences across the globe, both online and in person, which was one of the programme's ambitions.

Types of cultural forms, media types and/or creative activities used by projects



Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1



When looking at the cultural forms, media types and/or creative activities by grant programme, some patterns and differences emerge, including the following:

- The majority of the 17 COP26 Creative Commissions projects included **film/TV/video** (88% vs. 74% overall) and over half included **music** (59% vs. 47% overall) and visual arts (53% vs. 42% overall).
- All 3 UK/Korea projects included **digital arts** ranging from a virtual exhibition and online platforms sharing creative works and life experiences to a digital model of the landscape (vs. 45% overall)
- Both COP27 Creative Commissions projects included **film/TV/video** (vs. 74% overall) and **audio/podcasts** (vs. 24% overall).
- Of the 7 UK/Egypt projects, 43% included **literature/poetry/spoken word**, **digital arts**, **music** and **film/TV/video**.
- Of the 5 Gender Ecologies projects, 60% (vs. 74% overall) included **film/TV/video** and **music** (vs. 47% overall).
- Two of the three (67%) UK-Russia Creative Commissions included **film/TV/video** (vs. 74% overall) and **visual arts** (vs. 42% overall).



Image: UK-Russia Creative Commissions, Tribe, installation of Echo of the Sea, photo by Alesya Murlina, 2022



Outputs from the Creative Commissions were varied – many have become creative assets constituting part of the legacy of the programme such as:

- **Songs of the Earth** music album, animated film and e-book resource
- **Museum of Plastic** 2121 Virtual Reality Museum and film
- **Nine Earths** immersive art installation with sound and film
- **Tales of Care and Repair** policy declarations and online database
- **Connecting the Climate Challenge** educational resources and school eco-committees
- ‘Better Late than Never’ dance film from **motherEarth international**
- an immersive exhibition at The Lakes International Comic Art Festival and COP28 by **From Ink to Action**
- podcasts and texts from **Deep Ecologies and Climate Portals**
- the **Milaap** film from Gender Ecologies
- a virtual platform from **Littoral Chronicle for UK-Korea Creative Commissions**
- a collection of bilingual stories from **The Earth Turns** for UK-Egypt Creative Commissions

The wide variety of artforms is testament to the range of creative responses possible for this work. It seems to demonstrate more of a focus on visual and digital arts, although many of the films and digital events do include performance. Performing arts such as theatre or dance by their nature require a place to perform and therefore tend to be more local in nature. Given the global reach of Creative Commissions, it appears likely that the more digital/visual/film based artforms had the capacity to be transported and reproduced more easily, such as at COPs and other international platforms.

The value of Culture & Creativity in relation to the climate crisis

Humanising science, bringing data to life

Climate science and climate action are often characterised with numbers and data. Art, culture and creativity in contrast bring empathy, emotion and connection. Going beyond facts and theories that can alienate people, creative practices embedded in local cultures make the climate crisis relatable, more legible and relevant to daily lives. Making the conversation human thus inspires action. As Alison Tickell, Founder and CEO of Julie’s Bicycle has said: *“the arts is the difference between knowing knowledge and feeling knowledge”*.

I noticed a lot of apathy in the topic – around me as well as in myself – and this project is an attempt to feel something again, and then do something. A lot is hidden from us, particularly when it comes to the climate crisis, and even more so if it is ‘far away’. We wanted to make the invisible visible. To make a connection between people and nature and through that, support a reconnection with the realities of this emergency. (...) I wanted to make something about the climate crisis that wasn’t



words and facts and science. Something that was about feeling, and something that helped to build empathy. I also wanted to make something that would punch people in the face a bit, that would make people want to do something. (motherEarth International, UK partner)

Culture and creativity, by telling stories and making climate change more relatable, can invoke emotion and create a reaction, beyond what the science and data can do on their own. Projects used this as a tool to galvanise audiences towards climate responsibility and action.

Arts creates an emotion, which maybe just statistics and facts and numbers on climate change don't. So, we love using art to carry forward the environmental message...especially for climate action, the urgency of the thing. (Songs of the Earth, India partner)

It's not a lack of information; it's a lack of emotional attachment to it. Nobody really is going "this isn't happening" – people don't care. Whereas if you think about your grandchild or your daughter – you have an emotional, immediate humanistic touch, then [for audiences] there's no getting away from that. (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)

Projects told stories through creative media and methods in a way that is engaging and interactive.

Many of the [end users] don't know that the species [of dolphin in the delta where they live] are in danger [from] fishing or any other activities. Tourists came and destroyed the beauty of that habitat... so that will now be addressed through the games [created via the Commission. [T]hey [are] aware that these are in danger. (Breaking the Waves, Pakistan partner)

Within Pakistan... it's been an eye opener...for people living in...cities about how certain rural populations live. (The Way We Ate, Pakistan partner)

Science to creative collaborations

Projects realised the value of bringing artists and scientists together to provide a holistic and nuanced conversation about climate change:

We're starting to understand the whole spectrum of climate scientists – and there's a whole different group of them, and different ideas, different thoughts – but what we're realising is they have no experience in the arts world, so they [are] sort of seeing things like audio, visual performances, installations to actually be another way of getting a message across. Because it's a bit dry otherwise ... lots of people don't really want to read things or be told things, they just want to be entertained. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

The common feedback we got from the scientists and those organisations that work with policy or in climate change: a lot of the audiences that they give this information to glaze over, because all of



these numbers can be sometimes overwhelming, but the presentation which makes the facts digestible and real to them, in terms of the stories and all of that, has received more positive impact. (World Weather Network, Philippines partner)

Many of the project partners had not worked in this way before, collaborating with artists and scientists, and their reflections on the combination indicate an appetite for these sorts of collaborations.

What we found is scientists want to meet artists and want to be in the same space. We're doing the exact same thing, we're just using different ways of asking questions. That's all art is really doing, is asking questions, not providing answers. (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)

Especially for creative [output] you don't want it to come across as preachy and too prescriptive... So the challenge was... how to have something that's... engaging creatively, but get the message across. (Everything Change, Bangladesh partner)

Participatory approaches through arts and creativity

Beyond creating awareness and understanding of the climate crisis, projects sought to empower people to take creative and collective climate action.

We involved communities on both sides [in the UK and in Nairobi] who are going to be affected by the climate crisis...it was about empowerment of self. (Doing Zero, Kenya partner)

[One of our partners is] so happy to be involved in something ... creative, rather than all the facts and figures of climate change, because they understand ... how important art is in getting the message across more vividly. (World Weather Network, Philippines partner)

It's about... the stories that... the arts can bring to break down the jargon, or the environmental fatigue. (Isis and Danu, UK partner)

Embedding sustainability in creative processes and structures

In addition to empowering others to take climate action, partners and artists also looked at their own practices and ways they could work in a more carbon neutral and sustainable manner.

Theatre is an incredibly wasteful medium of time and resources and everything else. How do I make this in a way that is completely or as much carbon neutral as I can? If I am reevaluating my resources and everything else, can I reevaluate the entire making process, including the storytelling. (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)

In one of the projects, **motherEarth International**, the project leaders created a carbon calculator based on known scientific methods and submitted a sustainability report. It included not only the more obvious



elements such as travel but also the often-ignored impacts of technology such as online engagement on the production of carbon. This is a specific output that can be used in future programmes and projects.



Image: Gender Ecologies, Poster for The River's Daughter, a play by Arie Azhar, Insaan Culture Club, ALL4ONE Communications, Kulsoom Aftab

Enriching public discourse and sharing diverse narratives

The Creative Commissions **encouraged debate and discussion** about issues of climate change and the environment among communities. Through these debates and discussions, projects encouraged individuals to take collective climate action.

I have aimed to intertwine art and environmental advocacy, creating a platform that not only raises awareness but also inspires action. (Gathering Moss, South Korea partner)

The projects increased mutual understanding between civil society and policymakers, climate scientists and academia.

We took that indigenous knowledge and formulated into thinking through scientists' perspectives, and it made sense. It all came together. (Milaap, Pakistan partner)

We made sure to build into our show a talkback with the audience. We included in our production ... sustainability managers, climate scientists, health professionals, Met Office, agriculture specialists ... The play had provoked thoughts, ideas in the audience, and we wanted to make sure that those ideas weren't just left on their own, which is a lot of what was happening in climate science, you know, "Doom, doom, gloom. Goodbye. Good luck with all that." (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)



Translating the terminology of climate change and sustainability is not always easy. Intercultural and interlinguistic differences emerge, which makes global debate challenging.

One of the greatest barriers to exploring further climate change themes within Pakistan is the formal terminology of climate change is still not ... common... Whilst people have a lot of indigenous knowledge and methods relate[d] to food and climate and seasonality – eating local, eating seasonal – they don't necessarily use [the] terminology of climate change. (The Way We Ate, Pakistan partner)

International Cultural Relations and Climate Action

Projects recognise the British Council as a key player in advancing the environment and climate debate both in the UK and globally.

We're incredibly grateful to the British Council. There is no other organisation in this part of the world, in Pakistan ... there are very few organisations doing what they do, and there's certainly no one looking at aspects of art, culture ... No one [else] is looking at cultural heritage in light of climate change. (The Way We Ate, Pakistan partner)

One hopes that there will be a more enlightened view to the soft power that the British Council delivers. It's a really, really important organisation ... the British Council delivers really significantly for the amounts of money that they spend. (Doing Zero, UK partner).

The Creative Commissions projects have shown how the British Council can exert influence, working with partners to demonstrate how themes such as climate and environmental change can inform policy and practice through on the ground action.



Case Study

Trees for Life

<https://www.earth-art-studio.com/trees-for-life.html>

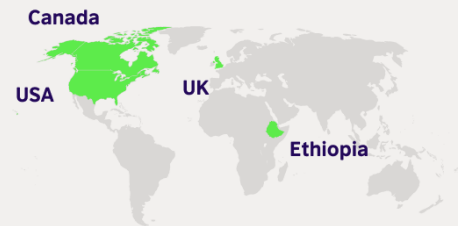


Dundee City Council (UK)

Rural Organisation for Betterment of Agro-pastoralists
(Ethiopia)

Institute for Sustainable Horticulture (Canada)

NASA (USA)



CREATIVE & CULTURAL FORMS

 Digital Arts

 Film/TV/video

 Literature/poetry/spoken word

 Music

CLIMATE THEMES

 Adaptation/resilience


 Climate mitigation/Carbon capture and removal

 Forests (incl. deforestation)

 Biodiversity & ecology

 Climate Action/Activism

SOCIAL JUSTICE THEMES

 Indigenous communities

 Youth voice/Intergenerational exchange

 Interculturality

Trees for Life brought together the experiences of Ethiopian youth from Kofele with indigenous knowledge to respond to challenges around biodiversity, deforestation, and climate mitigation. The project centred on reforestation, turning tree planting into artistic creations which were designed to be viewed from space through Google Earth. One of the most significant outcomes of the project was NASA's commitment to long-term satellite monitoring of the living artworks in the Kofele region of Ethiopia. This partnership positioned the project as a pioneering example of earth observation climate artworks, combining art, science, and environmental conservation. NASA's involvement ensured that the project's impact will be measured over the next 10-20 years, tracking biodiversity improvements and land rehabilitation. This collaboration not only provides scientific validation but also elevates the project to a global scale, marking it as a groundbreaking intersection of art and climate science. This outcome demonstrates the power of integrating art and technology to address pressing environmental issues, offering a lasting contribution to both climate action and artistic innovation.

“

Trees for Life continues as an active artists-community collaboration and illustrates that land rehabilitation doesn't need to be expensive. We understand the benefit of trees to the land and that people can assist in creating better soils and future-proofing sites from climate issues by planting trees.



Role of social justice and equality in projects

Creative Commissions projects reflected the connections and intersections between the environment and diversity, gender equality and social justice, actively engaging with groups and communities currently under-represented in climate change conversations and/or those who are disproportionately affected by climate change.

Based on the materials provided and published about the 38 Creative Commissions projects, interviews with many of the project partners and some monitoring data that was collected, projects were categorised as addressing one or more of the following social justice themes:

Social justice themes

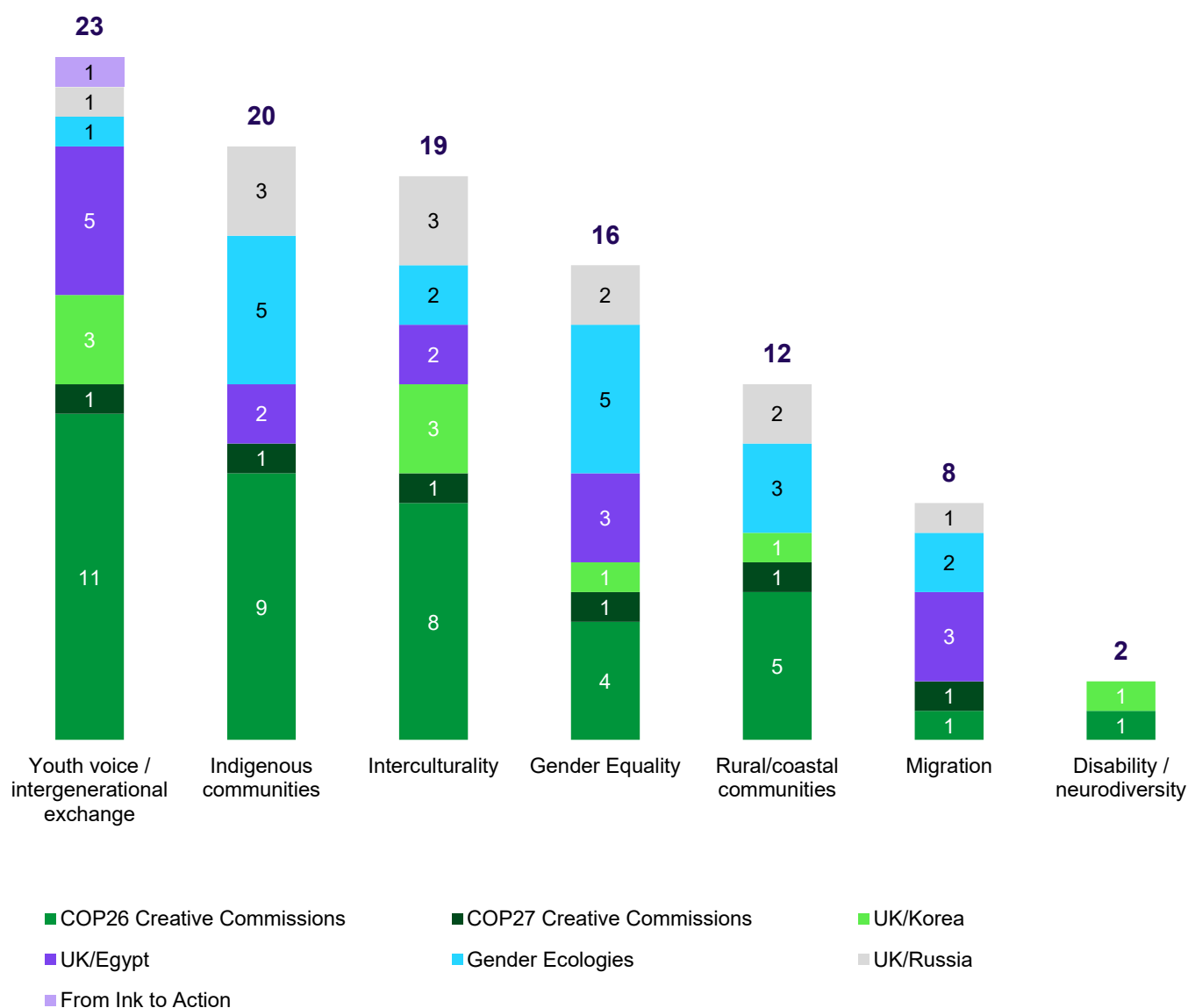
- Gender equality
- LGBTQIA+
- Migration
- Indigenous communities
- Disability/neurodiversity
- Youth voice/intergenerational exchange
- Interculturality
- Rural/coastal communities

For more information on Gender equality and social inclusion, see **Appendix VIII**.

- **Youth voice and intergenerational exchange** was the social justice theme addressed by the most projects, with 58% having this as a focus in their project
- 53% of projects worked with **indigenous communities**
- 50% addressed **interculturality / intercultural exchange**
- 42% addressed **gender equality**.



Social Justice themes addressed by projects



Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1

When looking at the social justice themes by grant programme, some notable patterns and differences emerge:

- For the 17 COP26 Creative Commissions, 65% (vs. 51% overall) of projects focused on **youth voice / intergenerational exchange** and 53% (vs. 53% overall) worked with **indigenous communities**.
- All three UK/Korea projects included youth voices / intergenerational exchange and addressed **Interculturality**.
- Of the 7 UK/Egypt projects, 71% (vs. 61% overall) looked at themes around **youth voice / intergenerational exchange**, 43% (vs. 42% overall) **gender equality** and 43% (vs. 21% overall) **migration**.



- All 5 Gender Ecologies projects explored **gender equality** (vs. 43% overall) and worked with **indigenous communities** (vs. 53% overall) and 60% (vs. 32% overall) with **rural/coastal communities**. 40% of Gender Ecologies projects explored themes around **interculturality** and **migration**.
- All 3 UK-Russia Creative Commissions worked with **indigenous communities** and focused on **interculturality**.

Projects foregrounded, shared and combined the stories and experiences of young people, women and girls, indigenous people and communities that are affected by climate change.

I think there's a real value in... co-design between communities that are [from] very different parts of the world, but that share some of these universal challenges that we face as a world. (Doing Zero, UK partner)

Young people

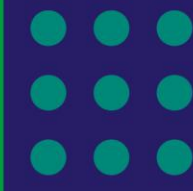
Climate change is one of the most important issues for young people around the world as they look towards what the future – and future planet – holds for them¹³. Across the Creative Commissions funding rounds, the British Council encouraged grant proposals that engaged young people. 23 of the 38 projects (61%) involved youth voice or addressed intergenerational exchange in their projects.

Project examples include:

- As part of the UK-Egypt Creative Commissions, the collaborative exhibition, **Our Broken Planet**, which connected youth audiences directly to scientists and young changemakers as they explored the pioneering solutions to the planetary emergency through a physical gallery, digital content, and an online events programme.
- The UK-Korea Creative Commission **Daily Rituals: Four Earths** created two artworks that reconstructed footage of the daily consumption activities of young people between the ages of 19 and 34 in Korea and the UK with creative methods.
- One of the COP26 Creative Commissions **Project arCc** engaged young people to assume responsibility towards saving the planet by sharing resources and empowering them to be ambassadors and engage local communities.

Amplifying the voices of young people from around the world to express their ideas, hopes and concerns around climate change was central:

¹³ [British Council Next Generation UK December 2024.](#)



[One of our successes was] ...capturing young people's urgent voices from different social, political and geographical contexts in a way that drew connections and similarities AND the striking differences of knowledge, understanding and level of priority of climate issues across the different countries. (Phone Call to the World, UK partner)

[Stop These Games aimed] to ring in a new era of environmental and social awareness, inspired by the lived experiences, hopes and dreams of the young participants.

As climate issues become more visibly urgent to all generations, there is likely to be increased focus on finding new climate solutions rather than just enabling better quality dialogue. Young people have a new and different view of climate problems and their solutions. Creative commissions are a vehicle for this.

[Reading Water encouraged] young people from Egypt and the UK to respond to water issues by connecting and sharing their local experiences of two rivers, transforming their experiences into collective answers with digital media.

More than giving voice now, projects aimed to move young people to be ambassadors and agents of change – climate action:

Those students [who use our game] are [now] aware. They will definitely go on that government platform.... They will raise their climate change issues... These youngsters... the youth who will grow in our future... will definitely raise [their] voice. (Breaking the Waves, Pakistan partner)

[Stop These Games] provided a platform for these young artists to express their perspectives on environmental issues through art, amplifying their voices in a global conversation.

As seen with other youth and next generation involvement in climate and wider UN and national decision-making, some of the Creative Commissions also highlighted how it can be challenging to hear what is said by those who are going to live with the consequences of climate change but who were not responsible for it:

There was a lot of negativity and... aggression from the audience, especially the younger generation... saying "why is this my responsibility to clean up your mess?" (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)



Gender Equality

The climate crisis is not gender neutral. Women and girls suffer the worst effects of climate change, exacerbating existing gender inequality and threatening livelihoods, health, and security. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, representing 71% of the 1.3 billion people across the world living in conditions of poverty, and so they are more exposed to natural and social disasters generated by environmental deterioration. The climate crisis makes the care tasks disproportionately borne by women – such as supplying water or energy for cooking in the home – much more difficult. Women may also face additional burdens because of their class, race, disability or age.

In this way, climate change places a disproportionate burden on women, in particular, who have different access to information, resources and employment opportunities in communities. At the same time, climate change is one of the causes of the migration crisis, among which poor women represent a large proportion of the people who migrate. When women are pressured to migrate in order to lead healthy and safe lives elsewhere, they often face specific risks along their migration routes.

Women are often considered change agents and civil society leaders in climate action, with recognised experience in mitigating and adapting to climate change in day-to-day life. Women are also leaders in the conservation of indigenous cultures, which consider the preservation of nature to be fundamental. They are essential to the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills,¹⁴ protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage, promotion of equal rights and access to cultural life. This role often derives from traditional 'family' roles managing households, preparing food and bringing up children.¹⁵ Recognising this often-invisible labour, and its value, is part of recognising the key role women and communities play in responding, adapting to and mitigating climate change.

Despite making up most of the cultural workforce in many countries,¹⁶ women are underrepresented in leadership roles in the sector in the UK¹⁷ and internationally.¹⁸ Barriers are even higher for black or indigenous women; LGBTQIA+ women; young or old women; migrants; economically disadvantaged women; and those with multiple intersectional identities.

It was in this context, that the 5 Gender Ecologies grants (as part of the Pakistan/UK Season) were commissioned with the mission 'to foster a mutual exchange of knowledge and skills, promoting the voice of women, their safety and dignity [... and] exploring ways to close the gap between the disproportional

¹⁴ Musiza, C. (2024). Gender, Traditional Cultural Expressions, and Intellectual Property: Exploring Women's Empowerment and Cultural Production in Zambia. In: Mastandrea Bonaviri, G., Sadowski, M.M. (eds) *Heritage in War and Peace. Law and Visual Jurisprudence*, vol 12. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-47347-0_27

¹⁵ Mellor, Mary (2000), "Nature, (Re) Production and Power. A Materialist Ecofeminist Perspective", en Fred P. Gale y Michael M'Gonigle (eds.), pp. 105–120.

¹⁶ [State of the Arts Report about the situation of women artists and professionals in the Cultural and Creative Industries sector in Europe, March 2020](#)

¹⁷ [Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre | Arts, Culture and Heritage: Audiences and Workforce](#)

¹⁸ [Gender in Geopolitics Institute | The role of women in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage](#)



effects of climate change on women. Across the programme as a whole, nearly half (16 or 42%) of projects addressed gender equality.



Image: Gender Ecologies, Participant embroidery from workshop, Permaculture – Gardens of Resilience, Adrian's Croft, Apnakam, Maheen Zia, Sumbul Khan

Projects not only addressed the impact of climate change *on women* but also the role *of women* as activists against climate change as guardians of ancestral, traditional knowledge about the environment and cultural practices using natural resources.

We were looking initially at generic food practices within Pakistan ... we felt that there was a definite lack of women's stories in the project overall ... We realised that there was a bigger story to be told here, which included climate change and particularly female food practices. (The Way We Ate, Pakistan partner)

The project...covers the stories about the impact of climate change on the coastal women of Indus delta... and the purpose was...to project the voice of coastal women in the form of art. (Breaking the Waves, Pakistan partner)

While some Creative Commissions projects were asked to collect numbers of individuals engaged face to face and online by gender, this was not collected consistently across all projects featured in this report, and thus there is an incomplete picture of engagement. Amongst projects that did report the gender of individuals engaged, there were more females than males engaged in the projects.



The following tables summarises the available data by grant programme but should not be taken as comprehensive and representative of all engagement with the Creative Commissions.

Number of individuals engaged face to face

Grant Programme	Male	Female	Other	Not Applicable / Unknown	Total
COP26 Creative Commissions	1137	1285	1525	1372	5319
COP27 Creative Commissions	135	124	0	1904	2067
UK-Egypt Creative Commissions	156	191	0	8152	8499
UK-Korea Creative Commissions	-	-	-	5149	5149
Gender Ecologies	0	515	0	4672	5187
TOTAL (FACE TO FACE)	1428	2115	1525	16100	26221

Number of individuals engaged online

Grant Programme	Male	Female	Other	Not Applicable	Total
COP26 Creative Commissions	1301	1479	204	343	3327
COP27 Creative Commissions	408	506	10	16	940
UK-Egypt Creative Commissions	0	0	0	323	323
UK-Korea Creative Commissions	0	0	0	388	388
Gender Ecologies	0	0	0	3000	3000
TOTAL (ONLINE)	1709	1985	214	3682	7978



Case Study

Milaap – Where the salt meets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1g8TdEhpQA>



Marvi Mazhar & Associates (Pakistan)
University of Westminster (UK)



CREATIVE & CULTURAL FORMS



CLIMATE THEMES



SOCIAL JUSTICE THEMES



Milaap explored the impact of environmental degradation and climate change on communities, particularly focusing on women's voices. The documentary film highlighted the environmental degradation caused by negligent urban and rural planning, using women's voices and perspectives to reflect on the intersection of climate change, land rights, and cultural preservation. This project attempted to underscore the integral relationship between indigenous knowledge on land, ecology, and cultural practices. The project culminated in workshops held in London, Karachi and Lahore, bringing together students, climate experts and gender experts.

The project addressed the impact of climate change on marginalised communities and raised awareness about the need for inclusive and sustainable environmental planning, particularly through the lens of gender and indigenous knowledge. It did this by showcasing the traditional ecological knowledge of women from indigenous communities in Sindh and Punjab. The film was screened at notable venues, including the University of Westminster, Cambridge University and the Architekturmuseum in Vienna, facilitating global conversations about environmental justice, indigenous knowledge, and climate change impacts.



Indigenous Communities

As part of the commissioning process, the British Council sought to foreground indigenous and local community voices, rather than focusing on UK solutions. According to IPCC reports and many other sources, Indigenous communities directly face the multiple impacts of climate change, including food insecurity, natural disasters such as drought and fire, and extinction¹⁹. On top of this, they face multiple additional challenges: the ongoing effects of imperialism and colonialism; top-down public policies removed from their needs; an extractive economy threatening natural resources; and tensions and conflicts in multi-stakeholder governance. This means that climate change adaptation and mitigation measures are often implemented without including their voices and their ancestral knowledge about nature.

Indigenous communities are repositories of wisdom about the relationships of humans with the natural environment, plants and animals – but this wisdom is often expressed through art, culture, and storytelling rather than institutionalised academic scientific knowledge.



Image: Listening to Ice, Goldsmiths University of London, Indian Institute of Technology Indore Simrole

Artistic production is a form of engagement that can foreground and value communities' ancestral knowledge and expertise about the environment. There is no clear-cut boundary between research,

¹⁹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html>



dissemination, and connection with the community: creative co-production, a collective process of knowledge production, is a medium that allows us to 'do science'²⁰ and disseminate at the same time.

The ancestral knowledge of indigenous communities and their relationships with the environment allow for the construction of innovative and democratic solutions to address climate change. Doing this in cultural projects requires creating open spaces for indigenous communities' stories and experience-based knowledge. Successful projects have a horizontality in their construction and development, co-authored and people-centred approaches, and respect for the time and knowledge of all participants.

Indigenous communities were a key focus of the Creative Commissions, as 20 of the 38 projects involved or addressed themes around indigenous communities. Many projects, such as Trees for Life, Listening to Ice, Phone Call to the World and Living-Language-Land explored indigenous knowledge and practices involving biodiversity, ecology, land and water.

MILAAP attempts to underscore the integral relationship between indigenous knowledge on land, ecology and cultural practices. (Milaap, Pakistan partner)

For instance, **Listening to Ice** explored the different knowledge practices that are mediated by 'ice' from scientific expertise to local knowledge and indigenous traditions, combining western scientific technology in the form of underwater microphones against how indigenous and local communities respond to and manage glacial change through oral storytelling and songs.

This is an example of how we could be working more collaboratively, bringing local knowledge into a project, in dialogue with scientific expertise. (Listening to Ice, UK partner)

Living-language-land offered a platform to minority and endangered language-holders to explore the relationship between language and environment, with the goal of growing the lexicon that is used to reflect and describe this relationship.

It came together very naturally that we wanted to focus on this link between language and nature. (Living Language Land, UK partner)

Language grows out of a place so the specifics of that place – the creatures, the plants, the landscape, the climate – are all represented in the language. But also language describes more deeply the relationships of humans to the more than human, but also all those other relationships to each other. (Living Language Land, UK partner)

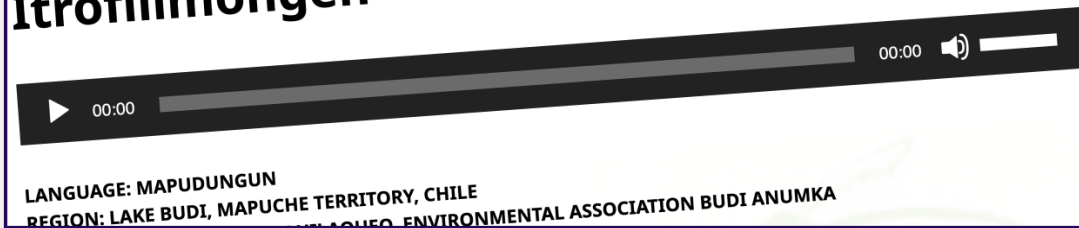
²⁰ Whether in the colloquial sense of talking and learning about science; or in the sense of citizen science, where civil society leads activities such as air quality monitoring such as with the [Citizen Science Global Partnership](#).



The involvement of indigenous communities provides for intercultural dialogue even within a single country where these communities will often have a different relationship with the land and nature, different framings of climate and nature within their culture and with a certain kind of culturally grounded place-based community knowledge to climate challenges.



Itrofillmongen



LANGUAGE: MAPUDUNGUN

REGION: LAKE BUDI, MAPUCHE TERRITORY, CHILE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATION BUDI ANUMKA

Neville Gabie, independent artist

Philippa Ruth Bayley, creative producer (UK)

University of the Free State

University of Cape Town (South Africa)

CONA - Pedagogias Ancestrales (Colombia)



CREATIVE & CULTURAL FORMS



Website/digital platform



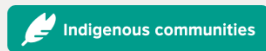
Archive

CLIMATE THEMES



Climate Action/Activism

SOCIAL JUSTICE THEMES



Indigenous communities

The project created a living lexicon – a word bank – about land and nature, drawn from minority and disappearing languages. It aimed to animate world views lying outside English- and Western-dominated conversations about climate breakdown and market-led solutions. It produced a dual language Spanish/English website and engaged audiences through social media, featuring written, video and visual content produced by and with native language speakers.

The project estimates 10,000 reach across all channels (excluding broadcast). Its legacy exceeds its publicly available digital content. Ontario-based textile artist Lorraine Roy, inspired to make a piece of art for each word, has exhibited at the Elora Centre for the Arts in 2023 and will at McMaster University in 2025. Amongst others, ThoughtBox – who provide education for personal, social and environmental wellbeing – have created online resources for teachers from the words. Notable academic linguist partners Matthias Brenzinger, International Linguapax Award holder, and Aldrin P. Lee, President of Philippine Linguistics Association, extended reach to academia.



Language is inherently political in these contexts [of fracking and reduction of land]. It relates to how well accepted or supported the language and community – their status, which languages are taught in schools, cultural practices – what success looks like for people.



Legacy of Projects

As part of the commissioning process, the British Council was interested in projects that would have longevity, that could be scaled up and shared globally using digital platforms and tools. While some projects were able to carry on in some form or evolved into new projects, many projects did not establish a clear plan for legacy, predominantly due to capacity, funding and resources.

Inspiring further creative climate action

However, the ultimate legacy of all projects could be said to be the seeds that were planted in the individuals who engaged with the projects – as partners, participants or audience members – a seed that inspired individuals to take climate action or to affect other parts of their lives. Whilst the impact of projects on participants was not always something about which evaluation gathered structured evidence, project partners felt this had taken place.

From Gathering Moss:

One of them was really interested in filmmaking...And he went on the boat, and he made a film about the reality there, employed by Greenpeace [...]

One of the South Korean participants is... doing a university course in London ...he said, the project was part of the inspiration for coming to the UK to do that study.

A couple of other participants were selected to be part of the Gwangju Biennale.

One of the UK participants... has carried on working in... climate and environmental stuff and has just done a big piece at ...Green Man Festival in Wales.



Image: UK-Korea Creative Commissions COP26, Gathering Moss project 'Illogical Love' by participants Sooah Kwak and Chanu Lee 2021, Bang & Lee, Watershed and Art Center Nabi



In other examples of legacy, the **Earth Turns** had a variety of legacies based around the project 'We Still Have A Chance' including a mural in Exeter City Centre (See Case Study below) as well as a book from the project and two films created by young people that explored the alternative worlds of Exeter and Cairo.

In a different way, **Trees for Life** has continued to garner interest in terms of best practice for public arts engagement and climate delivery and was nominated for a global prize²¹ giving it further prominence. In other ways it has also helped Ethiopian participants to learn about tree management, supported through art facilitated visuals and audio recordings, such as songs and includes a 'living artwork' observable from space that can encourage a call to action to plant trees and vegetation in patterns that can be recorded by satellite.

Securing further funding

The British Council provided some top up funding and some projects secured additional third party funding:

- 10 of the 17 COP26 projects received top up funding for the continuation of their existing project and also explored new projects with new partners.
- One of the 17 COP26 projects was awarded funding to continue as a UK-Korea Creative Commission and UK-Vietnam Season, and another project secured funding to evolve into **From Ink to Action**
- **The Earth Turns (We Still Have A Chance)**, one of the UK/Egypt Creative Commissions, project secured funding locally in Exeter and subsequently was successful in securing a large grant from the Gulf Strategy Fund and British Embassy funding to participate in COP28 and COP29. The project has continued to evolve since COP27 when it debuted in Egypt. Further adaption of other stories from "**We still have a Chance**" are in production, alongside a physical copy of the book and an international collaborative project for COP28, '12 Poems for 12 Days for COP28: A Catalyst for Climate Solutions and Actions.' They also secured funding to be present at UK Pavilion.

While some projects were able to continue or build upon their project beyond the timeframe of the grant programme, many projects would have liked assistance, including funding and guidance, from the British Council for their legacy.

²¹ <https://www.instituteforpublicart.org/case-studies/living-artworks-trees-for-life/>



I think this is probably a criticism of lots of organisations, where you generate lots of brilliant projects, and then they seem to get forgotten about afterwards, instead of building a legacy [for] some of the work. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

There needs to be thinking ... about how these projects can deliver the impact that they're capable of, how they can grow ... and whether the connection with UKRI or with Innovate UK or co-funding, with international partners, or with private funding. (Doing Zero, UK partner)

Project partners suggested that the British Council could do more around showcasing and elevating the projects once they complete to help secure the legacy and impacts of projects. This could include bringing the projects together, enabling further collaboration to take the legacy forward together. Whilst such platforms require effort and resourcing, some felt that events such as the City of London exhibition were good examples of how this innovative work can be undertaken.

The last couple of years has been a lot of work rebuilding and doing it unpaid as well ... there's a few places in the UK [we could show it]. We're having to talk to a gallery in the US ... but what we'd really love is the British Council to own it and help us find those places and elevate it that way. (Nine Earths, UK partner)

[T]he potential that's created by connecting [the projects] doesn't go anywhere. There's no real way of taking that forward. So, there are unexploited potentials because of the constraints that British Council faces. (Doing Zero, UK partner)

This may also benefit from consideration about how resources are signposted and shared, building a collective repository of outputs and resources from projects.

I found myself recently applying for a British Council grant, looking for existing resources on things. It was a festival toolkit. And then I found one, lo and behold by someone else who was given a grant from the British Council on how to run sustainable festivals. So, if I had access to that resource, I'd be using it. (Doing Zero, Kenya partner)

Post-project engagement with project outputs

Following on from their completion, projects usually focused on further use of the work already developed such as plays, films or exhibitions. See **Appendix IV** for a list of projects featured at the COPs.

For example, **The Museum of Plastic**, one of the COP26 Creative Commissions, was taken on tour and also featured at COP27 and COP28. An exhibition that emerged from this initial project remained as a touring exhibition at Durban Local History Museums until January 2024 and was subsequently used at a Nature Reserve's community open day to celebrate Freedom Day in April 2024.



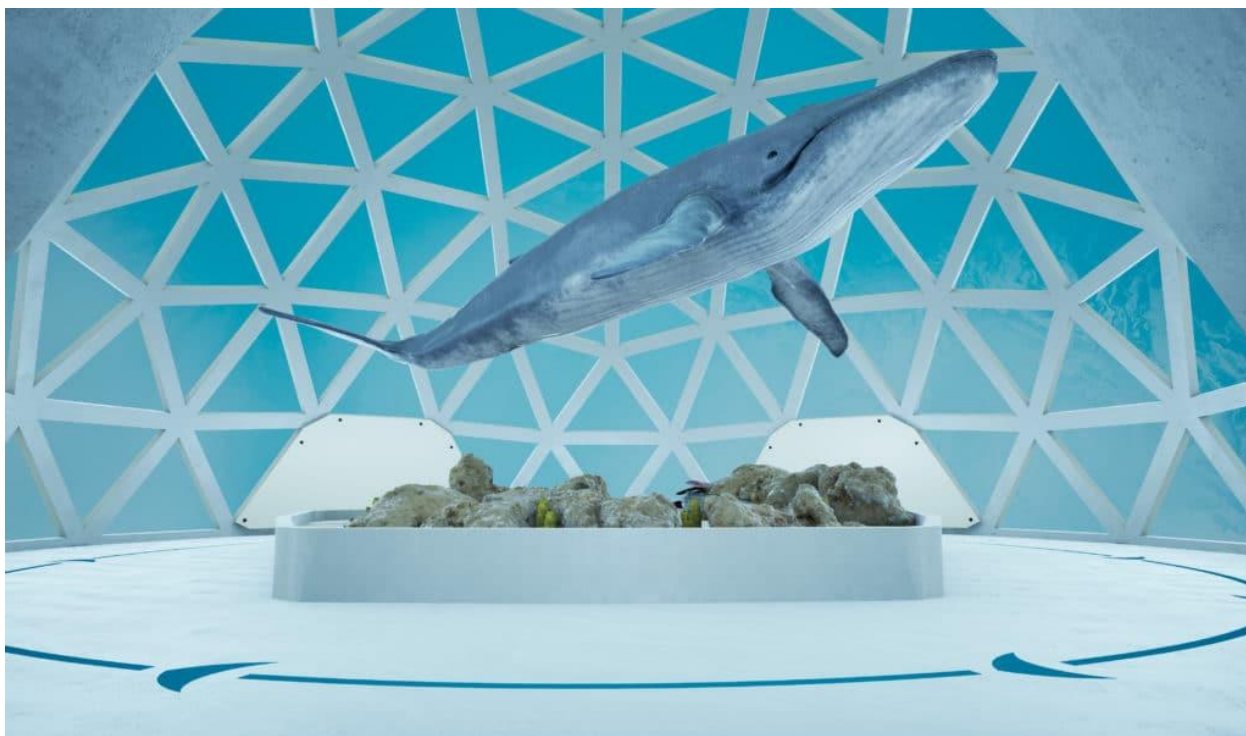


Image: COP26 Creative Commissions, Virtual reality Museum of Plastic 2121, Greenpop, Baz-Art, Museum of Design in Plastics, Arts University Bournemouth, Cooperative Innovations, Circular Plastics Collaboratory at Hull University, Possible, 2021

A number of projects created films that are publicly available online (see Appendix II).

*Many attendees were inspired to screen the film at their institutions and other relevant venues.
(Songs of the Earth, India partner)*

The legacy is we have this wonderful film that's alive and will stay alive for a long time on the internet. (Isis and Danu, UK partner)

Inspiration and capacity resulting in new creative projects

Some projects created plans to continue and build upon their work beyond the grant programme timeframe.

The legacy is this trilogy [of films] that's emerging ... [W]e're just finishing the second part. We're in post-production and hoping to launch it in September and then reunite the first and second, [launching it at] an international traditional dance festival in Edinburgh. (Isis and Danu, UK partner)

We then performed it again...in March of the next year, recast it, expanded it, turned it into a much larger production, not bound by time. And then my company turned that into an audio play that we released on the first day of COP 28 ... So it's still living on. (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)



For a number of projects, their Creative Commissions grant was a springboard for the development or evolution of new projects that explore artistic and creative responses to the climate crisis.

Nine Earths was commissioned for COP26, then developed into a new project for the UK/Korea commissions for COP27, **Daily Rituals: Four Earths**, which then evolved and influenced a later project called Climate Storytelling Workshops which was part of the British Council's UK/Viet Nam Season.



Image:UK-Korea Creative Commissions COP27, Film still from Daily Rituals: Four Earths, Artebah, D-Fuse, TX Lab of the Korea Advance Institute of Science and Technology, 2022

Creative Commissions projects inspired other artists to create artworks in response to the climate crisis.

Living-Language-Land has a bit of the feeling of a mycelium; it connects in unexpected ways and a new fruiting body breaks through the surface of the soil and produces something surprising and beautiful! One of those surprises was to hear from textile artist Lorraine Roy based in Ontario, Canada, who was so inspired by the project that she decided to make a piece of art for each word. The series of beautiful works [was] exhibited at the Elora Centre for the Arts in 2023. (Living-Language-Land, UK partner)

For some projects, the legacy was the lessons learnt, the research and development and the unintentional outcomes that arose from the delivery and reflection of the projects.

Learning experience to build on for future VR projects that can support climate education. (Museum of Plastic, South Africa partner)



Understanding legacy in terms of cultural relations capital and capacity building

For many projects, the relationships and partnerships developed and nurtured throughout their Creative Commission project was the most impactful legacy. Project partners planned to continue growing these relationships and creating new projects together.

The people we met through the project, both in terms of community and partners, so experts who we engaged. We've got those relationships, and there's things we want to grow from that. (Doing Zero, Kenya partner)

We're looking to creating perhaps an exchange of UK artists, who are working on climate crisis, come to the Philippines, and same with the Filipinos. (World Weather Network, Philippines partner)

The British Council's *A Cultural Relations Approach to Development* report²² defines "A Stock of Cultural Relations Capital in the form of Cultural Relations assets built up in ODA-eligible countries over time" and recognises the specific assets to which cultural relations contribute:

- Connections
- Partnerships
- Modelled values
- World authority
- Understanding
- Trust

By reason of the international cross-sectoral partnerships required of the projects, all Creative Commissions have contributed to such partnerships and connections. As a result, a considerable amount of understanding and trust has been built between practitioners and organisations as evidenced through interviews and qualitative overall assessment.

It could also be argued that all Creative Commissions projects have contributed to SDG 17 to Strengthen the Means of Implementation and revitalise the Partnership for Sustainable Development²³ aligned with priorities for UN approaches to capacity development²⁴:

This also aligns with the shift from the 2015 Paris Agreement onwards to treating capacity building support from developed countries on an equal footing to addressing the climate crisis with financing and technology support.

²² [A Cultural Relations Approach to Development: Why and how the British Council approach to development works, August 2024](#)

²³ [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development](#)

²⁴ [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Capacity Development](#)



Case Study

The Earth Turns / 12 Climate Stories / We Still Have A Chance

<https://greenfutures.exeter.ac.uk/we-still-have-a-chance/>

https://youtu.be/31hgo_sb8E?si=HEXK2T5ZwYp5h351



University of Exeter (UK)

American University in Cairo (Egypt)

Met Office (UK)

Visual Utopias (Germany)



CREATIVE & CULTURAL FORMS

Performing arts inc. opera, dance, ballet, circus exc. music

Literature/poetry/spoken word

CLIMATE THEMES

Sustainable cities/green spaces

Pollution/clean air

Water

Adaptation/resilience

Biodiversity & ecology

Climate Action/Activism

SOCIAL JUSTICE THEMES

Gender equality

Migration

Indigenous communities

Youth voice/intergenerational exchange

Interculturality

The Earth Turns was a climate-inspired performance adapted from We Still Have a Chance - 12 Stories for 12 Days of COP27, an anthology of micro-stories created by climate activists, scientists, health professionals, students, and artists in the UK and Egypt. It drew attention to the human stories behind climate change and the health of our planet and to connect an emotional response to an intellectual understanding of the environmental crisis. It was performed at the Falaki Theatre in Cairo's Tahrir Square with a recording of the performance available on the website. It was also staged in the UN-controlled Blue Zone at COP27 and the public Green Zone after being chosen by the UN from hundreds of submissions. The project had a significant legacy, firstly as part of Exeter's Public Art Strategy in which a large-scale mural artwork was produced as part of Exeter's Public Art Strategy to inspire conversations and action. Secondly, it was awarded British Embassy Gulf Strategy funding to deliver an international collaborative project 12 Poems for 12 Days for COP28, 'We Are The Possible, and presence at the UK Pavilion at COP29.'

“

We have a huge responsibility. So, I like to see this as a huge opportunity to shift the narrative, turn the page, and begin to look after those future generations. It's a truly inspirational and fantastic way of communicating the big issues we're facing with climate change, but also giving us hope.



Strategic and policy context

Why is considering this context important?

The brief for the evaluation required the programme and its projects to be considered in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and subsequent developments including Action for Climate Empowerment alongside the broader UN 2030 Agenda²⁵ and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – as outlined above.

This section focuses on unpacking the implications of the strategic context for the Creative Commissions and for this evaluation. It asks two questions:

- Given the environment and context in which the Creative Commissions have operated, which relevant themes and stakeholder groups have they addressed to date?
- In this rapidly changing environment and context:
 - How should a future Creative Commissions for Climate Action – or other similar – programme be positioned?
 - What could a renewed purpose and focus be?
 - Where and how can individual projects have most impact?

Answering these questions can support further strategic decision-making in the British Council around:

- Future Creative Commissions or similar programming and related strategic partnerships;
- British Council-wide engagement with the COPs and Culture-Based Climate Action initiatives;
- The implementation, strategic communications and monitoring of its Climate Connection strategy.

The shift in global climate policy towards more holistic solutions

As **Appendix VII** on the background to global climate change policy sets out in more detail, this area of policy was formalised in 1992 with politicians being driven by scientists' concerns to establish the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). Its first 20+ years saw the science – and technological and financial solutions driven by governments and significant polluters – dominate the discourse and action. The environment and climate change became increasingly present in public and policy discourse but were rarely front and centre in the UK and most other countries.

The 2015 Paris Agreement ratcheted up the ambition of climate action to limit “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels.” It made three important shifts in the framing of both the climate crisis and solutions to it:

²⁵ [United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda](#)



- It frames the necessary change as ‘**economic and social transformation**’ informed by science, which is a shift in emphasis to both society and communities, on one hand, and to the need for investment in and opportunities from the greening of economies, on the other.
- It also explicitly introduces **capacity building** as a category within support to climate adaptation – by developed countries, whose historical emissions have caused climate change, of less developed countries, who are disproportionately impacted by climate change – alongside the provision of finance and technology.
- It led to the Action for Climate Empowerment²⁶ mechanisms to “empower **all members of society** to engage in climate action” with a strong focus on the **public** and more broadly **civil society**.

At the same time, climate mitigation had initially needed to focus on **heavy emitting** industries and sectors – such as transport, energy, food production and construction – often dominated by technology. Solutions have as a result often been framed as predominantly technical and industrial.

As other less technically dominated sectors aim to fulfil their environmental responsibilities – such as the creative and cultural sectors – they have looked for climate mitigation solutions, including pathways to net zero – which are more organisational and people-centred, albeit that they may also be enabled by technologies.

Meanwhile, **climate adaptation** – defined as being the adaptation of human society to climate change that cannot be mitigated – has to consider the full spectrum of human activities not just the basic human needs of food, water, housing and healthcare, and to think beyond technological solutions.

All of which means that more holistic thinking needs to bring a greater diversity of lived experience, knowledge and expertise to the problem of the climate crisis:

The scope of the climate crisis and the growing impacts from a warming world are drawing together an increasingly diverse set of people working to address this existential threat. The experts, advocates, and groups within this widening community approach climate change from different perspectives ...²⁷

The regular meetings of the countries who are signatories to these various agreements (the Conference of the Parties or COPs²⁸) and the discussions and negotiations that take place between the COPs over the decades become increasingly **multi-stakeholder**²⁹.

²⁶ Defined as “work under Article 6 of the Convention and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement”

²⁷ [Climate Nexus | the Technocratic Approach to Climate Change, Explained](#)

²⁸ [United Nations | What are United Nations Climate Change Conferences?](#)

²⁹ In a UN context this means involving ‘non-government actors’ including civil society and the private/third sector alongside governments see UNSDG – [Common Minimum Standards for Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in the UN Development Assistance Framework](#)



In this supranational climate action policy context, this allows for the involvement of **less significantly emitting– and non-technology** – sectors such as **education, research, creative industries** and **culture** – all within the British Council's remit and all represented within the participants and stakeholders engaged by the Creative Commissions.

The COPs are also fora with a stocktaking function in which – under the glare of the media fulfilling its role in democratic accountability³⁰ – countries are held to account for their progress against past climate commitments as well as making new ones.

COPs represent one amongst many opportunities for diplomacy, multi-stakeholder engagement, activism and ultimately action – to address the climate crisis and related scientific, technological, economic, environmental and social themes and policy areas.

However, there are many other transnational gatherings of stakeholders addressing these themes. All of these platforms represent opportunities for past and future Creative Commissions projects to reach new audiences, as do preparatory activities for COPs and national policy-civil society engagement, which is often driven by COP deadlines for commitments and reporting.

Climate and environmental thematic framework

The conceptual framework for climate and environment themes has been designed around themes in public and policy debate. It has been used in this evaluation to understand and assess the ways in which Creative Commissions projects to date addressed the subjects of climate change and climate action that appear in discourse, as set out below.

This framework draws upon:

- The international treaties and policy frameworks referenced in the summary of global climate policy above and in **Appendix VII**
- Specialist input from advisors working in global climate policy
- The content of documentation about and feedback from the Creative Commissions projects themselves – and the categories, language and framings they used.

All the categories fit under the broader category of **climate action/activism** – which ranges across:

- the actions of countries under their climate treaty obligations
- community action by and with communities through to the 'activism' of civil society influencing policy

³⁰ [The Constitution Unit Blog | The role of the media in democracies: what is it, and why does it matter?](#)



- the behaviour of businesses and other advocacy, for example by sectors including the creative and cultural ones.



Climate & environmental themes

Natural capitals

- Oceans/coastal erosion/ ocean pollution / sea level rise / acidification
- Land use and management
- Permafrost/melting glaciers/Arctic/Polar environments
- Forests (incl. deforestation)
- Water / water pollution
- Clear air / air pollution
- Biodiversity / ecology

Climate Adaptation/resilience – *with option to be further developed in future phases of the programme*

Climate Mitigation

- Recycling/circular economy/innovative design
- Renewable energy/energy efficiency
- Energy transition/future of fossil energy/oil, gas and coal
- Sustainable cities/green spaces
- Reducing emissions/net zero (*industrial*)
- Food and agriculture/dietary shift
- Carbon capture and removal
- Carbon footprint/sustainable consumption (*individual*)

Loss & Damage

- Climate Migration
- Extreme weather/natural disasters
- Cultural Heritage Protection

...recommended to be further developed in future phases of the programme

Business and economic factors impacting climate action

- Corporate action/greenwashing/greenhushing
- Green subsidies and trade
- Green skills

...recommended to be further developed in future phases of the programme



The framework is organised:

- With **natural capitals** – on which humanity depends, together with negative climate impacts on them (like pollution for air and water) – as a heading for specific kinds of capital (such as forests)
- Using a single broad **climate adaptation/resilience** term covering actions of society to adapt to climate and resulting environmental change – which, depending on future focus of the programme, can be further broken down
- Dividing **climate mitigation** actions – by humanity to reduce negative human impact on climate – into terms common in public and policy discourse such as ‘recycling’ or ‘net zero’
- Splitting the policy objective of **carbon emissions reduction** into an industrial ‘net zero’ term and ‘carbon footprint’ representing people’s personal view
- Starting with some terms in a new **Loss & Damage**³¹ group of themes sufficient to describe the projects to date, but which can be extended in the future
- Similarly, starting a group of themes for **economic and business factors** – which could be expected to become ever more significant within the public and policy discourse around climate (and hence a legitimate area of potential future Creative Commissions projects).

Creative and Cultural Approaches to Climate and Environment

Artists and creatives have long recognised their own impact on society, and their role in shaping not only the cultural sector, but wider human culture, worldviews and practices. Cultural production is intimately implicated with – and responding to – nature and the environment. As well as supporting public engagement³² with science and medical research (in recent years, particularly in the UK³³), artists and creatives have carried on their own active discourse about ways and means of maximising/minimising their impact on climate change.

In the wake of Amitav Ghosh’s 2016 recognition that literature was suffering an ‘imaginative failure’ in coming to grips with the subject,³⁴ ‘climate fiction’ has become a recognised and vibrant sub-genre spanning both literary and commercial fiction.³⁵ Many artists and creatives see action as their responsibility – and culture as critical in helping society to envision different, better futures.

³¹ i.e. impacts on society of climate change that remain after climate mitigation and adaptation, as explained above

³² Public Engagement has been mandatory for the majority of UK HEI funding since 2008, see [UKRI Public engagement with research](#)

³³ Where the UK is one of the leaders globally through networks such as the [National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#)

³⁴ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, 2016).

³⁵ [Claire Armitstead, 2021, Stories to save the world: the new wave of climate fiction, The Guardian.](#)



Governments (via international policy frameworks), funders and the ‘incumbent’ (already in the conversation) scientific and technological stakeholders are only now catching up with the realities of cultural action on climate change.

Through its Creative Commissions programme, the British Council has taken the lead in engaging with the cultural sector to act on climate change. In ‘VUCA’ contexts (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) such as a pandemic and with new environmental extremes reaching the news weekly, the best strategic choice is to act – and shape future decisions based on the response to your actions – because it’s impossible to formulate a logical, evidence-based strategy in chaotic contexts.³⁶

The British Council’s support for the Creative Commissions projects in response to this chaotic situation has been invaluable in gathering evidence about the impact of culture in climate action and activism. The Creative Commissions exemplify how creativity and culture can address frequent critiques of the so-called **technocratic approach** which:

*focuses on identifying and acting on the most efficient pathways to decarbonization without remedying societal injustices...[and] take[s] a market-driven, sectoral approach to climate change.*³⁷

Creative Commissions projects take a holistic approach by involving people from different creative and cultural disciplines, civil society and with scientists and other researchers, meaning that they integrate wider societal perspectives and diverse ways of knowing and understanding the world.

As well as appearing at COP21-23, Creative Commissions projects have engaged audiences in many other contexts:

- Film festivals – **Green Spaces Atlas** at the Al Sidr Environmental Film Festival
- Other significant policy gatherings – **Nine Earths** at Connecti conference at the Bandung Biennale in Indonesia as part of the G20
- Prestigious cultural venues – **Songs of the Earth** at the Royal Albert Hall and Purcell Room
- Universities – **Doing Zero** at Manchester Metropolitan University as part of the Design Manchester Festival, and **Project arCc** across 11 universities

With the evidence from this evaluation and the strategic and policy review it contains, the British Council can now set new goals and strategy in future Creative Commissions for Climate Action programming,

³⁶ Dave Snowden, 2013, *The Chaotic domain*, The Cynefin Co.

³⁷ [Climate Nexus | the Technocratic Approach to Climate Change, Explained](#)



informed by what has been learned so far, creating a new research agenda (a new generation of research questions) and addressing the next generation of policy and societal imperatives. It can also be an even more active member of the alliance of organisations and individuals pushing for Culture-Based Climate Action to be formally recognised within UN climate negotiation.

To do this, the evidence needs to be specific about:

- what kind of cultural forms, media types and creativity activities work
- how they have been effective in addressing specific social justice and climate/environmental themes.

Alongside the social justice and climate/environmental thematic frameworks, is the typology of cultural forms, media types and creative activities that was used in this evaluation to categorise and assess the Creative Commissions projects to date. It is proposed to be used and evolved in future iterations of the programme to:

- balance, prioritise and set goals with respect to certain forms, types and activities
- to monitor and evaluate in a way that is comparable to the past and which recognises and differentiates between the specific strengths and benefits of particular forms, types and activities.

Cultural forms, media types & creative activities

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| → Film/TV/video | → Public art/graffiti/site-specific works |
| → Music | → Archaeology |
| → Audio/podcasts/radio | → Architecture & built environment |
| → Performing arts | → Museums & archives |
| → Crafts | → Natural heritage & environment |
| → Literature, poetry, spoken word | → Fashion |
| → Visual arts including photography | → Festivals & outdoor arts |
| → Digital arts | → Immersive & games |
| → Comics/picture books/graphic novels | → Design |
| → Sculpture | |

These categories are commonly used and effective in categorising cultural activity within the UK. From a Western point of view, they would benefit from some co-design with stakeholders to reflect the categories of work seen from outside the UK, indigenous and other relevant perspectives. For example, they omit



intangible heritage³⁸, oral traditions and ritual practices which are woven through most of the projects to date – but there may be better, and more specific ways of describing these. The network of project partners and future applicants and partners would be an ideal group to involve in such a co-design process.

Culture-Based Climate Action

Culture-Based Climate Action (CBCA) was launched at the UAE COP28 in 2023, focusing on the cultural and creative sectors' as yet largely untapped role in fostering the necessary economic and social transformation to mitigate and adapt to climate change – action that is neither 'technological' nor primarily about those sectors reducing their own emissions.

The Group of Friends³⁹ of Culture-Based Climate Action – launched by the Ministries of Culture of Brazil and UAE with support and leadership from Julie's Bicycle, Climate Heritage Network amongst others – is campaigning for a Joint Work Decision⁴⁰ in the lead up to COP30 in Belém in November 2025. If successful, this would pave the way for the allocation of resources over the following year to develop the CBCA concept with greater political attention. They are also trying to secure agreement to embed culture and creativity in the 'Race to Resilience' theme⁴¹ championed by High Level Champions Group⁴².

Through their and many others' efforts, and with CBCA as a rallying call, cultural and creativity's contribution to action against climate change is now, finally, starting to be seen as important, fundable and reputation-enhancing at national levels and in the cultural sector. This represents a major opportunity for the British Council to win political support, funding and partners for the future of this programme – and perhaps others – in the future. It also means that other players will be seeking to enter this space – both a good sign and a marker of increased competition for what are limited attention and resources. There is still work to be done for other sectors to adopt culture-based climate action as an approach.

Future backing for CBCA will require better evidence than exists already. This evaluation report – and evaluations from future work in line with the recommendations provided – can contribute such evidence. With this, the British Council will be increasingly able to demonstrate the unique value that creativity and

³⁸ With renewed significance in the UK resulting from it becoming the 183rd signatory of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage with much to learn from and share with other countries who are already signatories <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/intangible-cultural-heritage-united-kingdom-becomes-183rd-state-join-unescos-convention>

³⁹ [Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action \(GFCBCA\) | International coalition launched to promote culture-based climate action](#)

⁴⁰ [Climate Heritage Network | Call to Action](#)

⁴¹ [Race to Zero | Race to Resilience](#)

⁴² The UN nations formed the [High-Level Champions Group](#) at the 2019 COP25 in Madrid which have since retained a mandate to enhance the ambition and strengthen the engagement of non-government actors in achieving the goals of the Paris agreement



culture – and the potential of international collaboration, which utilises UK strengths in these sectors via the British Council – can bring to the already crowded multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder space of climate action.

Cultural heritage within climate Loss & Damage

Loss & Damage⁴³ is the term used by the UN Environmental Programme for:

...the unavoidable and irreversible negative economic and social impacts of climate change **despite climate mitigation and adaptation actions** on those who are not responsible for causing them and least able to adapt to them.

The climate change impacts on cultural heritage⁴⁴ – both tangible and intangible – is a subcategory of Loss & Damage.

- This attracts specific funding – often responding to damage and risk through conflict as well as climate change – such as the DCMS/British Council Cultural Protection Fund⁴⁵.
- Culture was recently incorporated into climate policy on Loss and Damage as part of the Adaptation and Resilience Pathway of the Marrakesh Global Partnership for Climate Action (MGPCA).
- At COP28, the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience set out a specific target on the protection of Cultural Heritage from the impacts of climate-related risks and established a new Loss & Damage Fund administered by the World Bank.

Climate action needs different kinds of knowledge

Climate change disproportionately affects oppressed and marginalised people(s), but structural inequalities mean that they have less power to drive social, economic and political change. If climate action/activism doesn't actively include and foreground marginalised people(s), it risks both being less powerful and reinforcing existing inequality.

Understanding and adapting to climate change requires knowledge – not only from scientific laboratories or academia, but knowledge embedded in our traditions, longstanding connections to our natural environment, and daily lives. The relationship between communities and the environment generates knowledge systems on environmental care which can address climate change in a way that scientific, industrial and policy research cannot.

⁴³ [United Nations | About Loss and damage](#)

⁴⁴ [The British Council Strategic Literature Review: Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage, November 2023](#)

⁴⁵ [The British Council | What is the Cultural Protection Fund?](#)



‘Epistemological (or epistemic) justice’ is defined as making visible, and granting equal value to, all types of knowledge and knowers⁴⁶. This means putting scientific knowledge alongside human wisdom about living within and with the natural environment – particularly ancestral and traditional knowledge, and other knowledge held and transmitted by marginalised groups. This knowledge is neither inferior nor less important than others, particularly when it comes to adapting and responding to climate change.

Dialogue, innovation, creativity, engagement and collaboration of the kind fostered by the Creative Commissions can level the playing field between artistic, academic, scientific, and ancestral/informal knowledge.

⁴⁶ UNESCO | [Epistemic justice and the knowledge commons for lifelong and lifewide learning](#), January 2023



Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals and Action for Climate Empowerment Framework

Contribution⁴⁷ to the Sustainable Development Goals

All 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were self-reported as being addressed by at least one project, thematically, programmatically or through local policy engagement.

- All projects, as creative collaborations for climate action, worked towards **SDG 13: Climate Action**.
- As international collaborations, all projects worked towards **SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals**.
- Over two-thirds of projects (39% or 15 projects) looked at topics related to **SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production**
- 29% (11 projects) focused on **SDG 5: Gender Equality**.
- **SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation**, **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**, **SDG 14: Life Below Water** and **SDG 15: Life on Land** were each addressed by just over a quarter of projects (26% or 10 projects).

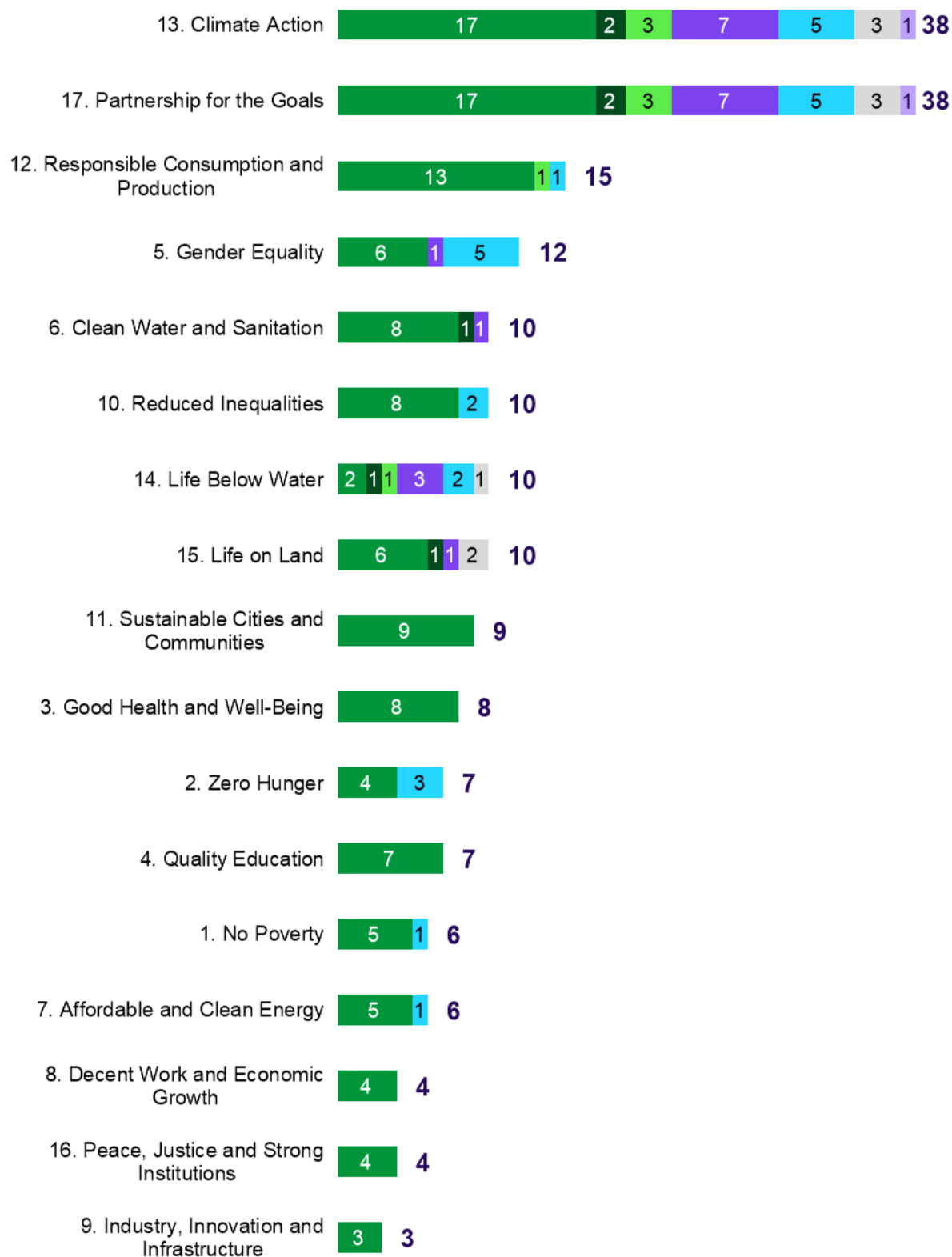
When looking at the SDGs addressed by grant programme, some notable patterns and differences emerge, including the following:

- For the 17 COP26 Creative Commissions, 76% (vs. 39% overall) of projects addressed **SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production** and 53% (vs. 24% overall) **SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities**.
- Of the 7 UK/Egypt projects, 43% (vs. 26% overall) addressed **SDG14: Life Below Water**.
- All 5 of the Gender Ecologies projects addressed **SDG5: Gender Equality** (vs. 32% overall).
- 2 of the 3 (67%) UK/Russia Creative Commissions addressed **SDG15: Life on Land** (vs. 26% overall)

⁴⁷ COP26 Creative Commissions were asked to self-report their project's alignment with the SDGs as part of their Monitoring and Evaluation Template. Through an analysis of the documentation from projects in other grant programmes, the contribution to the SDGs has been assigned based on either the themes addressed by the project, the audiences reached and engaged by the piece, or because of specific engagement by the project with local policy or policymakers.



Sustainable Development Goals addressed by projects



■ COP26 Creative Commissions

■ COP27 Creative Commissions

■ UK/Korea

■ UK/Egypt

■ Gender Ecologies

■ UK/Russia

■ From Ink to Action

Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1



It's difficult to draw concrete conclusions from these findings, but it is clear that the framing of each set of commissions was aligned with the SDGs addressed and is perhaps not a surprise; for example, the Gender Ecologies projects emphasised gender equality.

The contextual and historical elements were also likely to have determined which SDGs were more strongly considered, with the Glasgow COP26 taking place soon after the pandemic which may have meant a greater focus on local environments (leading to a focus on sustainability and communities and on the nature of consumption under lockdown). In addition, the nature of the partnerships and places where the projects took place would have had an effect, as one project leader commented.

They saw an opportunity to weave in, improving people's wellbeing, improving their neighbourhoods with also using the science that they understand, they'll reduce the heat island effect, and then also draw down carbon or to clean air through various things that they're planting. The opportunity was just very obvious to use those kind of brownfield sites because they're everywhere in those kind of capital cities [in Botswana]. (Green Spaces Atlas, UK partner)

In that sense, the different sorts and strengths of attention to the various SDGs can be seen as a response to the needs of those involved as participants or beneficiaries in the projects.

See **Appendix VI** for self-reported alignment of all projects to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Contribution to Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) lines of action

Action for Climate Empowerment – a category of climate action activities introduced under the 2015 Paris Agreement – has an overarching goal to empower members of society to engage in climate action. The six ACE lines of action are:

- climate change education
- public awareness
- training
- public participation
- public access to information and
- international cooperation.



Given the nature of the programme and calls, all 38 projects contained elements of public awareness (exhibitions, performances, campaigns, events, communications), international cooperation (between UK and other countries) and public participation (engagement with young people, communities, women, audiences, scientists etc.).

- 22 projects (58%) included elements of public access to information through online platforms, digital resources and outputs and sharing at public events



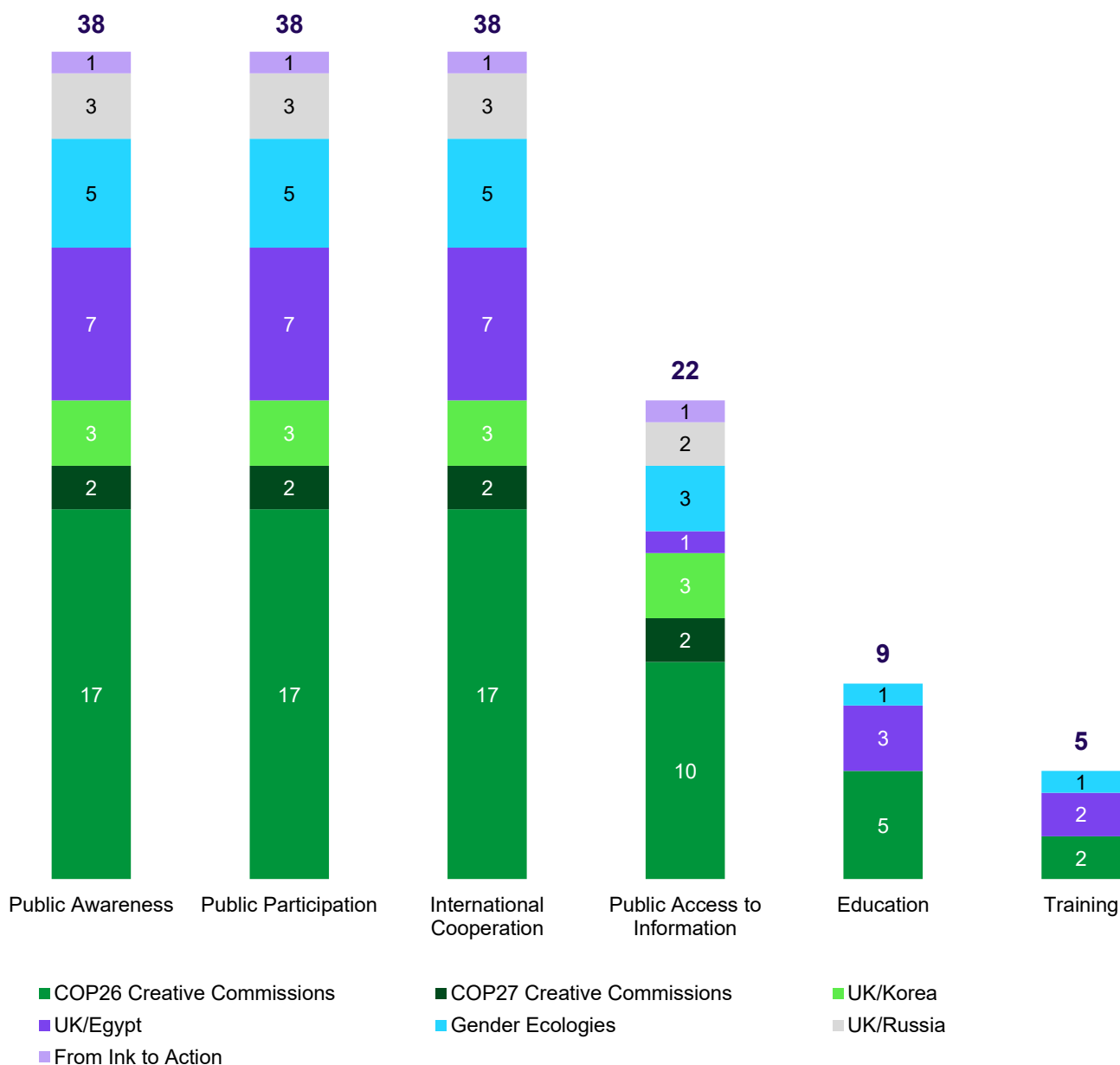
- 9 projects (24%) included elements of education such as working with universities and schools on developing resources and curriculum
- 5 projects (13%) included elements of training such as green skills and environmental practices.

When looking at the ACE elements included in projects by grant programme, some notable patterns and differences emerge, including the following:

- For the 17 COP26 Creative Commissions, 10 projects (59% vs. 58% overall) included public access to information, 5 projects included education (29% vs. 24% overall), and 2 projects included training (12% vs. 13% overall).
- Both of the COP27 Creative Commissions included elements of public access to information (vs. 58% overall).
- Of the 7 UK/Egypt projects, 43% (vs. 24% overall) included elements of education and 29% (vs. 13% overall) included elements of training.
- All 3 of the UK/Korea projects included elements of public access to information (vs. 58% overall)
- 2 of the 3 (67%) UK-Russia Creative Commissions included elements of public access to information (vs. 58% overall).



Action for Climate Empowerment elements included in projects



Base: 38 / 17 / 2 / 3 / 7 / 5 / 3 / 1

Whilst impacts on policy, policymaking and policymakers have not been the primary focus of the Creative Commissions programme to date, programmes like this clearly do fall within the Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) banner within global climate policy. This explicitly recognises the potential impact of innovative engagement of and perspectives from civil society on policy development and policymakers and the implementation of climate policy – rather than just policymaking:

*By ensuring that people can participate effectively in climate change decision-making **and implement[ation of] climate mitigation and adaptation activities**, governments should seek to integrate civil society perspectives and mobilise the general public. In some places, this will*



*prompt profound changes to how political leaders and civil servants are accustomed to working and encourage people to be more attentive to policymaking.*⁴⁸

There would appear to be untapped potential for future work in this area to argue for and evidence such concrete change impacts. In this policy and strategic context (explored further below), making such a case for creativity and culture contributing to climate **action** – rather than just public and policy discourse – would further strengthen its position and contribution to wider Culture-Based Climate Action.



Image: COP26 Creative Commissions, Nine Earths, D-Fuse, Metal, RMIT University, Maya Chami, Sembilan Matahari, Musica Estranha,

⁴⁸ [United Nations Action for Climate Empowerment](#)



Reflections and recommendations

These are organised ranging from the strategic to the operational considering:

- Future positioning within UK and international policy and wider British Council strategy
- The level of ambition for future impact – from better dialogue to solutions and change
- Future focus of climate and social equity themes and global regions
- Potential to diversify creative approaches and cultural forms
- Support to our partners – to commissioning, creative Research & Development and production, audience development and legacy
- Monitoring and evaluation

Strategic positioning within Culture-Based Climate Action

Culture-Based – and perhaps also Creatively-Enabled – Climate Action (CBCA) is going to be an increasingly busy space. As a global frontrunner in this area of work, the British Council can sustain its position and distinguish itself and the contribution by demonstrably bringing areas where the UK is recognised as strong in knowledge, expertise, talent and reach, including:

- Public engagement with research, especially in using creativity, media and culture; cultural heritage; and around science including environmental and climate sciences
- Cultural marketing, communications and outreach and broader concepts of 'audience development' for cultural and creative experiences and activities.
- Cultural relations, supporting international exchange and collaboration on mutual terms

By contributing ideas and evidence to the CBCA movement, through cultural relations and international collaboration the British Council can:

- Keep current its understanding of what others are doing in CBCA so that it does not duplicate and works in partnership with others.
- Find like-minded organisations with which to partner on the future of the Creative Commissions programme, including co-design and delivery, and joint fundraising.
- Further develop the analysis of the policy and strategic context presented earlier to assist in securing support for CBCA.
- Choose strategic priorities which consciously differentiate the British Council offer and that of the projects and partnerships that it funds.

A potential point of difference could be to go beyond building climate awareness and improving the quality of public and policy discourse ('talk') and move further into fostering through creative and cultural approaches the development and adoption of climate solutions ('action').



The British Council could explore how Loss & Damage financing from other funders could potentially be applied to future work focused on Loss & Damage to cultural heritage. It could investigate how its own Cultural Protection Fund could potentially fund some of the future Creative Commissions– or at least be more strategically aligned with it.

Strategic positioning within International Development

There is potential to be better aligned with UK and devolved government international development and soft power objectives, and to demonstrate more concrete impact towards development outcomes. To do this, the British Council would need to explore how both past and future projects under the programme can achieve greater impact and influence. This would require:

- Establishing a theory of change or logic model for the future programme which is explicit about the particular UN SDGs that the programme is aiming to work towards, with guidance on how to measure impact and value against them. This will aid consensus about the strategic aims of the programme and enable better evaluation of its success to be undertaken.
- Requesting applicants to the programme to identify which SDGs they would expect to be contributing to and how, as is common with other impact and development funding. This was done for the COP26 and COP27 Creative Commissions and could be adopted across other projects.
- Using the kinds of models used in ‘communications for change’ (such as the Ladder of Change proposed under [Project Goals](#)) in project design, selection, monitoring and evaluation, and communications. This would better support individual projects and cohorts of projects to:
 - identify specific parts of the public that will be involved and impacted
 - define the desired deeper more ambitious impacts on publics in terms of changed attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in addition to awareness and understanding
 - plan dissemination, outreach, distribution and communications accordingly.

There would appear to be some missed opportunities in addressing SDGs through the projects, specifically:

- Decent work and economic growth – through opportunities for green growth coming from skills and ideas generated through the projects
- Industry, innovation and infrastructure – given that most climate impact is generated by business and public services, but influenced by consumer and citizen behaviour as much as advocacy – what is the role for creativity and culture within the projects to engage more meaningfully with this?

In future programme design, the British Council could consider more proactive engagement with the private sector, which has a key role to play in tackling the climate emergency.



Strategic positioning within the British Council

The strategic context even within just the British Council is complex. This work could benefit from and contribute to other British Council projects, strands and initiatives:

- Connections to Higher Education and maybe even language learning (as in UK / Viet Nam Season)
- Connections to Seasons of Culture between UK and partner countries, and other international collaboration grant schemes within the Arts team
- Work with young people including Next Generation and Youth Connect programmes
- Cultural Protection Fund (as noted above).

The level of ambition for change – from talk to action

Undoubtedly the projects have great impact on those directly involved but there is an opportunity for them to have an even wider impact (on society, policy etc). By COP30 in Belém, Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) – to which all governments committed, will have had these ambitions for 10 years:

- “By ensuring that people can participate effectively in climate change decision-making and implement[ation of] climate mitigation and adaptation activities... [to prompt] profound changes to how political leaders and civil servants are accustomed to working”⁴⁹
- For “those directly impacted by the adverse impacts of climate change to share their understanding and experience” to be “connect[ed] to decision-makers and practitioners” via “feedback loops and mechanisms”⁵⁰

Some projects expressed scepticism of how far their projects really influenced and impacted policy thinking. Whilst being realistic about the potential impact of small creative projects there is a distinct opportunity to enable them to achieve it.

The great takeaway that we had from COP 28 because we did our show in the UK pavilion. It was the first time a creative endeavour had been invited to do that. The ambassador said, 'You know, I've been here all week long. I've seen 40 PowerPoint presentations. I will remember none of them after tomorrow. I'm not going to forget this. (The Earth Turns, Egypt partner)

The project goals are clustered around building climate awareness and improving the quality and diversity of voices in public and policy discourse. **If the purpose of Culture-Based Climate Action – of which the Creative Commissions is an inspiring example – is to generate action which demonstrably contributes to climate mitigation or adaptation, there needs to be a shift in vision towards using**

⁴⁹ Public Participation as defined in [United Nations Action for Climate Empowerment](#)

⁵⁰ Public Access to Information as defined in [United Nations Action for Climate Empowerment](#)



creativity and culture to design solutions and support their adoption, demonstrate their benefits and motivate change.

For this to happen, projects need to be thought of more in terms of being research and development to produce something (creative, cultural, of scientific or technical value) that has a lifespan rather than being one-off projects, and their funding being a subsidy of activity. They also need to have monitoring and evaluation integrated (more detail below) to learn from practice, make them sustainable and able to attract other support – as well as enabling learning to take place in a variety of ways and providing an evidence base for the British Council to use for future initiatives.

Setting the strategic direction

Once the British Council has reviewed the findings and recommendations, they will then be in a position to set out the **future ambition and focus** of this work. Representing this as a logic model can help to structure the strategic goals as outcomes and represent how the future programme aligns with different British Council strategies and wider policy agendas.

The British Council makes regular and good use of Theory of Change and Logic Models. These are helpful for gaining consensus, planning the initiatives and developing the evaluation methodology. However, the nature of these models (not just for the British Council) means that there are sometimes tendencies towards generalisation. These models need to be used as aids for conceptualising, planning and evaluating initiatives rather than being thought of as a task to be completed or an end in its own right.

Developing a Theory of Change model should be done collectively in discussion by all involved in the programme development. It should be linked to longer term aims and objectives, providing a springboard to more detailed outlines of what the programme is hoping to achieve. This will then make evaluation of the Creative Commissions programme easier to develop and plan, with its various components being linked through a data framework that links its intended outcomes more directly to the evaluation and monitoring undertaken. See below for specific recommendations regarding Monitoring and Evaluation.

Thematic and geographic focus

Innovative initiatives like this have to be pragmatic – COP has been a catalyst for activities that have understandably been platformed at COPs and delivered in the run-up to COPs and have worked in regions where there has been partner funding available. There is potentially now an opportunity to consider the thematic focus and location of future activity.

In order for the programme to continue being relevant to global, regional and local public and policy debate, the British Council should consider how future programmes:



- Address themes climate and environmental themes which are emerging or otherwise under-debated⁵¹ and/or where the UK policy, environmental, science, technology and cultural sectors have perceived strengths and leadership⁵² and therefore the British Council's contribution differentiated from others
- Address themes that impact most on civil society such as climate migration – building on projects in the UK/Egypt and Gender Ecologies calls – climate adaptation and resilience, and green skills and sustainable practices
- Be more geared towards action that will lead to concrete societal, environmental and economic benefit
- Align more with the priorities, concepts and language in global policy, the evolving focus of climate activism and interdisciplinary climate action by through industry, climate science and technological innovation.
- Develop its intersectionality, taking into account gender issues, under-represented voices and indigenous cultures, traditions and practices.

Geographical areas of focus could be driven by climate and biodiversity themes:

- Explicitly encouraging the involvement of islands and coastal regions could enable a specific, first-hand focus on rising sea levels, acidification etc
- Specific calls could be made for projects exploring polar regions (probably requiring collaboration with other partners from developed countries), such as **Arctic Treeline**.

It would seem sensible to make the most of opportunities and networks in Iberoamerica because of:

- The upcoming COP30 in Belém and the UK-Brazil Season of Culture led by the British Council and Instituto Guimarães Rosa (IGR), the Brazilian government's organisation for cultural diplomacy
- the Iberoamerican Programme of Creative Industries and Culture launched⁵³ (including the proposed data observatory to measure economic, social **and environmental** impacts of culture) by the OEI in August 2024

⁵¹ For example, climate finance and the Loss & Damage Fund are currently highlighted

<https://www.oxfordeconomics.com/resource/key-climate-and-sustainability-themes-for-2025/>

⁵² For example, in our leading use of wind energy, as the largest exporter of financial services or as the first signatories of the NDC Youth Clause <https://universalyouthclause.org/>

⁵³ OEI | OEI launches Ibero-American Program of Cultural and Creative Industries to boost the region's economy from its cultural potential



- The upcoming UNESCO Mondiacult 2025 conference on cultural policies for sustainable development in Spain, following on from Mondiacult 2022 in Mexico
- British Council's Cultura Circular programme for the sustainability of festivals in Latin America and the Caribbean with UK partners.

Diversifying creative approaches and cultural forms

Certain cultural – arts, culture and heritage – forms are less or not represented in projects to date and could be considered for future calls. A potential research question for future evaluation could be: what is the value that specific creative approaches or cultural forms bring to public and policy discourse around climate and in the change that climate action requires?

Now we are post-pandemic in practical terms, calls could encourage more live performance. Such live outputs could also be captured (filmed) for greater dissemination and legacy as well as limited carbon footprint, building on projects to date including **motherEarth international**, **Phone Call to the World**, **Stop These Games** which combined some in person activity with online collaboration and participation.

Preservation of cultural heritage and the challenges that climate change brings are a topic of considerable policy and academic interest that rarely appear within culture or media. See earlier recommendations relating to Loss & Damage and Cultural Protection Fund.

The UNEP-supported Playing for the Planet initiative⁵⁴ led by the games industry represents mainstream and global games. Creative Commissions thus far have included metaverses and virtual reality (such as **Breaking the Waves**, **Museum of Plastic**, **Gathering Moss**) but there is still opportunity around games and gaming. A partnership between the British Council and other commercial and impact investors interested in stimulating greater diversity in games could spur the development of many more culturally diverse and 'serious' games.

Social equity themes and focus

The calls and projects have a strong EDI theme and stance – including interculturality and bridging between creatives and communities in different countries. There has been a strong focus on gender, youth and indigenous communities to date. There is an opportunity to address other dimensions of social justice and to explore more explicitly themes of intersectionality.

Building on the success of the Gender Ecologies call, future calls (or strands within calls) could highlight specific social justice themes that the programme would like projects to address. These could, for example, include disability rights, LGBTQIA+, migration and refugees, intergenerational work – outside

⁵⁴ <https://www.playing4theplanet.org/>



formal education settings. They could include the lived experience of both artists/creatives and communities, including how climate change and natural disasters impact these people with these attributes.

The complexities and sensitivities of collecting EDI information to date have limited the programme's ability to have an overall view of what aspects of social justice, gender balance and inclusion are being addressed. Where permitted by law and in a locally sensitive way, having taken appropriate specialist advice, the British Council could require projects to profile and anonymously report on the EDI characteristics of team members, participants and audiences.

Better evidence of this kind would help applicants and project partners identify which gender and inclusion gaps the projects can consciously address and which they may inadvertently sustain or even reinforce. The opportunities and risks can then be managed within programme and project activities, by evolving the recruitment of participants and strategies to engage audiences, potentially targeting unrepresented groups. The evidence would help the British Council better measure its social justice impact.

The British Council could facilitate expert-led peer learning sessions between past and current projects to share inclusive practices that work in this particular context of collaboration between sectors, disciplines and communities with very different lived experiences, both in country and transnationally. Based on the interviews, this is likely to be welcomed and valued by project partners and can enrich projects and project outcomes.

Future calls could explicitly encourage evidence of community engagement in the pre-proposal design of projects as well as their early post-funding development stages. In this way, participation will not be limited only to more fully formed creative ideas. Such earlier stage user-centred design and people-centred practices can co-design and co-select the issues to be addressed, outcomes to be achieved and the way they are framed rather than just influence creative responses to them.

Commissioning process

In order more fully to meet its own aims for inclusivity and diversity and to continue to lead both creative and social innovation in this emerging field of Culture-Based Climate Action, the 'gene pool' of people, knowledge and lived experience involved in future projects could be widened. This could include people and organisations in disciplines with which the British Council does not commonly collaborate and those less familiar with its work and funding programmes. This would require:

- An evolved communications approach to the funding calls, using others' networks and with longer lead-in times so people less familiar with the British Council and its processes have time to develop ideas, bring together partners and write bids.



- Support for brokerage between potential partners. This is common with other comparable programmes funding creative, cultural and collaborative research and development activities and often involves events and online platforms where people can meet potential partners.
- More strategic longer-term partnerships that develop awareness and positioning for the brand of the programme overall, rather than just promotion of each funding call.

The funding calls should include clear expectations on projects in terms of project management, reporting, accessibility, marketing and communications so that bidding projects can plan and budget accordingly.

The asks to projects should, wherever possible, be planned and communicated in advance.

The participatory – co-design and co-creation – elements of the programme can be further developed by explicitly referencing such activities as eligible for funding, encouraging project partners to consider how these approaches could work in the context of their project and by giving examples of past work.

Some guidance on commercial matters – contracting, intellectual property rights etc – available to applicants could improve the sustainability of projects and project partners and avoid risks of mismatches and potential disputes.

The fact that the project partners surveyed struggled to identify specific project goals – in terms of impact on audiences and participants – suggests a potential lack of clarity of the change outcome they intended – or a desire to be seen to be achieving the maximum rather than focusing on an achievable outcome in the project timeframe. If the projects are to be more outcome and impact oriented – directing their research and development, production, marketing and outreach efforts to these ends – it would help them to be clearer what these goals are. This would also provide focus for how each project and the programme as a whole is evaluated.

Support for international connections and collaboration

Projects were keen that capacity and resources were adequately budgeted from the start and expressed a desire for British Council's support on this. Similarly, projects also wished to have additional guidance on best practice for international partnerships, particularly around communication, ensuring mutual approaches and taking decolonisation narratives and power dynamics into consideration. For this to take place, it will be important to ensure that project partners have initial training and orientation at the beginning of the grant programme so that they are better prepared for their work.

Further impact could be achieved by connecting partners and projects with local country teams early in the process so that they can provide guidance about the local context, including EDI, safeguarding and duties of care. Local country teams can also help the projects find relevant avenues for increasing visibility and ensuring sustainability of projects that is important for their legacy.

In order to provide the peer learning and connections with other projects that many project partners to date have wanted, the British Council could establish and facilitate a network of the projects in each call.



Through this network, which could be facilitated entirely online by grants managers, project partners could ask questions, share ideas and outcomes from their projects, and support one another. This would be expected to have benefits in strengthening the programme as a whole through sharing of best practice and co-ordination of certain actions, including marketing and communications by the projects and the British Council.

Support for marketing & dissemination

The British Council can help projects recognise their responsibilities beyond creative development and production by being clearer in funding calls about this ‘last mile’ of reaching and engaging audiences – including those new to the partners, artform or topic – in person or digital. This is crucial in achieving impact from the British Council’s investment in activity where the impact goes beyond supporting or building capacity in the cultural sector alone.

Creative and cultural research, development and production requires specialised skills, knowledge, affinities and styles of working. This group of professional competences and attributes is significantly different to those required by the marketing, communications and dissemination of – and outreach around⁵⁵ – creative and cultural experiences and content. The UK is particularly adept at recognising this distinction in its own creative and cultural sectors. Many have well codified and differentiated training and careers, practitioner roles and roles of organisations in collaborations, for example:

- Distribution, promoters, touring and exhibition versus development and production
- Agents, galleries, museums and other exhibition spaces versus artists and makers
- Distribution to education settings of learning content and the delivery of education, learning & training in those settings using that material – versus production.

Particularly in the arenas of digital content and experiences and digital marketing – including social media – , the competencies required are specialised and fast moving. It is therefore difficult to find them in the same project partners who are capable of undertaking such specialised and groundbreaking development and production work as the Creative Commissions demand.

Taking this need for projects to have access to specialist knowledge and skills and the UK’s strengths in this area into account, this would seem to be a clear part of the programme and where the British Council and its UK cultural and education networks could add significant value to future Creative Commissions projects and project partners. The British Council could choose to resource, commission and/or fund further support, such as:

- The development of:

⁵⁵ Outreach around a finished ‘product’ rather than during R&D or production



- A marketing, communications, audience development and outreach strategy and plan for each cohort of the programme, as a whole
- Tailored strategies and plan for every project, or a selection of them
- The delivery of such whole cohort or individual project strategies and plans
 - In whole, or
 - Supporting specific areas, for example: social media, online video/film distribution, digital learning content distribution
- Supporting the projects themselves to deliver their project's strategy and plan through:
 - Training
 - More informal knowledge exchange from specialists – and between the projects
 - Structured coaching and mentoring
 - Developing guidance and toolkits.

The experimental social media listening research detailed in **Appendix IX** could be further developed and applied across all the projects in a consistent way.

Such specialists could be from the UK or elsewhere. Some past project partners would be a valuable source of knowledge and experience for future ones, especially where their audiences, themes or artform/media types matched. Whoever provided the support and/or guidance would need to address the distinct challenges of:

- Promoting and securing engagement with creative and cultural outputs
- Communications for Change, Communications for Development⁵⁶ etc

Any such strategies and plans would need to be developed with and clearly communicated to the projects ahead of time so:

- Project partners are clear what the British Council itself plans to do and – where detailed – what they themselves are responsible for
- Messaging and engagement – particularly on social media – from the British Council and projects are co-ordinated and thereby amplify and reinforce each other.

⁵⁶ For example, [United Nations Agora | Communication for Development \(C4D\)](#)



Supporting legacy and project and organisational sustainability

To enhance the legacy of the programme – and to prevent already under-funded cultural organisations and often underemployed creative and cultural freelancers working unpaid trying to achieve this – the British Council would need to seek to secure or signpost to additional financial and other resources for past and future projects. This would require:

- providing additional support to projects to support them consciously developing sustainable business models for their project outputs and organisations⁵⁷;
- adopting some new approaches to funding and financing, especially alongside others and/or aligned with the dominant business models of certain artforms and media (eg film distribution and exhibition);
- securing additional support and expertise on intellectual property rights and other commercial matters for future projects;
- encouraging or signposting to funding from non-cultural sources wanting to improve the quality and inclusivity of policy or public debate – for example, public funders, development banks and impact investors;
- encouraging or signposting to funding or other support from stakeholders wishing to accelerate the development and adoption of solutions – for example, public administrations, technology providers and both small and large businesses.

The British Council has made extensive investment in these Creative Commissions and many projects have significant legacy which could be further exploited. There is an opportunity to achieve greater impact by providing or helping to secure additional support to the marketing, dissemination and outreach around **creative outputs already produced** to reach and engage further audiences. Such support to achieving further reach could be an alternative use of some of the future funding of programme, instead of the default use of funds always being on new creative Research & Development⁵⁸ (R&D) and creative production⁵⁹.

Projects in the main believed that it was valuable for their work to be showcased at COPs both in the political Blue Zone and in the more public Green Zone spaces. Culture-Based Climate Action activities in the runup to COP 30 in Belém – and, if the Brazilian presidency achieve their aim, beyond – provide further opportunities for the British Council and the projects it supports to have greater reach and influence. In preparation for and during COPs – and in other supranational and national climate and environmental fora – the Creative Commissions can showcase their work, tell their stories as part of a

⁵⁷ This would then also support the growth – sustainability – of the project partner organisations

⁵⁸ As defined by Nesta in [Defining R&D for the Creative Industries](#), March 2017

⁵⁹ i.e. the making of creative and cultural products per [United Nations | New Economics for Sustainable Development Creative Economy](#)



global movement, and contribute to debate and policymaking this report and other evidence for the impact and innovation that creativity and culture bring.

The projects are individually inspiring and impressive but can happen in isolation for a limited amount of time. Facilitating connections between projects as part of an overarching, long-running programme can extend their reach and legacy – for example, curating and combining outputs from multiple projects and using the British Council brand, as happened in the City of London Corporation exhibition.

Evaluation and monitoring

Much of the required evaluation processes in Creative Commissions were in place and this review and report has been able to draw on that which has been undertaken. However, the Creative Commissions evaluation has suffered from unevenness in type and lack of completion by many of the projects involved. For some cohorts there was a more thorough process of evaluation than for others, making wider / long term analysis challenging due to the lack of data to adequately benchmark. This has meant that for this report, for example, basic elements such as the climate change themes, or Sustainable Development Goals addressed by projects had to be assessed through textual analysis and a follow-up survey rather than directly drawing on the data provided at the time.

There is a need to have a unified, cohesive approach to monitoring and evaluation across all projects. This work is currently in development for a single British Council Arts Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning and Outcomes Approach for 2025/26 onwards.

There has also tended to be a focus on reporting of activities undertaken rather than of the outcomes and impacts of the projects. Whilst this is a difficult area to investigate and ideally requires a longer-term assessment and project implementation time, it is important that a programme such as Creative Commissions with its ambitious aims finds a way of evaluating these impacts. A regular set of indicators which are maintained over several programmes will enable a reliable and useful evidence base. It should be emphasised however, that most of the components are already present. What Creative Commissions requires is greater consistency and standardisation in the evaluation, with agreed definitions and indicators carried throughout alongside an insistence that all projects fully meet their evaluation requirements.

Whilst the British Council is well known globally for its cultural, educational and language learning elements it may not be so widely recognised for the way in which it can contribute to raising awareness of global challenges and influencing in certain policy areas such as climate and the environment. Monitoring and evaluation should be closely aligned to policy frameworks to situate the impact and contribution of the Creative Commissions to wider global goals such as the SDGs and the Action for Climate Empowerment. These recognised frameworks provide the narrative and framing to contextualise the Creative Commissions programme in an international policy context, which helps to make the case both



domestically and provides evidence for wider conversations such as the Culture-Based Climate Action movement, the UNFCCC COPs, Biodiversity COPs, and upcoming talks at Mondiacult 2025.

Projects suggested that a flexible, adaptive and responsive approach to monitoring and evaluation may be beneficial, so that they could respond in ways that make sense to their project and their milestones. Whilst evaluation is sometimes thought of as an additional unnecessary burden, encouraging projects to think in terms of its importance by integrating it as part of the project should help to produce comprehensive, robust and useful evaluation that benefits all involved.

The 'summative' outputs of evaluation – conclusions drawn at the end of programme phase – can enable the British Council to raise its profile and evidence more fully the impact of the projects including demonstrating its value in leading Environmental and Climate Change programmes such as the Creative Commissions.

Meanwhile 'formative' processes of evaluation – taking learnings along the way from ongoing monitoring and taking time out with those managing and participating to reflect – can enable programmes, and strands and projects within them to change, improve and develop. Such learnings can then also contribute 'horizontally' by being applied to other British Council programmes, creating additional value from what are inevitably constrained resources invested in an individual programme.

To make the best formative use of the evaluation undertaken, there could be more ways for reflection through discussions and debate, enabling peer to peer and networked learning, as happened during the COP26 Creative Commissions. The British Council could consider more consistent implementation of such activities across all future Creative Commissions.

