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Engaging and Empowering Young People through Arts and Humanities Approaches in the Context of Global Challenges

A Research Report by PRAXIS: Arts and Humanities for Global Development

PRAXIS

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

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Foreword

As this report makes abundantly clear, it will be impossible to deliver on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without working in partnership with children and young people, and in particular without understanding how they see the world and how they wish to approach the global challenges we all face. The leadership role that young people have in the climate emergency is currently perhaps the most visible example of the crucial part this generation has to play in addressing global challenges, in terms of the clarity, creativity and urgency that they can bring to the debate. As one young climate activist said to me during the COP26 Climate Summit in 2021: 'If your generation isn't going to do anything, then get out of the way while we do something.'

The PRAXIS report we present here highlights the breadth and depth of youth engagement across a whole host of pressing global problems that young people face, particularly in the Global South. Alongside the climate emergency, the projects discussed, all funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), showcase the many different ways in which young people are addressing issues such as youth un(der) employment, inadequate educational systems or gender-based violence, as well as issues that have specifically come to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the impact of lockdowns on the mental wellbeing of children and young people or the ramifications of the so-called 'digital divide' on this generation, which the pandemic has made both more visible and exacerbated. The projects discussed here provide innovative, practical models for how young people can effect change for themselves, and how development agencies, universities and other actors can best support them to do this.

All the projects discussed in this report were also funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Thus, the report also points to the particular role that Arts and Humanities-based research can play in working with children and young people to address these challenges. Bringing together a whole host of development agencies, civil

society organisations, NGOs, academic researchers and young people, AHRC GCRF projects provide a unique opportunity for reflection on the ways in which development work requires culturally and contextually-specific approaches if it is genuinely going to effect change. Moreover, by providing a platform for what are frequently very intensive but small-scale projects, AHRC and GCRF have helped to build connections across projects, supporting the development of new networks, drawing out key insights from across multiple projects and so helping to both increase the visibility of this work and to ensure the take up of research findings by a whole host of relevant stakeholders—from development organisations of all scales to local and national policy makers. It is particularly interesting, in this regard, to note the ways in which such projects address the vexed issues of sustainability and scalability. These are issues that are frequently seen as particularly problematic for small-scale projects such as some of those discussed in this report. What we find here, however, is a variety of creative ways that projects seek to address these issues head on, often balancing a commitment to participatory, youth-led project development with a pragmatic need to embed their work within an on-going development 'ecology' in order to ensure their research has a tangible legacy.

The types of projects described in this and all the other PRAXIS reports in this series cannot, on their own, ensure that we meet the UN's SDGs. There are, of course, other key issues that must be addressed, not least a significant funding deficit, which the OECD judged to be around £2.5 trillion before the COVID-19 pandemic (www.oecd.org). What these reports do show, however, is the value (and value for money) such work can offer, and in the case of this report specifically, how these projects point to the central importance of allowing children and young people to shape the terms of their engagement for themselves.

Professor Paul Cooke

Centenary Chair in World Cinemas; Principal Investigator, Changing the Story: Building Civil Society with, and for, Young People in Post-Conflict Countries

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AHRC: Arts and Humanities Research Council

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

CTS: Changing the Story

Co-I: Co-Investigator

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GCRF: Global Challenges Research Fund

IPU: Inter-Parliamentary Union

ILO: International Labour Organization

NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

ODA: Official Development Assistance

PAR   Participatory Action Research

PI: Principal Investigator

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

SE: Social Enterprise

SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa

UKRI: United Kingdom Research and Innovation

UN: United Nations

List of Spotlights

Executive Summary

This report focuses on youth concerns and voices in the context of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). A key output of PRAXIS, the report is concerned primarily with research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The central question informing the report is: ***What is the distinctive contribution of arts and humanities research for engaging and empowering young people in the context of global challenges?***

The report is largely based on insights from semi-structured in-depth interviews with Principle and Co-investigators of a diverse range of GCRF projects from Official Development Assistance (ODA) countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East that engaged young people in arts and humanities research. A desk analysis of 61 youth-focused research projects also informs the report. It also benefits from interviews and online discussions held for the project 'Youth, Voice and Development' in 2020.[1] Additionally the report reflects data gathered through a survey distributed to all AHRC-funded GCRF Principal Investigators (PIs) who had not participated in the interview process.

Chapter 1: **'Youth and Global Development Challenges'** reflects on some of the challenges faced by young people globally, with a particular focus on ODA countries included in the GCRF portfolio. It highlights the demographic trend of a youth bulge in many lower-income countries which too often is not viewed as a potential dividend but as a challenge for economies that cannot meet the needs or labour requirements of the increasingly youthful populations. The chapter outlines four interconnected crises affecting young people in many low-come countries:

A Crisis in Employment: Unemployment rates have been rising sharply across the world,

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1   See report: Youth, Voice and Development: The Transformative Power of Creative, Participatory Approaches for Young People in a Time of Crisis: a Mapping of Initiatives from Changing the Story and the British Council (Feb 2021)

particularly in low-income countries. In 2020 the global average youth unemployment rate was 13.6%, rising to 30% in North Africa, with young women often worst affected. COVID-19 has considerably increased the precarity faced by many young people in labour markets, although the full picture of pandemic-related impacts on youth employment is still emerging.

A Crisis in Education: Registration at primary school level may be rising in many low-income countries but reports show that the quality of education has been declining, with lack of adequate facilities or trained staff among the issues cited. As a result, education systems are failing to equip young people with life skills or prepare them for employment.

The Exclusion of Young People from Voice, Agency, and Leadership: Young people all over the world are facing barriers to representation in political structures and are also losing confidence in formal political systems and actors, who they view as corrupt or incapable of effectively addressing issues with relevance for them. They are increasingly turning towards alternative pathways to change, including involvement in social movements and informal activism.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Discrimination: GBV is a growing problem globally, affecting young women in many ODA countries. UN Women estimates that around 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual abuse by a partner or non-partner at some point in their lives and COVID-19 has exacerbated this threat for many. Girls and young women face other issues that include early marriage and teenage pregnancy. However, these challenges are often not addressed due to their sensitive nature and also because of the lack of available resources and targeted interventions.

The chapter also reflects on the impacts of conflict for many young people globally. It notes that youth voices and experiences are often forgotten or silenced in fragile, unstable situations even though youth are often among the worst affected. It highlights the risks of not addressing these issues, with potential problems that include growing mental health problems among young people and the appeal of violent sub-groups for disaffected, disenfranchised youth. It emphasises the important contribution arts and

humanities approaches can make to building the resilience and capacity of young people in the face of the challenges they encounter. These approaches are explored in the remaining sections of the report, drawing on examples and case studies from the AHRC GCRF portfolio.

Chapter 2: Articulating Youth Voices through Arts and Humanities-Based GCRF Projects highlights the power of creative participatory approaches for enabling the articulation of youth voices that are so often side-lined or silenced. It problematises the notion of 'youth voice' and shows how a range of GCRF projects in Asia, Africa, and Latin America respond to the reality that 'voice' often goes beyond 'rational' verbal language and that arts-based approaches can provide an 'alternative language' that allows young people to express difficult, even traumatic concepts, emotions and experiences. This is not only empowering in many cases but can also contribute to promoting positive mental health. The section also stresses the value of creative methodologies that include participatory film, photography, dance, and drama for mediating communication by marginalised groups of youth such as deaf children, refugees, and street-connected children.

Chapter 3: Empowering Young People as the Protagonists and Authors of Their Own Stories through Arts and Humanities-based Research focuses on the capacity of arts and humanities approaches for enabling young people to tell the stories that have meaning and resonance for them, rather than the stories they, or others, feel they should be telling. The chapter argues that approaches such as creative film-making focusing on personal 'ideation'; the production of street art and the creation of contemporary dance by young people contribute to the disruption of state-endorsed national stories and histories. These approaches also have the potential to empower and profoundly change the young people they engage both by inviting them to re-interpret the past and imagine different, positive futures and by providing engaging platforms for communicating these ideas to a wide local, national, and even international audience.
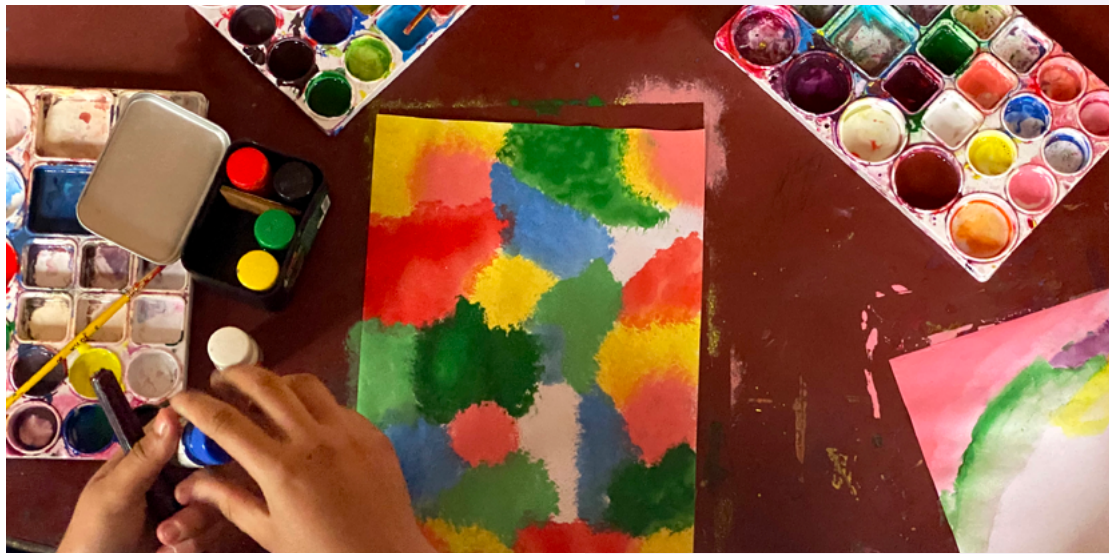
The Art of Healing in Kashmir: how creative activities can support child wellbeing in areas of conflict. Photo credit: Suhail Parray.

Chapter 4: Education Matters: Creating Effective Learning Environments through Arts and Humanities Approaches provides examples of GCRF projects that employ arts and humanities approaches to build transferable qualities and skills for young people, including in applied areas such as social entrepreneurship and film-making. It maps ways in which innovative arts-based approaches foster critical thinking, encouraging active reflection on issues such as identity and rights. Many of the approaches challenge hierarchies of knowledge and empower young people through the valuing of their own experiences and ideas in ways that can contribute to transforming harmful behaviours and attitudes. The chapter also highlights ways in which sustainability has been built into many of the projects, enabling them to continue and evolve beyond the immediate period of funded activities.

Chapter 5: Addressing Gender Inequality and Social Exclusion through Arts-Based and Humanities-based Youth-Centred Approaches discusses the gender transformative potential of arts and humanities-based youth-focused research through examples from GCRF funded projects. The chapter argues for the power of creative approaches in challenging pervasive stereotypes by engaging young people to reflect on and change gender-based attitudes and behaviours that may be harmful. It provides inspiring

examples of projects that have tackled the sensitive issues of sexual health and GBV with young people through innovative arts-based approaches, leading to tangible positive changes. It also considers the extent to which youth-focused GCRF projects have integrated gender into their design and implementation, highlighting risks of failing to do so, including skewed or unrepresentative findings and missed opportunities for addressing inequalities through the transfer of skills for example.

Chapter 6: Reflections on Research Process With Research Partners and Young People considers how successfully aspirations of co-production were applied in the context of work with research partners and young research participants. The interviews revealed that in many cases projects' successful roll-out hinged on building trust with actors in research locations. Levels of engagement and the capacity to contribute to change were often highest when relationships and consensus had already been created prior to the start of the project. A key point is the importance of academics and partners having a non-hierarchical relationship built on respect for one another's methodologies and ideas. It is clear, however, that the underlying power imbalances that characterise the relationships between academic institutions and local actors (especially those who are young)—exemplified by often time-consuming bureaucratic processes and constraints around authorship of key publications—are often more intractable, requiring more strategic attention.

Photo credit: Husniati Salma, Unsplash.

Introduction

Young people globally are pessimistic about their futures. In 2020, a global International Labour Organization (ILO) online survey of over 12,000 young women and men aged between 18 and 29 found that 38% were uncertain of, and a further 16% were fearful for their future career prospects. The survey also found significantly reduced mental health for over 50% of young respondents whose education or work had been disrupted the most since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO 2020a). The ILO report notes that 'the impact of the pandemic [has been] systematic, deep and disproportionate', with particularly severe effects for young women, the youngest respondents and young people in low-income countries (ILO 2020a:2).[2] These voices and concerns reflect a much wider global phenomenon that existed prior to the pandemic, with young people directly and disproportionately affected by systemic issues that include inadequate access to decent work; education systems that are far from fit for purpose, failing to preparing youth for employment; political ineptitude and the failure of governments to represent youth voices or needs; the exposure of young women and girls to multiple forms of discrimination and risk, including gender-based violence (GBV); and the growing, existential threats of climate change, conflict, poverty, and inequality.

It is not only the seriousness of these issues that is concerning but the scale. Young people represent over a fifth of the world's population.[3] Globally around 1.8 billion people are

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2   A Guardian study from 2021 focusing on a sample of young people aged between 16 and 25 living in Europe echoed these findings. In addition to the immediate effects of the C0VID-19 pandemic on their mental health and education young people mentioned concerns about the weakening economy, political ineptitude and complacency, and climate change. See 'So many revolutions to lead': Europe's Gen Z on their post-Covid future | World news | The Guardian.

3   This is based on an estimated 7.7 billion total global population, of which recent figures indicate around 1.2 billion are aged 15-24 (United Nations, 2018, World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNDESA).

between the ages of 10-24, constituting the largest generation of youth in history. Nearly 90% of these young people live in lower-income countries, where they make up a large proportion of the population. Their numbers are expected to grow—between 2015 and 2030 alone, about 1.9 billion young people are projected to turn 15 years old (UNDESA 2020). The enormous potential represented in this high proportion of young people of working age could be perceived as a 'demographic dividend', with virtuous economic, social and political impacts but, as the 2018 Global Youth Report states:

'Despite their significant present and future numbers, young people are often faced with age-related challenges and barriers to participation in economic, political and social life, greatly hindering their own development and, by extension, sustainable development. Harnessing the potential of youth is dependent on protecting young people's health and well-being, guaranteeing a quality education and the freedom to participate, providing decent work opportunities, and addressing the myriad other challenges young people face' (UN 2018:14).

This is therefore a critical moment. Evidence indicates that unless these multiple, overlapping crises are addressed, serious repercussions for young people at the individual and wider social levels could include economic stress and exploitation, mental health issues and participation in risky and/or violent behaviours. It has never been more important to understand what young people want and need or to engage them meaningfully in defining their lives and futures for themselves. This also means involving them in identifying and implementing solutions to global problems that include the 'existential' threat posed by climate change (UNDP 2020), conflict, poverty, and inequality, all of which have serious implications for their lives. It is clear that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will fall far short of achievement unless more efforts are made to actively listen to and create opportunities for young people. The UK government has noted that: 'without engaging young people seriously' in shaping and monitoring policies and actions towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

and the achievement of the SDGs it will 'simply not be possible to deliver' on objectives of strengthening global peace, security and governance; strengthening resilience and responses to crises; promoting global prosperity; tackling extreme poverty; and helping vulnerable people. [4]

Yet, despite this imperative, youth remains a neglected area in development programmes and there is a notable lack of research on young people in lower-income countries. For example, even though 90 of the 232 indicators developed to measure progress against the SDGs have relevance for young people there is a startling paucity of age-disaggregated data (UN 2018). Contributing factors are likely to be concerns over safeguarding and associated risks in work with children, adolescents, and young adults and the fact that youth is often not explicitly framed as a priority in development planning. As a result, young people's specific needs and perspectives often remain side-lined or invisible in a development context. Recent years have seen an increasing focus on the needs of adolescent girls, but this is usually in the narrow context of sexual and reproductive health and rights or education. Girls' and young women's concerns and experiences are often elided as they are bundled into the 'women and girls' development category, while boys and young men are rarely mentioned in the context of development programmes and narratives.

It is against this backdrop that this report focuses its attention on youth concerns and voices in the context of the Global Challenges Research Fund. A key aspiration of the GCRF is to contribute to progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the promotion of innovative, partner-focused approaches and the generation of much-needed evidence. This report is intended to reflect on the individual and collective 'added value' of projects funded through the GCRF, providing a youth lens on the three priority themes of equitable access to sustainable development; sustainable

4   UK Department for International Development, 2016, Putting Young People at the Heart of Development: The Department for International Development's Youth Agenda, UK.

economies and societies; and human rights, good governance and social justice. A key output of PRAXIS, the report is concerned primarily with research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in order to promote learning on the distinctive contribution that Arts and Humanities research can make to tackling urgent development challenges.

PRAXIS

Over five years, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) have made close to 300 awards under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Newton portfolio. These awards have drawn on AHRC's research base to address development challenges that are ultimately global challenges, including poverty reduction, global health, climate change, resilience, conflict, displacement, inclusive education, and rapid urbanisation.

PRAXIS, based at the University of Leeds, aims to champion the distinctive contribution that Arts and Humanities (A&H) research can make to tackling a range of urgent development challenges. PRAXIS has identified a number of strands across the AHRC GCRF portfolio: heritage, conflict and displacement, resilience and health. Its two major 'Nexus' events were held in Lebanon in February 2020 and via a virtual platform in November 2020 and focused respectively on Heritage and Conflict and Displacement. In light of the global pandemic that continues to affect global research, PRAXIS re-routed resources to include two new areas of focus in 2021. First, to explore how GCRF A&H projects have adapted to COVID-19, including a focus on long-term opportunities for understanding how these adaptations may inform action towards climate change. Second, to explore the critically important issue of young people's political and social engagement and agency, given the seismic shifts that are affecting global populations.

The central question informing this report is: ***What is the distinctive contribution of arts and humanities research for engaging and empowering young people in the context of global challenges?***

The report is organised around key themes, issues and questions that emerged from the reading of GCRF proposals, interviews with GCRF-funded researchers and a survey aimed at all GCRF project leads. These themes and questions resonate with aspects of three GCRF thematic areas, as well as intersecting with specific global challenge areas and at least nine SDGs.[5]

Under the GCRF theme of equitable access to sustainable development key issues reflected in the report include sustainable health and wellbeing—including mental and sexual health; inclusive and equitable quality education; and the articulation of youth voices and perspectives in development agenda-setting. Under the theme of sustainable economies and societies the case studies provide rich insights on resilience—with an emphasis on building resilience for adolescents and young adults, including through coping strategies; building skills and capacity for sustainable livelihoods; and addressing gender-based violence and discrimination. With regard to the thematic cluster of human rights, good governance, and social justice, the report highlights learning around the rights, livelihoods, and education of different groups of young people, especially those who are often at the extreme margins, including forced migrants, refugees, and street-connected young people. Often the difficulties the young people face are compounded by conflict or post-conflict situations.

The issues of poverty reduction and inequalities both frame and cut across the entire report. Gender inequality and women's and girls' empowerment are considered as cross-cutting concerns, with specific attention also paid to the issues of gender-based

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5   1) No poverty 3) Good health and wellbeing 4) Quality education 5) Gender equality 8) Decent work and economic growth 10) Reduced inequalities 11) Sustainable cities and communities 16) Peace and justice strong institutions 17) Partnership for the goals.

discrimination and GBV. Other axes of disadvantage and discrimination such as ethnicity, disability, language, and class are also considered.

Methodology for This Report

The report provides a deep analysis of a diverse range of GCRF projects from ODA countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East that engaged youth as a primary target group in arts and humanities research. It also draws wider reflections from projects that involved young people in less direct ways. Starting with the entire AHRC-funded GCRF portfolio (of approximately 300 projects), projects were identified through a search focused on key words that included 'youth, young people, children, teenagers, adolescents.' A total of 50 projects—including 'network plus' programmes were identified through this process and all the Principal Investigators (PIs) and some Co-investigators (Co-Is) of these projects were invited to participate in semi-structured in-depth key informant interviews. As a result of this process of self-selection, interviews were conducted with PIs and Co-Is of 24 GCRF AHRC-funded projects with a youth focus (see Annex 2 for the list of the projects included in this process and Annex 3 for the list of questions that informed the interviews). The report also benefits from interviews and online discussions held for the project 'Youth, Voice and Development' in 2020,[6] which drew learning from a range of projects under the GCRF funded network plus programme **Changing the Story (CTS)**[7] as well as from youth-focused British Council programme approaches.[8]

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6   See report: Youth, Voice and Development: The Transformative Power of Creative, Participatory Approaches for Young People in a Time of Crisis: a Mapping of Initiatives from Changing the Story and the British Council (Feb 2021)

7   Changing The Story is a four-year international, multi-disciplinary project which supports the building of inclusive civil societies with, and for, young people in post-conflict settings. It is a collaborative project between universities, INGOs, artists, grassroots civil society organisations, and young people across the world (Changing the Story (leeds.ac.uk)

8   Only CTS projects are included in this report.

The report is largely based on insights from these interviews, taking a deep ethnographic dive into the projects to understand research motivations, design, processes, and relationships; the roles and level of participation of young people; and desired and actual changes to which the research contributed—although given the short time-scale of many of the projects and the fact that some were still in process when the interviews took place this last question could not always be answered. Often the respondents provided rich, detailed information, much of which informs the report.

Additionally, the report draws on data from a survey distributed to all remaining PIs of AHRC-funded GCRF projects who had not participated in the interview process. A total of 16 responses were received and of these a further 11 projects were added to the original list of 50, based on information from survey respondents (see Annex 1 for a list of the 61 projects).

In addition to the in-depth interviews, a desk analysis of project materials for the 61 youth-focused projects was conducted, using data available from the United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) repository Gateway to Research. The report also benefits from qualitative case study information gathered through this process.

Statistical Overview

Information from the 61 projects was analysed, in order to gain an overall picture of trends, focal areas, patterns, and gaps for GCRF projects with a youth element or focus. This information is captured below.

Types of Youth Research Engagement

To understand how and to what extent young people were engaged within AHRC-funded GCRF projects the 61 GCRF projects with a youth focus or element were assessed against four categories[9]:

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9   The author assessed the 50 projects identified through key words and a further 11 were assessed by PIs via one of the survey questions.

1. Young people were the primary target group and co-produced the research
2. Young people were the primary target group but did not co-produce the research
3. Young people were one of the target groups and the researchers and/or partner organisations worked with them directly
4. Young people were one of the target groups but the researchers and/or partners did not work with them directly.

The results in figure 1 indicate that, for the majority of the projects, young people were the primary target group and directly participated in producing the research, usually through creative participatory approaches. The second largest category was projects that included youth as a target group and also worked with young people directly.

Types of Youth Engagement

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4
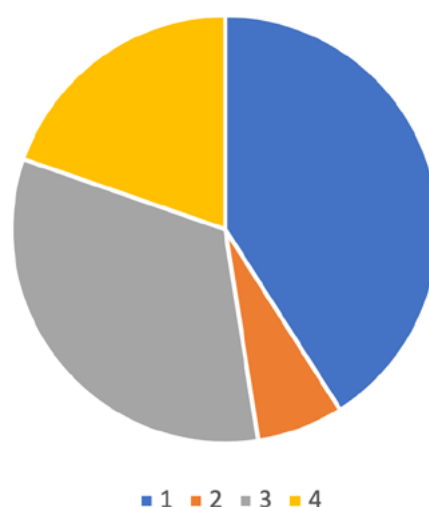
Figure 1: Types of projects in terms of engagement with youth

Methodologies

The projects were clustered into types of methodologies used, according to the following categories:

1. Participatory arts-based
2. Participatory but no arts component
3. Interview-based
4. Survey-based
5. Text-based
6. Other

As can be seen in figure 2, the majority of the projects had a participatory arts-based component such as dance or music, painting, creative writing or film and photography. Just under 10% of projects used participatory arts with other approaches such as interviews and surveys, while 47% had a sole participatory arts-based focus. Twenty-nine percent of projects used a mix of methodologies. Approaches captured under the 'other' category included participant observation, creative workshops and network events.
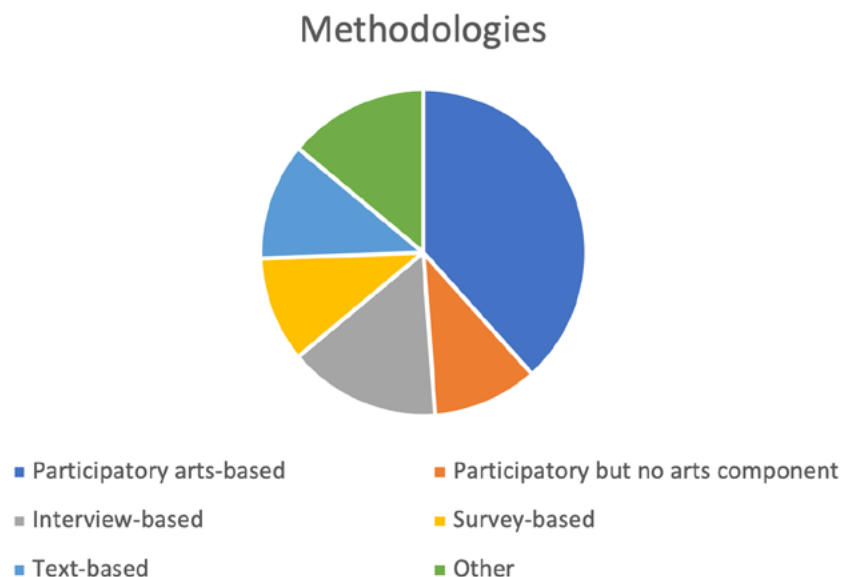
Figure 2: Methodologies used in projects

Research Locations

Regional Foci

- ■ Africa
- ■ Asia/Pacific
- ■ Latin America and Caribbean
- ■ Middle East
- ■ Multi-region
- ■ Europe
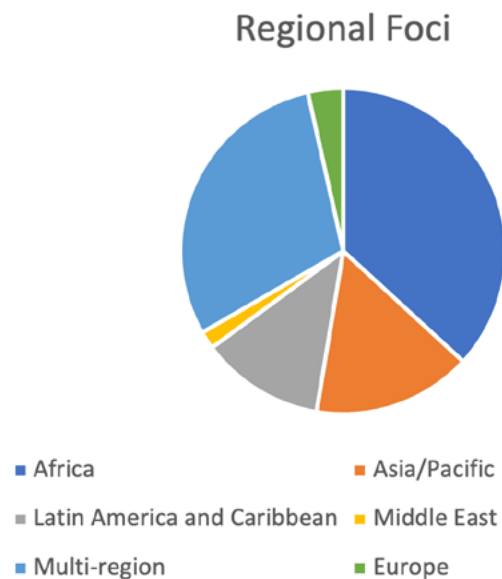
Figure 3: Research locations by region

The projects were also organised by regions where research was conducted, and an additional category captures projects that encompassed multiple focal regions. As figure 3 shows, the majority of the youth-focused GCRF projects were based in Africa, and the next largest category is multi-regional research. The Asia/Pacific and Latin American regions were both fairly well represented. Although very little research focused solely on Middle Eastern or European countries these were included in multi-regional projects. For example, 8% of multi-regional projects included one or two Middle Eastern countries and 16% included one or two European countries.

Conceptualising Youth and Young People in the Context of the Report

This section considers how we understand the terms 'youth' and 'young people', which are used across this report. Often definitions of youth are tautological. For example, according to the Oxford English Dictionary youth is 'the time of life when a person is young,

especially the time before a child becomes an adult.'[10] There is a general consensus that 'youth' defines a transition period, a 'life stage' associated with adolescence and early adulthood…where 'youth' is broadened to include the social constructions and conceptualisations of young people and their role in society (Billet 2019). This association is reinforced in development-related definitions and statements. For example, the 2030 Agenda defines youth as 'persons aged 15 to 24 years', yet there is no common agreement on which groups fall under the youth category. For example, in the context of the SDGs 'youth' refers to persons aged 18-29. However broad or narrow the categories the risk remains of excluding certain groups of young people. For example, there is a notable grey area with regard to young people aged 11-14, who technically fall into the category of 'child' but who are adolescents or pre-teens with often very different needs and vulnerabilities from younger children below the age of 11.

For Martin the concept and experience of youth is subjective, relational, and shifting. She notes that 'the notion of youth is not considered a standalone concept; rather, I see that it denotes a complex system of meanings and inferences about a person and their place in society…' She calls for 'an alternate narrative, where youth is a relationally constructed and constantly negotiated fluid and heterogeneous concept. Such a concept serves to further broaden implications for conceptualising youth and offers new components to the framework of the contextualisation of research with marginalised youth' (Martin 2019:98-99). She cites the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, which contends that youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group: ''youth' is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency' (UNESCO 2019).

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10   See: Youth noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com

This notion of youth as a fluid, inclusive category is one which this report embraces. The young people involved in the different GCRF projects around the world represent a diverse group, aged from around 10 years old up to about 30. The focus of many of the projects is more about understanding experiences of youth and their sense of generally feeling invisible, marginalised, and unheard than they are about producing deep analyses about or recommendations for particular age groups.

Structure of the Report

The report is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 considers the impacts of global challenges for youth, with reference to recent data. It focuses specifically on the issues of education, employment, voice and participation, gender-based violence and discrimination, conflict and mental health—also considering the implications of COVID-19 for young people. The chapter argues for the critical importance of a focus on youth engagement and empowerment through innovative approaches.

Chapter 2 considers the value of arts and humanities-based approaches for articulating and amplifying youth voices that have typically been excluded or silenced, grounded on case study examples from across the GCRF. It begins by asking 'what do we mean by youth voice' and goes on to highlight innovative ways in which GCRF projects have worked collaboratively with young people enabling them to express often difficult, painful emotions and creative—even controversial—ideas.

Chapter 3 focuses on the value and importance of story-telling in the empowerment of young people, in particular the provision of space and creative methodologies that enable them to tell the stories that have meaning and resonance for them. This contributes to moving young people from objects to subjects of stories that include development narratives and is a critical foundation of promoting youth agency.

Chapter 4 explores the role of arts and humanities-based approaches in the creation of enabling and empowering educational environments for children, adolescents,

and young adults. It highlights the importance of providing space and time for critical reflection and expression as well as for joy and fun through education, including for the most marginalised groups. The chapter discusses ways in which GCRF projects have built sustainability into their approaches, including through fostering practical skills that promote the employability of young people.

Chapter 5 focuses on the gender transformative potential of arts and humanities-based approaches through an exploration of projects that challenge gender stereotypes and address the root causes of issues such as GBV, gender-based discrimination and teenage pregnancy. The chapter also reflects on successes and challenges for integrating gender into GCRF projects.

Chapter 6 reflects on research processes within GCRF projects, interrogating concepts of co-production and considering the critical role of relationships with research partners and young people in the context of participatory research as well as highlighting tensions related to power and ownership.

Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Photo credit: Emmanuel Ikwuegbu, Unsplash.

Chapter 1: Youth and Global Development Challenges

Introduction

This chapter reflects on some of the challenges faced by young people globally, with an emphasis on Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) countries included in the GCRF portfolio. **As noted in the introduction, there is a lack of age-disaggregated data relating to the implementation of the SDGs.** The chapter therefore relies on a fairly limited pool of available recent data sets and qualitative evidence from different development agencies and research institutions. It draws heavily on the British Council's ground-breaking Next Generation (NG) Series, which highlights critical areas of concern for young people across a range of lower-income countries, based on in-depth qualitative and quantitative research in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Europe.[11] The NG research highlights key themes and areas of concern for young people across a range of countries, many of which are also reflected in the SDGs. The emerging body of evidence sheds light on the multiple ways in which both the prevalence of States and social and economic development processes are failing and excluding young people. It highlights commonalities across global regions and ODA countries as well as specific socio-cultural issues.

The Implications of Global Challenges for Young People

This section highlights four overarching themes to emerge from the NG work[12] and other key sources: a crisis in the availability of decent work for young people; a crisis in education; the exclusion of young people from voice, agency, and leadership; and the prevalence of gender-based discrimination and violence. It also reflects on the implications of conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic for young people.

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11   See: Next Generation research series | British Council

12   Reports consulted were on Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Lebanon.

The Crisis in the Availability of Decent Work for Young People

Many parts of the world, particularly in lower-income countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America, are experiencing a youth 'bulge'—an increase in the number of young people aged 15-24 as a proportion of the population. For example, youth in sub-Saharan Africa account for nearly 20% of the total population, while in Latin America and the Caribbean they comprise 17% and in Western Asia and Southern Asia 17 and 19% respectively (UNDESA 2018). In theory this demographic trend should present opportunities for economic development, driven by a young, educated labour force. Yet the reality is that across the developed and developing world formal labour markets are narrowing, unable to absorb new workers, while there is far from adequate investment into innovative solutions such as entrepreneurship.

In light of these challenges many young people are experiencing intense feelings of insecurity about the future. This new generation 'Z' has been dubbed 'The Precariat' (MacDonald 2017) because of their reliance on precarious, low-paid forms of often short-term work. The ILO estimates that 156 million youth in low and middle-income countries are living in poverty even though they are employed (UNDESA 2018). This changing work landscape brings some positive implications. For example, there are new opportunities for some young people to innovate through entrepreneurial activities, and to create flexible 'portfolio' careers, but this often depends on the availability of financial capital and on other assets such as market knowledge, confidence, and personal connections (MacDonald 2017).

It is clear that COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing employment deficit in many ODA countries, with young people worst affected (ILO 2020). Yet young people were facing significant barriers to the labour market before the pandemic. In 2020 the global average youth unemployment rate was 13.6%, rising to 30% in North Africa, with young women comprising the majority of the unemployed in most region and sub-regions (ILO 2020). Young people participating in the NG research were keen to enter well-paid employment but faced high unemployment in many countries. For example, in South Africa 66% of young people surveyed between the ages of 15 to 24 stated that they were unemployed (British Council 2018a). Contrary to expectation, many of the NG studies indicated that those with secondary and tertiary education are often more likely to be

unemployed because of the lack of skilled jobs and the gap between demand and supply in the employment market. There is also a growing number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This phenomenon is exacerbated by gender—for example, in Kenya 49% of young women interviewed for the NG study fell into the NEET category, compared with 37% of young men (British Council 2018b).

The challenges of securing and retaining decent work are even more serious and complex for vulnerable and marginalised youth including young women, those living in humanitarian settings, youth with disabilities, migrant youth, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. There is a clear gender inequality dimension to youth employment. Nearly 13.8% of the world's young women are unemployed, compared with 12.4% of young men (UNDESA 2018). More research is needed into the reasons for this disparity, but one likely factor is the implicit bias in hiring practices fuelled by discriminatory attitudes about women's capabilities and employers' unwillingness to pay maternity leave or offer flexible hours. Once in work many young women are subjected to sexual harassment and discrimination: in Kenya young women reported being asked for sexual favours as a condition of employment, while others reported being sexually harassed by customers and colleagues (British Council 2018b).

Migration is one symptom of unemployment in many of the countries. For example, in Kenya 71% of young people interviewed said they were willing to relocate if they had the opportunity. Mass migration for young people is leading to the problem of 'brain drain' in some countries such as Zimbabwe, which many skilled, educated youth are leaving (British Council 2020a).

The Crisis in Education

Global development databases such as the United Nations Development and Gender Inequality Index reflect high levels of registration at primary level in the majority of countries.[13] However these figures do not capture retention of students, nor do they reflect the drop in attendance for secondary education. For example, in 2014, 142

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13   See: http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi

million children of upper secondary age (under the age of 19) were not in school (UNESCO and International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training 2016). This figure drops to only 14% of youth completing secondary education for low-income countries (UNDESA 2018). In many regions girls face challenges to entering school and completing their education, and these disparities are further compounded by intersectional forms of disadvantage that include poverty, rurality, disability as well as refugee and street connected status (UNDESA 2020).

Additionally, while school enrolment figures may have risen, there has been a notable decline in the quality of education (UNESCO 2013). For example, in 2012, UNESCO referred to a 'crisis in learning', largely because teachers are inadequately trained and educated (UNESCO and UNFPA 2012: 130). Data from 2020 indicates that 85% of primary school teachers and 86% of secondary school teachers worldwide have received the minimum required training. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest percentage of trained teachers: 64% at the primary level and 50% at the secondary level (UN 2020).

The NG research mirrors this trend: many of the young people surveyed reported that the quality of education was lacking and did not prepare youth for employment.[14] In Ethiopia under a third (29%) of Next Generation participants felt their education prepared them well for work, while only 23% felt it had improved their chances of getting a job (British Council 2019a).

Other intersectional factors compound exclusion from educational opportunities. In Ethiopia young people with disabilities have faced educational challenges because of both negative social perceptions and issues with physical access (British Council 2019a). In Lebanon young Palestinians cited harassment or punishment in school as key reasons for dropping out of school (British Council 2020b).

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14   For example, the key areas for improvement in the Sri Lankan education system identified by the respondents to the British Council survey were improvement in the quality of teaching, improvements in the curriculum, and improvements to the facilities at educational institutions (British Council (2019), Next Generation: Sri Lanka, London: British Council).

COVID-19 has further undermined educational opportunities for young people, particularly the poorest. According to the global ILO survey, for young people who were either studying or combining study and work before the onset of the crisis, 73% experienced school closures, yet not all were able to transition into online and distance learning. One in eight young people (13%) were left without any access to courses, teaching or training (ILO 2020).

The Exclusion of Young People from Voice, Agency, and Leadership

In many countries young people are extremely under-represented in formal political structures. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), even though 49% of the world's population was under the age of 30 in 2020, only 2.6% of Members of Parliament were aged 30 and below, while only 17.5% were under 40 (IPU 2020). In the majority of the countries surveyed for the NG research, young people reported a deep distrust of authorities. Many had been completely turned off formal party-led politics. Overall, there was very low political participation of young people in many of the countries, a situation exacerbated by the abandonment of youth quotas in some cases. For example, in Zimbabwe more than 60% of those interviewed were unwilling to engage in politics and did not think their vote could change things for the better (British Council 2020a). Many young people reported not feeling represented or listened to by governments. They were also concerned about corruption and nepotism among those with power. In Ethiopia 36% of the young people participating had experienced political corruption in the past five years (British Council 2019a).

However, there are indications that young people would welcome opportunities to be more involved in politics, given the right conditions. For example, 44% of young Kenyans interviewed for the NG study said they would consider standing for public office (British Council 2018b). There is also a growing youth trend away from electoral politics and towards more youth engagement at local and civic levels. In Europe and other regions, rather than voting for traditional political parties, young people are supporting issues-based movements and groups such as Greenpeace, Black Lives Matter, Occupy, and Extinction Rebellion (Norris 2002 cited in Sloam 2017). The internet—in particular social media platforms—enables young people to come together and exchange ideas around issue-based politics and socially engaged ideas and actions (Harris 2017).

A pervasive issue is the poor representation of women in the majority of low-income (and many middle and higher-income) countries and the need to create the enabling conditions for women's political empowerment.[15] There are some promising developments that may begin to redress the balance. For example, in Sri Lanka a quota of 25% of seats in government for women has been introduced (British Council 2019b) but this measure only begins to scratch the surface of gender inequitable representation and does not guarantee equitable participation or treatment of female politicians.[16] One clear message is the need to encourage more young women to critically engage in politics as voters, agents of accountability, and leaders.

Gender-based Violence and Discrimination

There is a **serious growing problem of GBV at home, in communities, and in schools for young women, in particular in many ODA countries (UN 2020).** The SDG Report 2020 notes: '*According to surveys conducted between 2005 and 2017 in 106 countries, 18% of ever-partnered women and girls 15 to 49 years of age experienced such violence by a current or former intimate partner in the 12 months prior to the survey*' (UN 2020: 34). UN Women estimates that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives. Some national studies indicate that up to 70% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.[17] The 2020 SDG report found that public health measures associated

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15   See for example UNDP Gender Inequality Index (http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-5-gender-inequality-index-gii); Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Politics: 2020, https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2020-03/women-in-politics-2020

16   See A. Brody, 2009, Gender and Governance, Bridge Cutting Edge Pack, Brighton: IDS.

17   UN Women, Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women, https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures (accessed September 2020).

with COVID-19 had the effect of amplifying and exposing these existing problems. For example, lock-down and the associated restrictions left many women in already difficult situations unable to escape from abusive situations in the home (UN 2020).

Pressure on young girls to marry early, often leaving school to do so, also emerged as a key issue in NG research in low-income countries.[18] Emerging evidence indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating these issues (UN 2020). In many societies adolescent girls and boys also encounter pressures to engage in sexual activity, leaving them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and—in some cases—physical and mental trauma. Teenage pregnancy is a persistent issue for many low-income countries in regions that include Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), undermining girls' economic potential and sometimes placing them at risk of maternal death or complications from abortions. Yet too often the reproductive health needs of adolescents are being ignored. This means that adolescent boys and girls often have little or no access to practical, accessible information about sex and sexuality or counselling services, resulting in the perpetuation of myths and misinformation and a lack of effective routes for seeking advice or support.[19]

However, entrenched social norms, stigma and lack of effective interventions often means that little happens to change these situations. These are extremely sensitive, often hidden issues and any available data only reveals the tip of a far larger iceberg. However, they are vital issues to raise and understand through effective approaches with young people in order to address harmful behaviours and attitudes within their local and national communities.

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18   According to the SDG report for 2020,, in 2019 the risk of child marriage was highest in sub-Saharan Africa, where more than one in three women (34.5 per cent) between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18. S (UN, SDG 2020 Report).

19   See: Issue 3: Adolescent Reproductive Health | United Nations Population Fund (unfpa.org)

Young People and Conflict

A growing number of countries are facing ongoing or post conflict recovery situations, rendering populations—particularly the poorest—extremely vulnerable. Young people are too often forgotten or their voices silenced in the midst of these fragile, unstable settings. Yet they are among the worst affected, both directly and indirectly. According to the UNFPA more than 90% of all casualties occur among young adult males (UNFPA 2020: 21). Young women are also directly involved in conflict, accounting for around 10-30% of armed forces and armed groups worldwide (UNDP 2016: 24). Conflict has undermined children and adolescents' right to education in many affected countries. For example, prior to the conflict in Syria, nearly every child was enrolled in primary school but by 2013 around 1.8 million children and adolescents were out of school (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2015). Enrolment ratios in secondary education are nearly 20% lower in conflict-affected countries at only 48%, and are far lower for girls,[20] while less than 1% of youth who become refugees due to conflict have access to tertiary education.[21]

Conflict has gender-specific implications for young people. During conflict, weakened institutions, poverty, and financial hardship leave adolescent girls vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and violence (including risky livelihoods).[22] Girls and young women are also often susceptible to physical and sexual violence used as a weapon of war. Youth also comprise one of the largest groups of those who are forcibly displaced by conflict and disasters. In 2011 the number was around 14 million youth and 10 years later this figure is likely to be much higher (Search for Common Ground 2014). Conflict is a leading cause of forced migration, resulting in at least 82.4 million people globally being forcefully

20   See: YouthStats: Armed Conflict – Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (un.org),

21   See: YouthStats: Armed Conflict – Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (un.org)

22   See: YouthStats: Armed Conflict – Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (un.org)

displaced in addition to those pushed by poverty to seek a new life elsewhere.[23] Children under the age of 18 account for 42% of forced migrants.[24]

Despite these extremely concerning impacts of conflict on young people, humanitarian responses tend to focus on children, while adolescents and youth are considered to be more resilient and a lower priority.[25]

The Value and Critical Importance of Engaging and Empowering Youth

The body of evidence from across both ODA and developed countries points to a global crisis for youth that is being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a risk that, without systemic, urgent action these negative outcomes for children and young people translate into longer-term systemic impacts, ranging from economic stress and exploitation (including through illegal migration and trafficking) and mental health issues to participation in risky and/or violent behaviours. Some of these risks are discussed below.

Factors Fuelling Young Male Participation in Violent Behaviours

One worrying trend in low and middle-income countries is the rise of gang membership and violence, which has been identified as 'the primary threat to regional stability and security' in the Latin American region (Muggah and Aguirre, 2013). Research indicates that a negative educational experience, unemployment and the lack of a sense of belonging or purpose are key drivers of gang membership for young men in particular: 'youth gangs can…provide a form of social capital, a sense of belonging and purpose to

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23   See: UNHCR - Figures at a Glance

24   See: UNHCR - Figures at a Glance

25   See: YouthStats: Armed Conflict – Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (un.org)

disenfranchised youth' (Higginson et al., 2018: 5)[26] as well as a site for performing 'an extreme public masculinity that provides the gang member with power or 'respect'' (Higginson et al., 2018: 12; Adams, 2012; Baird, 2012). Evidence shows that these factors, coupled with mistrust of authority and feelings of alienation, also contribute to young people's attraction to violent extremism and membership of fundamentalist groups (Stewart, 2018).

Insights from the British Council work on strengthening resilience in the Middle East and North Africa[27] are particularly salient. Identified key push factors for involvement in violent extremism emerging from work in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia and from wider resilience research include:

> Unfair Governance
> Unequal social, political, and economic opportunities
> Lack of voice/representation
> Intergenerational trauma and sense of a threat to identity
> Conflict
> Endemic violence
> State repression, surveillance, and coercive policing
> Injustice and perceptions of injustice

These factors can contribute to a perceived and real narrowing of young people's options and perspectives and make them increasingly susceptible to powerful messages from

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26   The studies were conducted in Turkey, Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean, El Salvador, China and Brazil (Higginson, A., Benier, K. et. al. , 2018, 'Factors associated with gang membership in low and middle-income countries: a systematic review', In A Campbell Systematic Review, Vol. 1, Number 1.

27   https://www.britishcouncil.org/partner/international-development/news-and-events/march-2018/Strengthening-Resilience-in-MENA

violent fundamentalist movements (see Figure 1). Stewart notes that 'young people are not radicalised so much as 'recruited' into organisations that, very simply, provide community and a sense of direction' (Stewart 2018: 15).
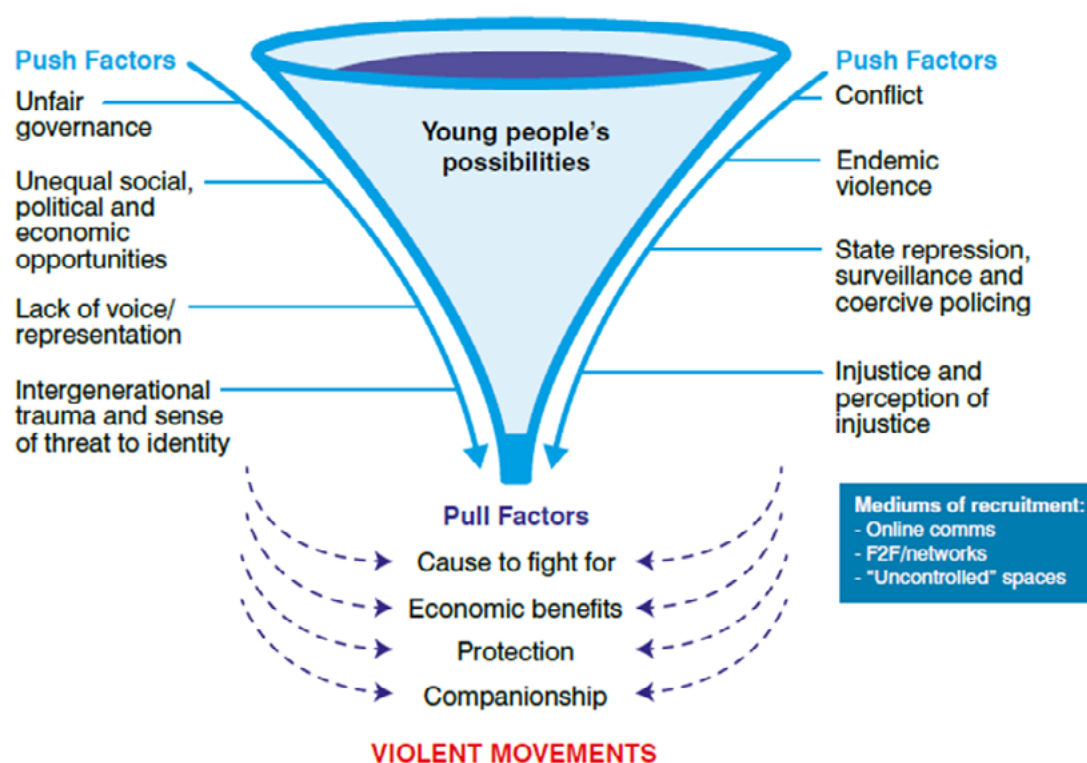
Figure 4: Process resulting in violent extremism. ©British Council, 2019 (developed by the British Council through the Strengthening Resilience Programme – funded by the European Union)

Youth and Mental health

Mental health is a critical issue globally, with young people one of the most affected groups. Evidence indicates that around three quarters of all mental health conditions start before the age of 18, and that children aged 10-18 are particularly susceptible: according to the Lancet 'most mental disorders have their origins in childhood and adolescence' (Lancet Commission: ND). This is partly due to hormonal changes in adolescence but is compounded by other factors such as poverty, conflict, displacement, bereavement,

trauma, bullying, sexual abuse, and discrimination, which can affect brain development as well as emotional responses and resilience. These mental health impacts create a vicious cycle that affects educational attainment and employment potential. Both boys and girls are affected but often help-seeking behaviour is much lower among boys and there is a higher rate of suicide among boys and young men.[28] COVID-19 has contributed to a deepening mental health crisis for young people. A survey conducted by Young Lives with 2,438 young people aged 13-25, between 26th January and 12th February 2021 indicated that 67% believed the pandemic would have a long-term negative effect on their mental health. The pandemic and the pressures of protracted lockdowns have contributed to increased anxiety, loss of motivation, and concerns about the future.[29]

There is evidence that early preventative interventions with young people can be enormously beneficial, helping to improve cognitive outcomes in children and reduce the incidence of mental health problems in later life (Lancet ND)[30] and improving their quality of life. However, challenges remain in the delivery of mental health interventions. Anxiety and depression are complex and are often part of a spectrum of mental health symptoms that go undiagnosed. A mental health diagnosis does not automatically guarantee effective treatment, however, even in high and middle-income countries. In low-income countries mental health is viewed very much as a secondary priority after meeting basic needs: 'It is viewed as a privilege, not a right.'[31] Mental health is also often perceived as a Western concept, while mental health interventions may be rooted in Western Cartesian ideas that distinguish between mind

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28   Interview with Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones 2021.

29   See: Covid Impact On Young People With Mental Health Needs | YoungMinds

30   This point was reiterated in interviews with Professor Anna Madill and Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones, researchers from the School of Psychology, University of Leeds.

31   Personal communication with Anna Madill 2021

and body, which feed into notions of mental and physical health as separate issues. Mental health is also stigmatised in many countries, and these negative implications are sometimes influenced by religious and/or cultural ideas.

Emerging research is exploring the value of promoting and understanding drivers of well-being in the context of mental health.[32] This resonates with the growth of interventions in some schools aimed at promoting resilience and positive mental health among students by addressing issues such as bullying and by promoting techniques such as mindfulness and art therapy. This report reflects on innovative approaches to positive mental health that have been trialled with students in a range of ODA countries and that are being integrated into school settings and curricula because of their high level of success. Chapter 2 discusses ways in which GCRF projects are addressing mental health issues with young people.

Opportunities and Challenges for Engaging Youth

Young people have a key role to play in the realisation of the SDGs and broader global challenges.[33] Yet there are glaring blind spots in policy, practice, and research when it comes to youth. For example, there is no standalone SDG on youth. There is also a notable lacuna in social research, including development-related studies, of adolescent voices and

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32   See for example Mainstreaming mental health - 2020 - News - University of Bradford

33   The UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs has held five global youth fora since 2015 in order to amplify youth voices and enable the active participation of young people in identifying solutions to climate change, post pandemic recovery and other 'existential challenges' across the world. UNDESA states: 'The active engagement of youth in sustainable development efforts is central to achieving sustainable, inclusive and stable societies by the target date, and to averting the worst threats and challenges to sustainable development, including the impacts of climate change, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, conflict, and migration' (UNDESA 2018: 1). As noted in the introduction to this report, the UK government has also recognised that young people are vital partners in realising the SDGs.

even young adults. Certain groups of young people—including young refugees, internally displaced or disabled youth, street-connected children, and young people in informal settlements—often fall out of analyses completely. Further analysis would be needed to understand why youth voices and experiences are so rarely captured. However, one reason may lie in the vagueness of definitions of youth, outlined in section 1.3, which, for example, often sweep the transitional period of adolescence into much larger categories that include young adults or leave adolescent boys and girls in a forgotten (and therefore invisible), grey area between childhood and youth. Another reason may be visibility and profile: because they do not have rights to vote, are too young to be employed, and are usually expected to be in school by law, young people under the age of 18 are often not considered active citizens with agency and there are few formal channels for their voices to be heard.

Negative dominant stereotypes and assumptions also shape perceptions of young people—particularly adolescents—framing them as unreliable, prone to delinquency, and difficult to work with. For example, McGregor and Farrugia note that: *'Intellectual frameworks currently used to conceptualise youth in the juvenile justice system are aimed at fixing the concept of youth in place through the notion of risk. They either essentialise the 'young risky subject', or they critique the way that youth is positioned as an object of governance through the technology of risk.'* They highlight the notion of 'at-risk' youth, noting that *'this approach demonstrates an individual subject of risk and responsibility who poses a threat to the moral order of the 'mainstream' and that is defined through technologies of risk assessment'* (2019, in Billet ed: 33).

Some researchers have argued that these perceptions of risk may be over-cautious to the extent that they are stymying the very research that could shed more nuanced light on the lived experiences of young people and help provide a better understanding of risk as it plays out in their lives. They posit that the bureaucratic requirements associated with safeguarding can undermine research aspirations and design and alarm funders, leading to researchers choosing safer, less 'risky' cohorts for their studies. Hart describes some of the tensions associated with conducting youth-focused research: *'On one side of the argument are scholars advocating for the protection of young people from harm…On the*

other are those seeking to promote a 'risk-positive' discourse, one that argues that only by being exposed to risks can young people adapt to and learn from life's problems and therein maintain a sense of wellbeing and resilience' (Hart 2019:46).

These dilemmas are summed up neatly by one of the survey participants for this report:

'If anything is to get better with GBV...it is imperative to work with young men, young women, and children. The ethical approvals can be more time-consuming to obtain...but working with youth is (while understandably fraught with permissions and ethical approval hurdles—rightly so) rewarding and imperative.'

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the specific ways in which young people globally, but particularly in developing country contexts, are being affected by global challenges. It highlights four key issues for young people identified through comprehensive research in multiple countries across global regions: poor educational provision, the lack of decent employment, the exclusion of young people from voice, agency, and leadership, and the persistent issues of gender-based discrimination and GBV. The chapter maps the risks associated with failing to address these issues, including a deepening mental health crisis among young people and the potential transition from disaffection to violence, particularly among young men. It calls for a rethinking of some of the perceived challenges that often stand in the way of youth-focused work, drawing attention to the enormous value of engaging with and empowering young people. The following chapters provide insights into AHRC-funded GCRF research that has grasped these opportunities in creative, effective ways.

The Art of Healing in Kashmir: how creative activities can support child wellbeing in areas of conflict. Photo credit: Suhail Parray.

Chapter 2: Articulating Youth Voices through Arts and Humanities-Based GCRF Projects

Introduction

The growing feeling of exclusion from formal modes of representation among many young people is reflected in emerging evidence cited earlier in this report. There is a palpable sense of disempowerment, of not being given space to speak or be heard, of young voices being side-lined or silenced on issues many care deeply about, such as climate change, environmental unsustainability, inequality or about circumstances of war, poverty, and instability that provide the backdrop to many of their lives. This is contributing to policies and processes that do not reflect their needs or perspectives. Politicised movements such as Occupy or X-tinction rebellion that amplify youth voices are simultaneously manifestations of this feeling of powerlessness and proof of the collective power and commitment of young people. Many youth-focused GCRF projects were driven by the desire to provide a conduit for the articulation of young voices through arts and humanities methodologies. While they take different approaches and have different levels of ambition, many are contributing to a growing sense of confidence, worth, and resilience among young people.

The next section problematises the notion of 'youth voice', using examples from relevant projects to interrogate its meanings and explore why it is such a powerful concept. The following sections highlight the potential of arts-based approaches for proving an 'alternative language' that allows young people to express difficult, even traumatic concepts, 'embodied' emotions and experiences, for promoting positive mental health. The final section considers the unique power of photography and film for mediating youth voices of those who are among the most marginalised and least heard.

Conceptualising 'Youth Voice'

'Voice' is a powerful, multifaceted concept. It refers to the physical action of communicating or singing. It also connotes the expression of a particular opinion, feeling or attitude—as well as the right to do so. It is associated with political representation—and solidarity—the 'voice of the people'. People can 'have a voice', 'lose', 'find' or 'raise' their voice

as well as 'giving voice' or 'voicing concerns.' As such, voice is axiomatic in terms of human identity, interaction, and realisation—it is closely bound up with a 'sense of self' (Martin 2017: 197). To paraphrase Foucault, voice is also power: those with the loudest, most persuasive voices—whose words are viewed as authoritative, containing self-evident truths—are often the ones who are both heard and listened to. By the same token the subjugation, undermining or silencing of voices is both deeply political and dehumanising.

The silences around youth voice are often compounded by intersectional forms of difference and disadvantage. Gendered socio-cultural norms mean girls often learn to 'know their place' through the reinforcement of 'feminine' traits. For girls in many different societies being feminine is equated with not speaking too loudly, and not expressing their opinions too assertively. Poverty, class, and other forms of difference also intersect with youth to delegitimise voices, attributing power to those who learn or acquire a facility with cultural forms of language considered authoritative through their families or private education.

Martin sums up the complex, evocative relevance of 'voice' in the following way in her reflections on young learners:

''Voice' is a term used metaphorically…to represent a person's perspective on knowledge and truth as personal, private and subjectively known—'voice', as in an exhibiting of dependence on others and as in denoting what is valued and considered empirical…. when discussing a person's 'voice' it is not their style of communication, verbal/nonverbal, interpersonal, that I refer to; rather it is what they say, how they say it and what it discloses. Therefore their 'voice', regardless of age or situation, demonstrates reactions within context and exposes the extent to which a learner considers they have a right to participate in the world around them, which in turn impacts on how engaged they are in their learning.' (2017: 197).

Many of the researchers interviewed for this report started from the point of the silence and intrinsic disempowerment they perceived around youth voices. In almost all cases the researchers initially under-estimated the capabilities of the young people they worked with and were amazed by the quality and depth of the insights and concepts they generated and by the physical outputs they produced. Throughout the researcher narratives was the notion of co-production as the creation of a negotiated space where the young participants learned that their voices not only count but are often the most knowledgeable and authentic, since only they truly understand their specific, complex realities and experiences.

Reflections on Youth, Language and Mental Health

The role of arts-based approaches in **providing or enabling an alternative language** for young people to express difficult, embodied concepts, emotions and experiences emerged across many of the projects. This was particularly evident in the context of therapeutic interventions aimed at promoting positive mental health among young people. For example, in India, **The Art of Healing in Kashmir: how creative activities can support child wellbeing in areas of conflict** used arts-based therapeutic methodologies to work with children and adolescents who often have deep-rooted trauma as a result of ongoing violence and conflict in the Kashmir region. A key aim of the project was to understand the potential for arts-based therapies to support the mental health and well-being of children affected by conflict. The arts therapy approach used in the **Art of Healing** opened up spaces for traumatised children to reconnect with lost or inhibited aspects of themselves. The process was also particularly empowering for some of the girls participating in the project.

Spotlight 1: Addressing Trauma Among Youth in Kashmir through Creative Art Therapy Approaches

The Art of Healing project involved two art therapists using puppetry and art as a means to engage the child participants, who were also supported to draw and paint butterflies as metaphors of transition and change and to articulate difficult emotions through different colours. Even though much of this work was conducted remotely, via Zoom, because

of Covid-19 restrictions, many of the children were fully engaged in the process. There were specific gender dimensions to these processes of 'self-discovery' and articulation. Anurupa Roy, a puppeteer working with the children shared the following story:

'A complete and unexpected transformation was one girl who had been quiet all along and we hadn't really noticed her but when she started to paint there was a complete change in her body language—just the way she held her shoulders and head and the way she painted, and something had got unleashed. Wherever it came from it's not going back into the box. On one of the days, she was wearing her old school uniform and she was covered in paint and she was painting with bold movements and had very sure brush strokes. She knew instinctively sources of light in a painting and I asked if she had ever been trained as an artist and she said no, and when someone pointed out her dirty clothes she said, 'I'm an artist and my clothes will be covered in paint.' Her friends were a bit taken aback because she had never spoken to them like that before. She said that she had discovered a language she had forgotten.'

The Art of Healing in Kashmir: how creative activities can support child wellbeing in areas of conflict. Photo credit: Suhail Parray.

Vikramjeet Sinha, the arts-based therapist working with the project, noted that this comment about language resonates with **Mooli Lahard's** theory of the forgotten language:[34]

'He talks about the 'adjacent language', which is when the body shifts. A lot of times we look at evidence in terms of 'can you tell us personally what has happened?' which is the questions that are asked, but also another thing is that the body completely shifts and the Kashmiri body, having been dismembered and traumatised, is a collective body with all the violence they have gone through so the idea of holding your spine straight and putting your shoulders back and painting with a kind of flair is a kind of response where the space is given to you…suddenly the wall opens up and the young people were saying 'the puppet could do things that we couldn't."

Far apart but close at heart: how do arts organisations in Latin America support the mental health of young people online during a global pandemic? is the only youth-focused GCRF project to mention mental health overtly in its title, although others cite addressing and/ or understanding mental health as a core aim. The PI, Stefan Priebe, partnered with well-established organisations in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Bogota, Colombia; and Lima, Peru, who have long-term experience of working closely with vulnerable young people from deprived, marginalised, and often fragile communities. The main aim of the project was to explore the extent to which their activities had been affected by the necessary shift towards online delivery during COVID-19 restrictions, and to learn from this process. The project also aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on young people from these neighbourhoods.

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34   See: Lahard, M. and Dent-Brown, K., 2016, Six-Piece Story-Making Revisited.

It was too early to answer these questions at the time of the interview, but Stefan reflected on his long experience of working alongside these types of organisations in Latin America. He explained that, through music, dance, theatre, and other forms of creative arts the committed individuals running the organisations use the available resources of young people and build their self-esteem, skills and confidence—all contributing to improved mental health. He noted that arts-based approaches can provide a medium for young people to communicate experiences they would not otherwise talk about: 'you can't just ask them how they feel…', giving the example of a girl who had been abused but had not disclosed this to anyone. She had attended a dancing group in the community and had been able to express her feelings and communicate her trauma during and after the experience of dancing. Stefan also described the value of arts activities for enabling young people to find their own equilibrium, move beyond the labels imposed on them by others, and forge potential alternative pathways to the gang membership that so often feels inevitable for young men and women in these communities. Stefan said: *'We don't want to see young people as victims or heroes. They may live in challenging contexts, but they also have the potential to laugh and be joyful.'*

Stefan stressed that these approaches alone are not enough: they need to be delivered in a sensitive way, informed by the facilitators' deep contextual understanding of the young people and the communities in which they live and enabled through the bonds of trust formed over time. He noted that the facilitators had attempted to bring these qualities and skills to online sessions in the context of COVID-19 lockdown situations but that they could never fully replicate the full, embodied experience of being in the same room performing with others in a safe space.

Working with Conflict-affected Youth through Embodied, Arts-based Approaches

The examples in the last section reveal 'extra-discursive' forms of language and voice that go beyond the verbal, enabling 'embodied' expression—literally communication through and about the whole body. Creative, participatory approaches such as those described above value the complex, sensory experience of 'actual felt bodies' (Chadwick, 2017). They both value and enable the expression of emotions, which may be felt acutely by

young people exposed to new and confusing experiences, yet which are often difficult to articulate through conventional language. At the same time teenagers and young adults may learn to suppress these emotional responses in a transition to adulthood, learning in many cultural contexts that they are indicators of 'childish' irrationality and unreliability.

Embodied, arts-based approaches can allow a reconnection with these buried feelings, helping to resolve internal tensions and build confidence. They also facilitate connection with 'transrational' (Harvey, Cooke and Bishop Simeon Trust, 2021) forms of communication and knowledge generation that go beyond the Northern-centric Cartesian emphasis on rationality, which tends to place the highest value on linear arguments—the ability to *'think and organise ideas in ways that organise the arbitrariness and emotion of everyday life and relationships into neat, logical/cerebral patterns'* (Brody, 2020: 12). Arts-based participatory approaches have been identified as 'an essential component of peacebuilding work' in post-conflict societies (Zelizer, 2003: 62). For example, community theatre has played a key role in reconciliation efforts in Rwanda (see Cooke and Soria-Donlan, 2017). Various GCRF projects demonstrated the effectiveness of these types of approaches for work with young people in post-conflict and other sensitive situations.

Connective Memories: intergenerational expressions in contemporary Rwanda; commissioned by Building Inclusive Civil Societies with, and for, Young People in 5 Post-Conflict Countries (Changing the Story). Photo credit: Deus Kwizera.

Spotlight 2: Enabling Rwandan Youth to Actively Engage with the Past to Envisage Alternative Futures

Connective Memories: Intergenerational Expressions in Contemporary Rwanda focuses on questions of intergenerational transmission of trauma in the shadow of the 1994 genocide. It critically engages with narratives that position children and young people as passive recipients of their national history and the associated trauma. For example, it is challenging to think about the concept of memory in Rwanda in a non-politicised way as the word for memory (Kwibuka) is the same word used to commemorate the genocide and so is bound up with a certain perception of the past and a certain set of memories. The project aims to understand how Rwandan youth are actively making meaning, how they are engaging with these narratives and what concerns and aspirations they have.

The project partnered with Mobile Arts for Peace (**MAP**), which uses arts for peace building with young people in Rwanda and other conflict-affected countries (also see Chapter 4). Music, dance, and drama provide a means of enabling dialogue among the young people and also with other family and community members on issues of conflict and personal security. MAP engages participants through exercises that generate trust and teamwork, alongside developing conflict analysis and problem-solving skills. The MAP methodology provides a space for young people to participate in discussions about issues of concern to them through arts-based approaches. These issues often emerge from story circles related to an issue or problem that the young people face, alongside other exercises. These stories are then analysed, and themes are developed, to form the basis of short plays that are written and performed by the participants. The participants respond to these issues by suggesting solutions at local and regional levels.

MAP aims to provide a more contextually relevant approach to dealing with trauma than Western psychosocial approaches, responding to the disconnect between Western approaches to trauma and lived experience. Rather than relying purely on verbal cues MAP is attuned to non-cognitive expressions of emotion and meaning such as body language. Efforts are also made to contextualise concepts, to enable the authentic expression of people's experiences and potential healing.

The first challenge for **Connective memories** was to find an alternative word to Kwibuka as using this term would frame the project as being associated with a narrow idea of memory and set of official state narratives. Working with five boys and five girls from a representative sample of schools, the project facilitators used arts to explore the idea of memories themselves, asking 'what does memory mean to you?' Based on their discussions, the group decided to use the concept Isangizanyankuru meaning 'to share stories' as their conceptual foundation rather than Kwibuka. The young people developed short plays based on the stories generated and performed these to adults to stimulate dialogue and thereby develop a potential pathway to change.

The stories reveal that the young people are often more concerned with immediate problems in the present rather than seeking answers in the past. Significantly, the stories have enabled reflection and disclosure of the highly sensitive issue of GBV. Some of the stories reflected young people's concerns about teachers sexually abusing girls as well as cases of domestic violence in the home. One story was about a teacher who had raped a female student, resulting in her pregnancy. This prompted a discussion where the adults identified the need for security cameras in schools, but the young female researchers recognised this was not practical, realising that the teachers could potentially switch them off and continue the abuse.

The project **Building Trust for Truth-Telling Among Former Child Soldiers: Animation for Inclusion and Peacebuilding in Colombia** also focuses strongly on amplifying youth voices that are so often erased from narratives and understandings of conflict—specifically those of child soldiers. The project has approached former child soldiers and has used creative co-production techniques to help capture their testimonies and ensure their voices and recommendations are integrated into Colombia's official narrative of the civil war. Life story narratives and interviews have formed the basis of an official report, an amination, and a tool for peace-building education.

Through the Lens: The Value of Participatory Photography and Film for Youth Voice

A number of GCRF projects have demonstrated the effectiveness of participatory photography and film for working with young people and enabling their voices to be both mediated and amplified.

Spotlight 3: Empowering Deaf Children through Participatory Photography and Film-Making in South Africa

[Enhancing resilient deaf youth in South Africa](#) started from the premise that many deaf people have a heightened, highly intuitive visual perception of the world, but are routinely stigmatised, excluded, and considered less able or unintelligent because they are less able to communicate in spoken language. The GCRF project proposal notes that 'vision plays a key role in shaping experiences and understandings of deafness, including sign language and other linguistic and non-linguistic modes of visual communication and expression that have no equivalent in written or spoken language.' Andrew Irving, the PI, explained: '*deaf kids learn the world visually — they have to read people and emotion visually so there's an enhanced epistemological level where vision is a way of knowing and understanding the world.*' The project leads saw visual methods such as photography and participatory film-making led by deaf school students aged between eight and 20 as a potentially empowering, socially inclusive process, enabling them to articulate their voices in non-verbal ways that allow insights into their specific experiences.

Andrew noted that deaf children often '*feel isolated in their family, community, and school—particularly kids in countries with low income . . . In deaf schools the resources are not invested so even though they have the same intellectual level as other children. . . their learning/linguistic age is lower because of these challenges. They also often don't have vocabulary for empathy or understanding emotions—**they have all kinds of embodied feelings but don't have the vocabulary to articulate or understand their emotions.**'*

The approach was also aimed at enabling the young people to build resilience by engaging them in developing personal and social strategies to combat abuse, neglect and discrimination often faced by deaf people and others affected by disability. For example, they made short participatory films on safeguarding aimed at communicating potential risks of abuse to other young deaf people. They also undertook work and made films promoting positivity and aspiration, engaging the young people in visualising a 'different set of possible futures' and considering what they might need to achieve them: *'This was about opening up the possibilities and perspectives that are previously unimagined and perhaps unimaginable because you hadn't got language in the same way.'*

Additionally, the project provided a means to showcase what the young people do well, focusing positively on their **abilities** and comparative advantage rather than only defining them in terms of disability: *'Having been told 'no, no, no—you can't do this' all their lives suddenly they have this skill that they are so good at—absolutely astoundingly good at. This then becomes a mechanism for engaging with all kinds of very complex social and personal issues.'* The work produced by the young people demonstrates a natural facility with and understanding of filmic and photographic language and techniques. For example, one of the photos of a group of three teenage boys shared by Andrew called 'swag' *'[showed] their confidence and pride in being deaf in their body language. The photo has Euclidian perspective—the vanishing point of a line that goes across the camera. They arranged their bodies precisely to get that perspective and also arranged themselves on a curve, so it is a very complex photographic technique. They had never touched a camera before. So this is **embodied knowledge** of how visual perception and knowledge, space etc., works. No other kids of that age would be able to take photos like that.'*

Enhancing resilient deaf youth in South Africa. Photo credit: Deaf Camera South Africa.

Participatory film has also provided a lens for young people in the municipality of Ekurhuleni, South Africa to challenge externally-driven media representations of their country and people and to present alternative perspectives and voices, in the context of three interlinked projects: **Using Digital Tools to Challenge Xenophobia and Support International Development in South Africa; Troubling the National Brand and Voicing Hidden Histories: Historical Drama as a tool for International Development and Community Empowerment;** and **Supporting Vulnerable Children to become Youth Leaders in South Africa: Shaping the Future of the Isibindi Safe Park Model Nationally.**

Spotlight 4: Bridging the Gap Between Young People and Policymakers through Participatory Film in South Africa

Supporting Young People to Become Youth Leaders in South Africa: Shaping the Future of the Isibindi Safe Park Model Nationally was a follow-on project from **Troubling the Brand**, which explored how community-led arts interventions—in particular participatory filmmaking projects—could be used to challenge the way national level 'soft power' narratives are used to 'brand' the nation internationally in Brazil, South Africa, and India. The project aimed to support communities in these countries who feel excluded from these narratives: the 'Denotified Tribes' in India, the 'Quilombos', or ex-slave communities in Brazil and the 'undocumented children' of illegal migrants in South Africa. The focus was on the potential of participatory film-making as a tool to support grass-roots advocacy to raise awareness of the precarious position these groups hold in society.

The PI, Paul Cooke, is interested in how participatory video can help people—including those from marginalised groups—to advocate for change in their own lives at the community level. He feels there is a mismatch between the way nations project themselves or are projected externally and the way they are understood or experienced by young people. Working in partnership with the Bishop Simeon Trust in South Africa Paul invited young people in Ekurhuleni to critically reflect on films made about South Africa, asking them what films they would make about themselves if they could. These discussions have fed into a process of supporting the young people to collectively produce several short films, including one on key principles for youth committees elected to run after-school clubs called *Safe Parks.*

The films the young people have produced have enabled their voices to be heard on a range of subjects. Significantly, the films cut across generational hierarchies and the cultural norms where children should be 'seen but not heard.' They have helped to promote intergenerational dialogue between young people and their parents on sensitive issues such as GBV and other risks faced by youth groups that they had previously felt unable to raise with them. The films have also provided an advocacy

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tool for expressing resource needs and aspirations relating to the safe parks to policymakers in local councils. According to Paul Cooke: *'In the film [the young people] said 'We have got nothing and have done a lot with very little. Imagine how much we could do if you gave us some support.' And out of that they were given land and money to build better accommodation on the land. So they were able to use film to advocate for better resources.'*

The project contributes to outcomes at the personal, organisational, and policy levels. The participating students have grown in confidence and resilience through the process as well as gaining practical skills in film-making and advocacy. Bishop Simeon Trust has also benefitted significantly from capacity development, gaining an appreciation of film-making as a tool for research, reflection, and policy influence. Insights and issues raised are also feeding into national-level policy and helping to improve levels of youth accountability.

These project examples illustrate the power of photographic and filmic lenses and language for enabling young people to effectively frame, articulate, and share their own realities and perceptions in very direct, often visceral ways. However, opportunities were perhaps missed in terms of using these processes to promote female voices and to enhance girls' technical skills by ensuring a gender balance in the film-making and photography. For example, openly addressing gender norms and stereotypes that often prevent women from taking on more technical professional roles and encouraging girls to do so in a safe space could have considerable transformative impact for both girls and boys.

Enabling Marginalised Youth Voices through Arts-based Approaches

Carefully designed arts-based approaches also have enormous capacity to amplify the least-heard youth voices. Often the young participants in GCRF projects have been from less visible or marginalised groups that are in 'policy blind spots' such as refugees, street-connected children, young people living in informal settlement communities, and disabled children and adolescents. For example, Andrew Irving explained that deaf children are often excluded from education in South Africa. This is partly because the curriculum in poor countries that are recently independent are based on colonial learning

practices, which are often not adaptable to the needs of deaf children. It is also rooted in a perception that deaf children have lower intelligence and capacity than hearing children. Andrew and his research partner's starting point was to build on the unique abilities of deaf children rather than on what they lack. He noted that they learn the world visually— they read people visually and have an enhanced visual understanding. He therefore sees the visual arts, cameras, film, and other techniques as a means to enhance self-worth and resilience: *'We focused on the skills they are very good at and used this as a mechanism to engage with social and personal issues.'*

Bridging the gap between young people and policymakers through participatory film in South Africa. Photo Credit: Bishop Simeon Trust.

Melis Cin described the motivations for her project: **PhotoVoice as an educational tool for intercultural learning and peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host community youth**, which connected young refugees with young people in countries where they are located (see Chapter 3): *'In most post conflict and peace building work young people are not included—there is no political platform for them. The older generations want to impose their own ideas, but they don't get the changing nature of the world. Youth find older people responsible for disempowering them. The spaces are dominated by older people, often men.'*

Supporting Just Response and Recovery to COVID-19 in Informal Urban Settlements: Perspectives from Youth Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa aimed to work with young people living in informal settlement communities in Nairobi, Kenya; Cape Town, South Africa; Freetown, Sierra Leone; Lusaka, Zambia; Harare, Zimbabwe; and Lagos, Nigeria to understand the inequalities and injustices associated with COVID-19 and associated responses in informal settlements. The project started with the reality that young people living in informal settlements are often overlooked and invisible in development planning and aimed to understand how COVID-19 had affected the lives, livelihoods, and mental health of these young people, some of whom were artists and performers. Working with partners Slum Dwellers International and its Youth Federation the aim of the project was to support young people from informal settlements to create video diaries capturing their experiences and feelings and to enable cross-learning by sharing these with other communities via social media and other platforms. Another connected aim was to develop a policy brief on key emerging issues, to inform a normative analysis of how such injustices might be addressed in immediate response planning, but also in ways that create resilience to future outbreaks as well as to other risks faced by the urban poor. Frances Crowley, the Research Affiliate, noted: 'We want to ensure that people making policy are reflecting the needs and wishes of people in informal settlements and understand the challenges of the virus and, in particular, the very real and devastating knock-on-effects they have experienced. Governments and organisations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic (and beyond) can ensure both effectiveness and proportionality in their responses by harnessing the knowledge, skills, inventiveness, energy, and connection of urban youth.'

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the potential of arts and humanities methodologies to enable the articulation of youth voices in authentic, meaningful ways that help to build confidence, ownership, and resilience. The chapter started by asking 'what do we mean by youth voice', exploring different meanings and understandings of this concept at personal, relational, and community levels. It went on to highlight case studies from the GCRF that demonstrate how arts and humanities approaches that include performance, film, photography, and art are providing an 'alternative language' for young people to articulate difficult, raw 'embodied' emotions in ways that promote positive mental health, relationships and self-esteem, often in fragile situations, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A key point is the value of these approaches for those who are often on the margins of development policy, practice, and research.

StoryLab Skills Training For Democratised Film Industries. Photo credit: Erik Knudsen.

Chapter 3: Empowering Young people as the Protagonists and Authors of their Own Stories through Arts and Humanities-based Research

Introduction

'There is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories.' (Barthes, 1975)

This chapter explores the importance of story-telling within the context of youth-focused GCRF projects. It reflects on the importance of stories for illustrating trajectories of change for young people and the connecting moments that so often are not—or cannot—be captured by big data. It highlights examples of projects where researchers and research partner organisations have worked with young people collaboratively; enabling them to tell the stories that most resonate with their own experience—the stories they really want to tell, rather than the ones they feel they should be telling. The projects contribute to moving young people from the objects to the subjects of stories about them as a critical foundation of promoting youth agency. In some cases, this means engaging young people in critical analysis of dominant narratives as a means to negotiate and 'own' alternative stories and truths about the past and their relationship to memories.

The chapter highlights *'quietly 'disruptive moments' where young people are encouraged to see themselves, their immediate communities and larger national realities through a new, objective lens and—as a result—see the possibility to imagine and begin mapping alternative paths and futures'* (Brody 2021: 11). This has been particularly powerful where young people are growing up in conflict-affected areas trying to navigate and be respectful of often painful community and national-level memories but also wishing to look forward and forge new, positive paths.

The human impulse to create stories—to impose a narrative order on the world—appears to be universal. Stories provide a lens on the past, enabling people to 'make sense' of complex, confusing events and make retrospective connections. Significantly, stories reflect 'world views', often operating within specific epistemological boundaries that, following Foucault, determine the limits of thought and language within specific socio-cultural settings and historical points. How stories are constructed, the characters within them, and the relationships between them provide a window into cultural psyches, preoccupations, and priorities. They are a reflection both of how people experience and see the world but also how they would like the world—and their own place in it—to be.

History, culture, and art are key sites for reproducing dominant, state-led stories and 'official', validated truths or 'national imaginaries' (Anderson 1983; 2016). Often defined by an established—and rarely youthful—elite, these narratives contain within them the inherent negation of alternative forms or stories or render them completely invisible, beyond the realms of imagination. As the opening paragraphs of this report convey, young people across the world feel increasingly that these stories fail to include or represent them. They are unable to recognise themselves or their needs and aspirations in present, past or future visions of their communities, countries or global home. They see the same mistakes being made and a continued failure to learn from them. This is resulting in an existential sense of alienation for many young people, foregrounding the need for a deep paradigmatic shift where not only the storytellers but the assumptions and concepts on which the stories are based need to change.

Enabling Young People to Tell the Stories They Want to Tell

The development field has been heavily influenced by critical actors such as Robert Chambers, who famously asked: 'whose development counts?', calling for a more 'bottom-up' approach informed by the deep local knowledge and socio-cultural contexts of people on the ground. This has resulted in development approaches that may appear, on the surface, participatory. In too many cases the 'development story' is informed by a primarily Northern worldview and set of post-colonial values. Too often decisions have already been made about the critical issues for people in lower-income countries or who are stateless. Where there is consultation, it is often within the unspoken boundaries of

the 'development game', where those being consulted are also aware of the rules and of what donors are prepared to fund. One of the respondents for this study reflected on the nature of donor-led development-focused research calls: '*There are various schemes about what we think is important in this world and saying we must research it because we think it's a problem but are we not projecting on the subjects with whom we are working? What we assume other people's problems are is reflected in the calls*.'

These processes often lead to the production of case studies that confirm existing ideas or present particular narratives about 'the poor', which highlight practical needs and vulnerabilities, and issues such as rights, access to resources, and empowerment. While these are highly significant issues, these narratives often present those in lower-income countries or in refugee situations as two-dimensional 'beneficiaries', rather than as rounded humans with ideas, dreams, desires, creative impulses, and highly developed cultures and languages. Two dimensions are often reduced to one dimension when it comes to youth since stories about young people are invariably told by intermediaries rather than by the young people themselves. As a result, these stories often focus on a narrow range of issues that may not be representative of young peoples' specific needs or concerns.

The GCRF projects presented below all aspire to 'hand the stick' to young people in development or humanitarian situations, providing them with the tools and knowledge to create stories with resonance and meaning for them rather than replicating established tropes.

Spotlight 5: Supporting Young People to Move Beyond Western-Influenced Film Narratives in Colombia

StoryLab Skills Training For Democratised Film Industries supported young people in Colombia to develop short films, focusing not only on technical skills building but also on promoting the generation of original ideas (ideation) and storytelling skills in order to understand what really matters for young people in this specific context. Building on previous work in Ghana, Malaysia, and Colombia, the project used an ethno-mediaology approach, an interdisciplinary approach inspired by practices in Ethnomusicology and Autoethnography. Ethno-mediaology involves the active and immersive participation of

researchers in the research culture and process, using this active personal engagement as a basis for knowledge generation, data gathering and evaluation. There were efforts to democratise the process by bringing in previous trainees from Colombia to become trainers in the two communities where they were working. They then brought the communities together into a seminar workshop/festival for a day so they could share their experiences and insights.

A significant feature of the approach is encouraging students to transcend normative narrative paradigms borrowed from Hollywood and other Western models, which are often consciously and unconsciously replicated, and to move towards more authentic, culturally and personally relevant ideas and cinematic forms. The PI, Erik Knudsen, had previously worked with groups of young people in the three countries, supporting them to develop stories using open Jungian techniques[35] and providing opportunities for them to share and reflect on the stories.

Erik noted: '*One important point is having courage to say those fragile things that are on your mind and not to be condemned by conventions and what you think people will think of you and the fears of the consequences of what you are saying. That's a very important part of what we do. It's about connecting to people's feelings.*' He added: '*If you own your own stories and you have the tools by which to start to express those stories that gives you new powers to control your life and to control the stories about you.*'

The original aim of the process was to address some of the SDGs through the ideation and film process, especially the ones around education and equity and economic development. Yet, during the initial stages of the project it became clear that not all young

35   Jungian theory is based on three principles: Integrity and being in the space as equals, without hierarchies or a teacher/student relationship; Authenticity: all stories need to start within a person and reflect their emotions, aspirations and anxieties; Openness: participants are encouraged to respect the space where very personal thoughts are expressed and to have the courage to be open.

people were interested in socio-economic situations and wanted instead to make films about love, spirituality, and more personal issues. Erik noted: '*That is why we do Storylab the way we do because we don't assume that people want to tell stories about particular things.*' He discussed the tensions inherent in development-focused research funding that brings a pre-determined socio-economic framework to projects that have people at their heart. He said: '*We all go into these countries and assume that is what they are concerned about…we anoint ourselves and go in there with our millions of pounds and it turns out that they are interested in love or spiritual crises, identity and who am I, what am I doing. Often any socio-economic concerns are related to what we are projecting onto them because if you listen to their really personal stories they want to tell, they are often not about that. They are often about very human things that affect all of us.*'

The **StoryLab** example resonates with insights from two other GCRF projects, the pilot project **PhotoVoice as an educational tool for intercultural learning and peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host Community Youth and Decolonising Peace Education In Africa.**

StoryLab Skills Training For Democratised Film Industries. Photo credit: Erik Knudsen.

Spotlight 6: Young Refugees and Youth in Host Communities Telling New Stories of Cooperation, Hope, and Trust through Photography

The aim of **Photovoice** was to better understand the experiences of young refugees in Turkey, South Africa, and Uganda through photo stories, with photography enabling communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Around 80% of displaced people are based in low and middle-income countries of the global South, where there are limited services, and this often creates tensions and conflict between refugees and host communities. The project sought to understand how to build peace among these populations by bringing them together in a way that enables them to express themselves using art and photography.

The project brought together youth from the host communities and refugee youth to talk about issues related to being young in their country, using PhotoVoice as a narrative tool, with a focus on learning how to take 'photos that speak'. For many of the Turkish young people it was the first time they had ever had direct contact with Syrian refugees. The participants undertook ethics and photography training over three days on light, composition, and how to express ideas through photography. They were then placed in pairs with one refugee and one person from the host community and were given a camera to share and take around the city. They took around 20 photos in their pairs and then came together to share the photos. They could either bring five or six photos with a story line or use one photo to express a single idea.

One of the project objectives was to engage youth in reflections and discussions about inequality. Some of the photos express these ideas. For example, a photo taken by a male Syrian refugee entitled 'Stop child labour' shows him with a $100 bill over his face held in place with plasters. He wanted to communicate that, since arriving in Istanbul he had worked in the textile industry, faced with precarious conditions and receiving a very low salary, but that his refugee status prevented him from speaking out against his employer. In the words of the PI, Melis Cin: '*He was trying to say that money silences you but money is also what you need to heal you*.'

Other young participants called for greater ownership over the project aims. For example, members of the group in Turkey preferred to focus on identifying solutions for a better, more peaceful, gender-just Istanbul than on the problem of inequality. Melis noted: '*they said it should be about what brings us together rather than what divides us.*' One refugee in Istanbul said: '*I don't want to talk about inequalities. I am so sick of hearing about how I have been exploited, discrimination and xenophobia—I don't want to be a victim*.' Another photo of a refugee expresses this idea of togetherness. The refugee was photographed near the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. He had a camera with him, and a young Turkish boy approached him and asked him to show him how to use it and the photo depicts that moment: '*a young Syrian boy is teaching someone from the host community—symbolising the idea of peace and capacity sharing. A key point was that all we need is small interactions to make a change.*'

A central aim of the project was to disrupt some of the narratives about refugees that are often based in myths, and to engage youth as 'epistemic agents of change' in this process. The value of 'small interactions' as part of this process was exemplified by the conversations and debates many of the Turkish young people instigated at home with their parents about refugees as a result of their experiences.

Decolonising Peace Education in Africa worked with young people in Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. A central question for the project was: 'What are the different knowledges and values underpinning peace and how can these practices be connected and compared across countries to create curriculum content and mode of delivery in informal and formal, Secondary and Higher Education in order to decolonise peace education?' The project was motivated by the recognition that stories about African countries—and their conflicts—have too often been written about Africans by white colonial commentators and that there is an urgent need for new iterations that have cultural and historical meaning for all generations, including young people. The project has deployed arts and humanities methodologies to capture local understandings, knowledge and values of peace among conflict-affected groups and used this evidence to produce a contextually sensitive peace framework to inform policy making and teaching

materials. Melis Cin, one of the Co-Is, noted: *'In the decolonising peace education project, we are working with the communities and young people to give them more space to set the agenda—often the communities and their voices do not always inform the terms of the projects, so we are changing in this project by following a bottom-up approach where they get to set the terms, content, and activities.'*

Similarly, GCRF project **Ugandan Youth and Creative Writing: New Perspectives on Conflict and Development** was motivated by the post-colonial development critiques of James Ferguson, Richard Jolly, and others, which highlight the '*perceived distance between the lived experience of African populations and discursive theorisation about them [which] has been blamed for the continuation of colonialist patterns of exploitation*' (project proposal, Gateway to Research). The project sought to strengthen the agency of Ugandan young people living in fragile and risky post-conflict situations by supporting them to write their own creative fiction. The aim is to use writing as a medium to help them imagine other possibilities, speak in their own voices, and communicate 'unseen development needs' beyond the constraints of colonial and development discourse.

Engaging Youth in Reimagining The Past and Re-Envisioning The Future

GCRF projects and project partners have enabled and captured the potential for young people to reimagine the past and envision the future in often positive and new ways that are influenced but not determined by dominant national, communal, or personal histories. Different projects have interrogated the issue of whose versions of nationhood, progress, history, art, and culture are being perpetuated and how these are mediated through school curricula, media representations, national art galleries, museums, and other forms of cultural expression. These approaches had particular resonance in post-conflict situations, enabling reflections on conflict, peace, and reconciliation from a youth perspective, and promoting processes of learning from the past but moving forward in ways that are more relevant and, often, hopeful.

In Cambodia the project **Contemporary Arts Making and Creative Expression among Young Cambodians** sought to subtly counter notions of formal, 'big C' Culture as something fixed and immutable by presenting alternative visions and practices of culture as dynamic, changing, engaging, and relevant. The project engaged young artists and performers in providing performative narratives that multiply those state-endorsed notions of formal culture that aim to reconstruct and preserve traditional forms of expression and embodied knowledge that were nearly obliterated by the Khmer Rouge. In a country where 65% of the population is under 30, young people do not necessarily relate to the experience of genocide or to narratives surrounding the loss of cultural forms. The project asked: 'How do the arts express what it means to be Cambodian today?' The aim of the project was to interrogate this question through the development of performance works by young and intergenerational artists.

Building Inclusive Civil Societies with, and for, Young People in 5 Post-Conflict Countries (Changing the Story). Photo credit: Cambodia Living Arts.

YouthLEAD: Fostering Youth Peacebuilding Capacity in Colombia was developed in the wake of the 2016 Peace Accord. The project asked how young people in Colombia are coping with the impact of war both at the national and local levels and how they are processing these individual and collective histories to understand the present and look forward to the future. Significantly, the project asks how arts-based practices can help close the gap between generations and social groups in Colombia. Central to this project was the training of young people in local communities to work with children aged 6-13 using photography and mural painting as part of a historical memory approach. The children were asked to think about issues such as displacement, place, community assets, and changes they would like to see and contribute towards and to analyse the photos they had taken in order to deepen their understanding of these issues. The work has been shared through a mobile exhibit in Bogota.

In Venezuela, **Pensamiento y Libertad** (Thought and Freedom) has helped young people develop critical thinking skills through art to enable them to visualise what post conflict life could look like. This work is important because of the sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, and political demotivation that many young people feel in Venezuela. The project lead explained: *'Young people feel their lives are static and not going anywhere— they can't plan or hope. They have no aspirations—they can't go to university and need to work but can't save or buy anything. They need to work to earn money to support their families. They work all day but don't achieve anything, work all day to earn money for food. They are living a hand-to-mouth existence. The only form of dissent they recognise is violent protest, but the project is helping give young people tools for expressing what changes they want and how they want change to happen, to see that they can be the change they desire and to fight for something better.'*

Spotlight 7: Engaging Young People in Post Conflict Reconciliation Processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Art and Reconciliation: Conflict, Culture and Community and its two follow-on projects Open Calls and the Living Museum: Innovation, Research and the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina and **The PCRC and ASBO Magazine: Sustaining Visual Peacebuilding, Empowering Youth and Embedding Impact** had the connected aims of investigating the history and potential of artistic and creative cultural practices and objects in processes and outcomes of post-conflict reconciliation, forgetting, remembering, and forgiving; and developing creative artistic practices and artifacts in relation to, and in collaboration with, particular communities. The researchers worked in partnership with the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo to support its role as a 'living museum' in sustaining employment, contributing to cultural life and fostering post-conflict peace and security. They also worked with the Post-Conflict Research Centre (PCRC) in Sarajevo—a peace building organisation that was established in 2014 and that uses an arts-based approach to promote peace building and transitional justice among young people.

PCRC run a successful youth training programme called Balkan Diskurs every year which the researchers were involved in evaluating. A group of 20-25 young people from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina are selected and trained in photojournalism so they are equipped to go out and explore the stories that interest them. The research team worked with the 2018 cohort with a focus on the theme of reconciliation, given that this can be a contentious idea in Bosnia because of the implication that after uncovering the truth, people can move on unproblematically without the need to pursue justice. Asking the young people to reflect on the question: 'What does reconciliation mean to you in the context of peace-building in the Balkans?' led to conversations about the use of the term 'reconciliation' and a discussion of whether other words such as 'forgiveness' or 'moving on' are more useful and less political.

The young people were asked to focus on reconciliation but were invited to interpret it in as broad a way as they wanted, seeing it in terms of the future they wanted to see for Bosnia. Arising from this process of reinterpretation, young people expressed that they have often felt frustrated with their parents' nostalgia and obsessions with war and the past. They said they wanted to move and think forward but felt constrained by these dominant narratives. Emerging from the process was their desire to tell different stories about their country. They wanted to think about marginalisation, identity, and division but in ways that were not necessarily connected to the war but to social justice issues as they saw and experienced them in contemporary society.

In a similar vein, **The Making of the Museum** has aimed to understand the ways in which museums emerge, the interactions between places, narratives, and social actors in the process of excavation and construction of pasts. The project works with young people in Pristina, Kosovo to involve them in influencing, shaping, and designing a new initiative—the School House Museum. Through participatory methods young people have been encouraged to produce knowledge and content for the Museum, a process which has enabled them to critically reflect on the past violence of the region and identify ways to promote awareness and active citizenship among museum visitors.

Participatory Filmmaking and the Anlong Veng Peace Tours and the follow-on GCRF project **Elephant conservation and indigenous experiences in Cambodia: Shaping environmental awareness through participatory filmmaking with young people** both used participatory film methodology with young Cambodians as a way to empower them as agents and beneficiaries of change by encouraging ownership of Cambodia's histories of war and atrocity and building dialogue and empathy across divided communities. In the first project young people made and disseminated films focusing on issues of post-genocide reconciliation and legacies of conflict for younger generations in Cambodia. Significantly young people worked with perpetrators as well as survivors of violence. In this way the participatory arts-based approach has enabled connections between the groups and perspectives, providing a conduit for meaningful reconciliation, a recognition of shared experiences and the fostering of empathy and trust between them. The

second project focused on harms inflicted on the environment, particularly in terms of deforestation and wildlife loss. The aim was to encourage young people to take ownership and actively engage with conservation issues, with a focus on protecting the habitats of wild elephants and the indigenous populations who live alongside them, and to amplify awareness of environmental challenges across communities.

Culture for Sustainable and Inclusive Peace (CUSP)[36] focuses on the transformative potential of conflict. Through creative approaches that have included theatre, dance, and creative writing, young people in Ghana, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, Zimbabwe, and the UK—including those from refugee backgrounds—have been encouraged to reflect on meanings and experiences of conflict in a safe, collective space. They have also been supported to identify opportunities for change, both in terms of preventing further conflict and 'future-proofing' themselves by building resilience, self-belief, and practical skills. Due to COVID-19 restrictions much of this activity has had to be moved online. This has led to the involvement of fewer young people and has been particularly challenging for those with mental health issues. Despite these constraints a key outcome has been the establishment of a community of practice among the researchers across the different regions and a focus on sharing knowledge.

Democratising and Revisiting Notions of Art, Heritage, and Culture

Some GCRF projects are revisiting notions of history, art, and culture in ways that democratise them, make them relevant for all and reposition them as powerful forms of agency and creation in the search for meaningful individual and collective futures. In this way they are contributing to the challenging of assumptions and thus enabling movement beyond circular self-referential thinking—leading to moments of change that, although subtle, can have iterative and cumulative power.

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36   Co-Investigators from two related projects–CUSP and CUSP Development Award–were interviewed for the report.

The example below from Zimbabwe illustrates the transformative potential of creating cultural capital that is owned and defined by people on the ground, rather than a few at the top.

Spotlight 8: Democratising Art from the Ground up in Zimbabwe

[Street Art to Promote Representation and Epistemic Justice Among Rural Marginalized Zimbabwean Youth](#) focused on epistemic injustice and cultural poverty in Zimbabwe. The project involved working with young people from poor, marginalised communities in Zimbabwe whose voices are silenced because their Tonga language and culture are viewed as irrelevant or second class within Zimbabwe's mainstream culture. The remoteness and poverty of the communities in which they live, coupled with endemic ethnic conflict, further entrench this sense of exclusion. Furthermore, the Tonga language and cultural practices are at risk of becoming extinct because they are associated with negative economic capital and are not being transmitted to young people.

The project, co-designed with a local Zimbabwean youth-based NGO, aimed to enable young people from these communities to articulate their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and aspirations. Some of the most high-profile artists from Zimbabwe—including those linked with the national gallery in Harare—were invited to collaborate with the project and introduced street art forms such as graffiti to the young participants as a form of expression and protest. A week-long training event was held with the artists to engage them in thinking about youth, the barriers young people face, and what agency they have and to support them in developing a practical workshop underpinned by these theoretical concerns.

The workshops engaged young people who had never received art training and introduced many of the students to street art. A sensitivity to language was a central part of workshop design, giving the possibility for the young people to participate and express themselves in their own language. Faith Mkwananzi, one of the Co-Is, said that, despite their lack of previous training they had produced 'some impressive pieces of art', which have been displayed through high profile exhibitions in the national museum of Harare and venues in other towns and cities. The art communicates multiple themes, including concerns

about the quality and value of education; the need for capacity building in vocational skills and the loss of local livelihoods such as fishing. A significant theme is gender equality, particularly the dominance of patriarchal norms and practices, and the prevalence of GBV. The students have also made a connection between the issues of poverty, school dropout, early pregnancy, and marriage.

Importantly, the project did not claim contribution or attribution to any grand material changes. Rather it was built on an implicit understanding that 'cognitive change is the first step' and that it is 'much more about reflecting on how to enable change in the mindsets of people first.' One shift in mindset relates to the questioning of assumptions for the young people, who have been enabled to recognise their own innate capacity to be artists and to see the possibility for art to be a democratic space they can occupy or own, rather than simply being defined by a wealthy, powerful minority. Melis Cin, the other Co-I noted: *'[the project] showed young people that art is not exclusive or a luxury but can be very inclusive and that young people can contribute to the development of art.'* Significantly the assumptions of that powerful minority have also been held to account as they view the art and began to review their own narrow ideas about the value and quality of community-based arts.

In addition to these perceptual changes, the young people involved have expressed a strong interest in reclaiming and energising their own cultural practices and art forms, calling for more workshops with a focus on teaching skills in local crafts such as basket weaving (for which Tonga people are renowned), which could also provide a route to income generation.

From Displacement to Development: arts education as a means to build cultural resilience and community-led arts production in the Marshall Islands centred around participatory arts-focused workshops with school children, members of their extended families, and trainee teachers in the Marshall Islands and Hawaii. The creative methodologies provided a means to aid recovery and understanding of the forced and voluntary displacement experienced by the Marshallese community. Through intergenerational

dialogue the participating children were encouraged to consider what local values and culturally situated knowledge remain in the memory and daily lives of those who have been displaced and to think about how these could form the basis of future strategies of resilience and cultural well-being.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of enabling young people to tell the stories they want to tell, rather than those they or others feel they should be telling, as a foundation of youth agency. This is increasingly significant against the backdrop of hegemonic national narratives that legitimise state control and even violence in many countries and that systematically exclude dissenting or alternative versions. Case study examples illustrate the ways in which creative arts-driven approaches can give young people—often living in fragile, conflict-affected settings—permission to focus on issues that have relevance for them, to 'own' and retell histories that underpin local and/or national identities in ways that offer positive pathways forward, enabling innovation, inspiration and hope. They offer opportunities for young people to see themselves as key actors, even leaders in shaping local and national identities as well as their own lives and aspirations.

Mobile Arts for Peace. Photo credit: Mobile Arts for Peace.

Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education through Heritage and Performance; commissioned by Building Inclusive Civil Societies with, and for, Young People in 5 Post-Conflict Countries (Changing the Story). Photo credit: Sreenath Nair.

Chapter 4: Education Matters: Creating Effective Learning Environments through Arts and Humanities Approaches

Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to education that contributes to 'the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.'[37] Vision 2030 recognises that access to education is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development, and all signatory countries of the SDGs are expected to make progress on and report against SDG 4 on quality education. As noted in chapter 1, figures indicate that primary school entry figures are rising across the world, but there are multiple caveats. The SDG indicators fail to capture retention rates and numbers of those dropping out of school. They also do not reflect the quality of education. This is significant because, as outlined in Chapter 1, it is clear from emerging research by the British Council and other agencies that many schools and tertiary institutions are failing to provide effective learning environments and that students are not being equipped with the skills they need for entering adult life or finding meaningful employment.

This chapter provides examples of GCRF projects that demonstrate the role of arts and humanities in building transferable qualities and skills for young people. It maps ways in which innovative approaches move away from formal, fact-based educational approaches where teachers are viewed as authorities imparting knowledge towards more dynamic forms of knowledge co-production that are often empowering. The chapter highlights how GCRF projects make the case for the importance of creativity, play, joy, and confidence building as integral aspects of learning—with evidence drawn from multiple projects. It highlights good practices for ensuring these approaches are sustainable and embedded rather than one-off events. The chapter also addresses the issue of education as a right, drawing on examples of projects that have aimed to give a voice to young people who are often excluded

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37   See: Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). United Nations Office of the High Commissioner (OHCHR).

from education policy. Finally, the chapter explores the potential of education from the perspective of building practical skills for income generation and enhancing employability among young people.

Challenging Power Relations through Alternative Approaches and Narratives in Schools

Multiple projects across the GCRF have demonstrated the extent to which educational processes can represent key sites of action and change. Some projects based in formal educational environments have shown, for example, that building reflective capacity for young people helps to foster critical thinking, problem solving, and leadership as well as empowering them to challenge accepted ideas and express their perspectives. Another key aspect is the way that teaching is conducted, moving beyond teacher/student hierarchies and encouraging more interaction, exploration, and creativity. In this way students are actively involved in co-producing classes and directing their own learning. Young people are treated as agents, actively participating in a two-way process of knowledge development and building skills to aid independent learning. This approach resonates with observations on empowering young people through education by Martin, who refers to '*building learner awareness, and along with it their sense of voice'. She notes: 'By contextualising problems and alerting [the students] to there being more than one way to solve a problem, I remove the notion of the teacher as the ultimate authority…they begin to realise positive roles of analysis and other procedures for evaluating and creating knowledge' (Martin 2019: 205).*

Stewart (2018) also emphasises the importance of effective, targeted education that teaches life skills such as '*self-esteem, agency, perspective-taking skills, and empathy, as well as the ability to network and negotiate*' for fostering resilience among young people. She notes that '*building resilience is… about how students are taught as well as what they are taught*.' Significantly, she cautions that '*there is evidence that the wrong sort of education can reduce resistance to violent extremism. In short, where education fails to encourage questioning or allow alternative points of view, debate or critical thinking, this can foster a particular mindset, which is attracted to simple solutions and absence of ambiguity, nuance or debate and that can lead to vulnerability to radicalisation*' (Stewart 2018: 12). Various GCRF projects illustrate these principles.

Spotlight 9: Promoting Resilience, Trust and Critical Reflection Among Young People through Arts-based Approaches in Post-conflict Country Schools

Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP): Informing the National Curriculum and Youth Policy for Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal works with young people in schools, using arts for peace building. Arts-based approaches (music, dance and drama) provide a means of enabling dialogue on issues of conflict and personal security. The MAP project uses a methodology that engages participants through exercises that generate trust and teamwork, alongside developing conflict analysis and problem-solving skills. The MAP methodology provides a space for young people to participate in discussions about issues of concern to them. These issues often emerge from story circles related to an issue or problem that the young people face, alongside other exercises. These stories are then analysed, and themes are developed, to form the basis of short plays that are written and performed by the participants. The participants respond to these issues by suggesting solutions at local and regional levels.

The connected project Ubwuzu: Shaping the Rwandan National Curriculum through Arts has pioneered a collaborative methodology with the aim of building youth innovation and leadership. The process entails mobilising arts and using experiential learning to promote dialogue with peers, teachers, parents, policymakers and other stakeholders. Young people in Rwanda and other focal countries were supported to design participatory research on issues that interest them, including around conflict prevention. Teachers, along with local artists, are trained to support students to reflect on their experiences and identify the questions they want to ask. They then work with them to develop research methodologies such as participant observation and key informant interviews, promoting discussion around good practices and pitfalls as well as techniques for data analysis. These processes inform the development of youth-led key messages and recommendations.

A key element of the project has been engaging youth directly in policymaking process. In 2019 national and regional consultations were conducted that involved a Youth Participation Working Group composed of six children from each province, who made recommendations concerning the development of the Curriculum Framework. One aim of the follow-on project

has been to generate a call-to-action document to engage policy makers in direct dialogue with young people concerning their needs, concerns and initiatives.

Significantly, MAP has contributed to raising awareness and challenging the stigma associated with mental health issues. This is critical in countries like Rwanda where around 25% of the population have post-traumatic stress disorder. Ananda Breed, the PI, noted:

'MAP sends the message that everyone has mental health and they are exploring it in a fun and interactive way…we are all exploring our stories together and we are finding the best way to support each other with those stories. So that is how MAP is influencing policy both around education and mental health.'

Mobile Arts for Peace. Photo credit: Mobile Arts for Peace.

Spotlight 10: Promoting Awareness and Behaviour Change in Use of Antibiotics through Visual Story-telling with School Students in Nepal

The use of creative arts to engage Nepali schools with antimicrobial-resistance and create positive behaviour change on health-seeking behaviours engaged adolescents in school settings as active participants in change. The researchers worked in partnership with Herd International as a follow-up to previous work on changing community behaviours linked to misuse of antibiotics through the development of participatory video (PV). A community-led evaluation of the initial project findings led to community members identifying the need to involve adolescents in awareness-raising around antimicrobial resistance as they were often sent by parents to buy over the counter antibiotics that were being used for personal use and also for animals. Realising that this is a blind spot in the existing data, the researchers saw that adolescents were not only playing a role in antimicrobial resistance but that they could be key allies in helping to shift behaviours. They designed a process adapting PV techniques where Herd international would work with adolescents in schools to develop story boards communicating messages about the risks of antibiotic use. The PI, Jessica Mitchell, explained that this approach moves away from the notion of imparting knowledge to young people in the traditional top-down way, instead involving them in two-way process of *knowledge exchange* that places trust in students and positions them as reliable sources of information. This is viewed as a far more sustainable, effective approach to awareness-raising that both empowers young people and enables them to speak directly to community members, including children and adolescents.

The project has earned the support of the Nepal department of health, whose representatives have recognised the power of participatory video for promoting local and youth voices and have indicated that the evidence generated could directly feed into policy planning.

Interrogating the value of theatre-based methodologies as a research tool for addressing the effects of violence on young people›s education pathways used performance-based approaches to encourage school students in Brazil to question pedagogical culture as well as student-student and student-teacher relationships. Through improvisation and other

techniques, the young people were invited to critically reflect on their experiences and relationships. They were provided with a safe space to express the problems encountered in the school environment, to think about what changes they could make, and to consider more broadly what kind of society they would like to be part of. The process involved students and teachers in two-way conversations where students were able to express their feelings and teachers were invited to listen and observe as a means to understand the young people's own realities. Issues included students' critique of meritocracy-based assessments, which alienated certain people. There were also discussions on sensitive issues such as bullying, GBV, suicide, and LGBT identities. The project embraced insights related to embodiment: a key area of learning was to value non-verbal cues such as silences and body language where, as the Brazilian Co-I noted: '*what you say is not always what you feel*.'

An integral part of challenging dominant truths and the power relations that sustain them is ensuring school curricula themselves—the topics and the way they are represented—are inclusive, relevant, and meaningful for the students, reflecting their own specific experiences. This is exemplified by the projects below.

Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education through Heritage and Performance illustrated the potential of creative approaches to include and amplify the voices of disenfranchised or marginalised groups of young people in the region of Kerala in India. One aim of the project was to develop a creative, theatre-based module for the educational curriculum aimed at raising awareness of tribal cultures that have been systematically excluded from educational materials. The modules promoted participatory performative approaches that enabled young people from remote tribal communities to express their own cultural values in their own language and forms of cultural expression. Part of the philosophy is that teaching and learning should not be purely cerebral and that a more embodied engagement energises and motivates students. The project aimed to foster mutual respect and understanding through cultural and intergenerational exchange. An end goal was to contribute to reducing the high dropout rate among (primarily male) students from tribal communities by making the school curriculum more relevant to them and by increasing understanding and support of the teachers.

Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC. Photo Credit: Su Corcoran.

Other GCRF projects have also recognised the critical value of developing culturally appropriate curricula and engaging approaches as a means to more inclusive, relevant education, and higher student retention. **Navigating Futures: arts education as a route to youth empowerment and pedagogical innovation** had as its locus the Republic of Marshall Islands. The Republic has the second youngest population in the Pacific, with 40% of the population under 16 years of age, but despite having one of the highest levels of per capita spending on education in the region, school dropout rates, and youth unemployment and suicide rates, are high. The project aimed to contribute to government policy on improving student participation and attainment in education by developing more culturally relevant teaching resources, improving literacy in both English and Marshallese, and making better use of Information Technology. A series of workshops focused on building the capacity of students, teachers and other stakeholders and enabled local knowledge sharing through creative arts such as painting and drawing, animations, and film-making. The workshops were designed to widen the creative skillsets of these young people to enable them to become economically self-sufficient as well as empowering them to express themselves through creative media.

The Political Economy of Education Research (PEER) Network critically engaged with educational content in order to explore potentially divisive meta-narratives embedded there. The project interrogated the question of why education may sometimes contribute to aggravating conflict through promoting locally relevant, contextually sensitive Political Economy Analysis. This work is intended to inform socially just education systems and provision for children and young people in contexts of conflict and protracted crises.

There are multiple potential outcomes from the innovative educational approaches outlined above. A long-term impact would be increased retention of both boys and girls up to secondary school and beyond, but these evaluations would require time and careful consideration around measuring attribution. In the meantime, some of the short-term changes reported by project leads provided a strong indication of the positive value of the approaches. For example, according to Ananda Breed:

'A big element of the process is in the transformation of the environment—school is a joyful place to be now. MAP has changed their relationships with their teachers and teachers with their students, it is instruction through play so it takes out the authoritarian power dynamic and makes the space interactive—it changes the way people are in the space, the way they communicate in the space, the way young people feel able to share their ideas to lead within that space—building in terms of consensus between young people and teachers. This is changing the way power is managed, with young people leading the spaces.'

Ensuring Sustainability of Arts and Humanities Approaches in Education

The GCRF projects outlined above illustrate the critical role of art in education, going beyond the consideration of arts and humanities as non-essential subjects with purely aesthetic value to arts as fundamentally important for creating quality and effectiveness of education, as well as building vital life skills for students. Yet there is a very real risk of GCRF and other projects remaining at the level of interesting one-off 'events' without longevity and without any sustainable influence. This section reflects on ways in which GCRF projects have built sustainability into their approaches.

Several projects have viewed peer-to-peer learning as crucial for enabling sustainability. This is true of projects using the **MAP** methodology, where facilitators work directly with teachers to build their capacity in leading performance-based activities. **Enhancing resilient deaf youth in South Africa** took a similar approach. A group of deaf adults were trained to facilitate the film-making and photography workshops. Eventually they both took over the running of the workshops and adapted them to make them more appropriate for deaf ways of learning, so that the PI was able to step back and observe rather than being directly involved. Sustainability is being further enabled through the establishment of a deaf educators' film group and the creation of an online platform called 'Eyebuzz', partly responding to the lack of media for deaf people in South Africa. Andrew Irving, the PI, is also keen to co-develop a handbook of alternative pedagogies for working with deaf children in schools, and to integrate this into school curricula.

In addition to building teacher capacity, another core aim of **MAP** is to inform curriculum development. Steps are being taken to consolidate and increase the scope of the approach through its formal integration into school curricula. For example, in Rwanda a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme has been established with the College of Education in the University of Rwanda. MAP team members have worked with 15 lecturers to adapt MAP into the national curriculum, in the areas of music, dance, and drama. A training of trainers approach is also being piloted with college of education lecturers, who are involved in developing a set of educational units that will be aligned with school lessons and classroom structures. The units focus on issues that include trust, teamwork, improvisation, characterisation, conflict analysis, and innovation. The third phase of the process will involve building MAP into continued professional development training for teachers.

Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education through Heritage and Performance also built in a strategy to scale up and adapt the approach for the wider Kerala region. The project team worked with allies in the Ministry of Education, the Kerala Development and Innovative Strategic Council (KDISC), the Government of Kerala, and the Kerala Social Security Mission. The overall goal was to integrate these approaches into the national curriculum. The project was initially piloted with 15 schools in a mountainous area of Kerala with a large tribal population, before being scaled up to include other schools and Indian states.

Confronting Gaps in Rights to Education for Young People

The SDGs provide a useful tool for capturing broad shifts in educational access. Data for the SDGs and other key global measures generated by agencies such as the World Bank, World Economic Forum and UNDP is usually disaggregated by gender. Unfortunately other forms of disadvantage and discrimination such as disability, poverty or ethnicity are often not captured. Several GCRF projects such as **Disability Under Siege** focused on addressing these gaps through arts and humanities-based research approaches.

Spotlight 11: Improving Educational Inclusion of Disabled Children in Conflict-affected Countries of the Middle East

[Disability under Siege](#) worked with partner organisations in conflict-affected countries of the Middle East. One of its central questions was how disability is represented in different narratives and sites that include performance, media, literature, and education. One of its strands explored how young disabled people can be more engaged in setting the agenda for knowledge production about disabilities. The PI, Dina Kiwan, noted that 85% of children with disabilities in Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon never go to school at all because of the ways in which disability—particularly when it affects mental cognition—is (mis)understood and stigmatised. There are also groups of young people who are either marginalised in school or who have very limited access to education because they are not officially recognised. A key aim of the project was to raise awareness of issues surrounding education provision for those with disabilities and to improve the quality of this education to support those where they need it most. The approach included developing equitable partnerships with local organisations, mapping research and policy, gathering and disseminating information via inclusive workshops, and developing

educational training materials in conjunction with schools and academic networks towards the goal of improving educational outcomes for those with disabilities.

Particularly concerning is the fact that SDGs and other formal indices have the effect of rendering invisible children who are refugees, displaced, and/or living on the streets due to their non-recognition by states and the resulting policy blind spots. As a result, they have little or no access to formal education yet these breaches in their right to education often go unrecognised. GCRF projects in Sub-Saharan Africa,[38] Mexico, and Egypt[39] worked with street-connected young people displaced by conflict and young refugees or who remained outside the education system.

Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education through Heritage and Performance; commissioned by Building Inclusive Civil Societies with, and for, Young People in 5 Post-Conflict Countries (Changing the Story). Photo credit: Sreenath Nair.

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38   Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC

39   Children's Literature in Critical Contexts of Displacement: Exploring how story and arts-based practices create 'safe spaces' for displaced children

Spotlight 12: Making Young, Street Connected Children's Educational Needs Visible to Policymakers through Performative Approaches in Sub-Saharan Africa

Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo worked with street-connected and refugee children and adolescents through creative participatory workshops where dance, poetry, and other forms of art were conduits for engaging them in questions about inclusive education. The project was driven by the core questions: 'how do you give these young people a voice and ensure they are listened to?' According to Su Corcoran, who led the programme in practice:

'The (GCRF) call seemed like a perfect opportunity to understand how and why policy doesn't favour inclusive education.… In Kenya, street connected children aren't classed as children in policy—the ministry for children is a national ministry but the mandate for street children falls under the mandate of labour, young people, and women—and is decentralised and has no connection to the national ministry. You have different implications in the way policy plays out, so we are looking at ways to start conversations between policy makers and young people so policy makers can understand the situation and move forward.'

Working with organisations and practitioners in-country the project piloted workshops with street-connected children in Nairobi, Kenya and young refugees in Kampala, Uganda and Bukavu, DRC, bringing them into a safe space with policymakers. The aim was to break down barriers through embodied expression and enable 'unfiltered conversations' to happen between the young people and the policy makers. The project was ambitious in its aim to bring policy makers and young people together in the same room and to mobilise art as a mechanism for the young people to directly communicate their feelings and concerns. In Uganda, the young refugees produced art and told stories about their experiences as refugees and how it felt to have their education interrupted. In Kenya logistical challenges meant that there was limited time to undertake all the planned activities but through dancing together with policymakers and later discussing their educational needs and rights with them, young street-connected people were

able to cross into an embodied space that made their lives and issues visible, albeit briefly. In the DRC, street-connected children, youth workers, educators, and policy makers, co-authored a poem that was later turned into a song or worked on short skits that showcased issues with the country's education system.

Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC. Photo Credit: Su Corcoran.

In Mexico informal educational spaces provide a means to engage the thousands of children and adolescents who are unaccompanied minors attempting to travel from other Latin American countries to the USA.[40] Many of these displaced children live on the streets and have no access to formal education.

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40   The PI, Evelyn Arizpe, estimates that around 60,000 unaccompanied minors are trying to transit through Mexico every year. Some go to refugee camps; others end up on living on the streets or in other risky situations.

Spotlight 13: Connecting with Displaced Children and Adolescents through Picture Books in Mexico and Egypt

Children's Literature in Critical Contexts of Displacement: Exploring how story and arts-based practices create 'safe spaces' for displaced children partnered with initiatives run by the Mexican Ministry of Culture that aim to provide these unaccompanied minors with opportunities to gather and learn to read and write in a safe, supportive space. Reading mediators hold sessions with the displaced children, many of whom are teenagers, in informal settings such as markets. The project focused on supporting the mediators through the provision of beautifully illustrated books. The PI, Evelyn Arizpe, explained that the image-led story telling presented in the books 'takes the weight away from the word', enabling language to be transcended and stimulating the teenagers to express themselves through dialogue, play, clay sculping, and other means. The process has enabled them to express complex emotions, talk about often difficult experiences and issues they faced, and recall memories of home. A key outcome was the impact on the mediators, who have developed their understanding of visual literacy, recognising the value of the books and other educational tools as part of strategies to support young people in fluid, transient contexts and non-formal educational situations. Showcasing the work with local communities receiving the migrants has also helped to combat discrimination by increasing their appreciation for the rich cultural heritage migrants bring.

Both the Peruvian Ministry of Culture and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have shown interest in the work. Notably, the project leads were invited to write a UNESCO guide on using books and the arts with young people in complex emergencies in Latin America.

The GCRF projects outlined above acknowledge and respond to the harsh realities that an increasing number of children and adolescents face in the context of migration against a backdrop of growing insecurity caused by poverty, climate change, conflict, and other global crises. On one hand they illustrate how creative methods can help improve the well-being and skills of these young people. Yet they also help bring into focus these issues that are so often invisible or on the very edges of policy agendas. They remind us, and the wider audience of policymakers, that all children and adolescents should be able to live secure lives without fear or uncertainty and that they have the **right to an education**, wherever they are and whatever their status.

## Skills Building for Income Generation and Employment Readiness among Youth

The 2018 UN World Youth Report notes that the '*dynamic relationship between education and employment constitutes a key component of the 2030 Agenda.*' It highlights the value of practical skills training as an integral part of education as an '*important means of enhancing youth employability.*' It states that: '*young people need relevant skills, knowledge, competencies and aptitudes to help them obtain jobs and establish career paths*', referring also to the importance of '*life skills centred around effective communication and negotiation, decision-making and problem solving, leadership, personal finance management, and critical thinking.*'[41]

Skills building to improve the employability of young people has been a key aim for many of the GCRF projects that inform this study. The PI for the **Art and Reconciliation** project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rachel Kerr, talked about the significance of the training in journalism delivered by their partner organisation for enabling young people to see a secure, sustainable future for themselves in their own country: '*A key thing was the sense of a lack of opportunities for young people. This is why they valued the training and skills to be able to stay in Bosnia. There is a huge brain drain out of Bosnia—a lot of people are leaving. There is a lack of opportunities because of the economic situation and a sense that they are not going to be able to progress and pursue their dreams. The project gave them a platform there. The young people were trying to talk about social justice but also to tell positive stories to carve out a positive future. There was a sense of optimism coming out of it—it wasn't all gloomy. They really want to stay but they need to try and find opportunities to enable them to be able to stay and contribute.*'

A significant number of projects used participatory approaches to film-making and photography in ways that enabled young people to tell their own stories while building practical skills in all aspects of film production. A key aim of **Storylab** was to build young people's capacity in ideation—the conceptualisation and construction of films—enabling them to 'own' the process from the outset and developing their confidence to continue beyond the life of the project and to pass their skills onto others.

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41   See: UN World Youth Report (2018)

Projects that include **Troubling the national brand** and **Enhancing resilient deaf youth in South Africa** also used a 'train the trainer' approach to develop young people's understanding of the persuasive power of film and arm them with knowledge about film and photography production processes.

Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC. Photo Credit: Su Corcoran.

Spotlight 14: Building Critical and Practical Skills of Young South Africans through Participatory Film-Making and Theatre

In South Africa Ilizwi Lenyaniso Lomhlaba aimed to tell the story of young South Africans living in the Karoo, a central region characterised by inequality, poverty, and an arid climate. The focus is a small town in Karoo that has been at the centre of development debates about sustainable energy and the struggle for land justice and rights. The project worked with young people to develop film and theatre narratives about land stewardship, ownership, and cultivation among landless people. Media was deployed as a tool for raising awareness and helping to foster intergenerational dialogue and understanding. Intended outcomes of the project were to engage young people as champions of land justice and to arm them with skills in persuasive documentary film and theatre production, with a focus on using narrative methodologies. Skills developed by the 15 young participants included social research, participatory film making, interviewing, transcribing and translating interviews, and editing them into films with subtitles.

The skills building element of these projects is particularly significant given the context of high youth unemployment in the focal countries, which is often compounded for young people with disabilities such as deafness. However, some of the interviews revealed missed opportunities for empowering girls. Many of the projects had clear gender transformative potential in terms of ensuring girls have equal access to marketable skills in an employment environment where young women often face discrimination but had failed to actively target girls or ensure gender balance in participants. Scott Burnett, project lead for **Ilizwi Lenyaniso Lomhlaba** noted the implications of failing to take these dimensions into account from the outset; and observed that even when girls formed part of the groups, it appeared that gender stereotypes were replicated in the (self)-assignment of the more technical roles to boys.

Promoting Social Entrepreneurship Skills among Young People

There is increasing interest in entrepreneurship as a means of proactively seeking economic empowerment, resilience, and self-determination. The growing social entrepreneurship movement is offering opportunities for young people to develop small, innovative, not-for-profit businesses in ways that are both socially and environmentally responsible. Social enterprise (SE) differs from purely commercial entrepreneurship models in that it is driven by a social purpose, deploying market mechanisms to create social change, for example through supporting refugee communities with access to education and safe, secure, well-paid jobs that bring dignity as well as an income. British Council research estimates that in Sub-Saharan Africa, SEs employ between 28 and 41 million people. The research indicates that SEs actively promote social inclusion and empowerment of traditionally marginalised groups in SSA: around 73% of SEs actively employ people from poor communities, compared to 56% of profit-first businesses, while women account for a higher percentage of SE employees and managers than in for-profit Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and private sector workplaces (British Council 2020c). The example below demonstrates the enormous potential of SEs for addressing the issue of youth unemployment in ways that are intrinsically empowering.

Spotlight 15: Promoting Effective Social Entrepreneurship and Well-being Among Young People in Malaysia and Cambodia

Building Inclusive and Sustainable Civil Society: A Social Entrepreneurship Wellbeing Toolkit Created by and For Young People recognises that organisations and businesses are only as strong and sustainable as the individuals behind them. It takes a people-centred participatory action research (PAR) approach to understanding the motivations of young social entrepreneurs in Malaysia and Cambodia and contributing to their and their families' well-being. The desired change/outcome of the project is to enable young people to be active citizens and changemakers in ways that are authentic to them rather than imposing external perceptions of 'ideal' social change and social entrepreneurship.

Participatory events have been piloted in Malaysia that enable young social entrepreneurs to share their experiences and map ways forward using tools such as journey mapping and

story boarding. In partnership with local organisations, the project leads are developing a toolkit, supplemented with locally relevant case studies, which is intended to help young social entrepreneurs to maintain wellbeing.

The innovative capacity of these young entrepreneurs has been illustrated by their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which many have viewed as an opportunity to increase the resilience and responsiveness of their organisations. Some have used the opportunity to make and distribute personal protective equipment and deliver food and other essential items. Others have taken a step back to think about how their organisations can become more resilient in the face of future challenges.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken as its starting point the right of all children to a state-funded education that provides critical life skills as well as a solid academic foundation, noting the failure to reach this aspiration in many countries. Through an exploration of innovative examples, it has argued for the potential of arts and humanities approaches to engage children and adolescents as co-producers of knowledge in ways that challenge hierarchies of authority and make learning a truly interactive, joyful process. The chapter has highlighted the importance of building critical thinking, for example by providing a reflexive lens on local issues by engaging young people in journalistic film-making in ways that also build practical skills for young people as the foundation for employment, leadership, and well-being. Projects such as MAP and the work in Nepal to address microbial resistance have demonstrated the transformative potential of education if delivered in ways that privilege young people's experiences and ideas. In addition, approaches such as the Tribal Education Methodology in India have highlighted the power of creative methods to address epistemic gaps in school curricula, by increasing their relevance and value for young people. The chapter has also drawn attention to the thousands of children and adolescents whose social marginalisation due, for example, to refugee status, street-connectedness or disability means they fall through education system gaps. It has provided examples of youth-focused GCRF projects using arts-based approaches to reach some of these young people and give them a platform to express who they are and what they need and want—including access to education.

None in Three(Ni3) - A Centre for the Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence. Photo credit: noneinthree.org

Chapter 5: Addressing Gender Inequality and Social Exclusion through Arts-based Youth-centred Approaches

Introduction

As we saw in chapter 1, young people face global challenges in multiple areas that include employment, education, and political voice and representation. These challenges are severely compounded by gender. In both developing and developed countries women often face the highest levels of unemployment and predominate in the lowest-paid formal and informal sector jobs, resulting in a wide gender pay gap—for example, in 2021, women represented just 27% of all manager positions globally (World Economic Forum, 2021). While there is growing gender parity in primary school enrolment across the world, girls are still severely restricted from accessing education in some countries and even when they complete their education this is often not a guarantee of well-paid employment. Yet the area most undermined by gender inequalities is political leadership: in 2021, of 156 countries covered by the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), women represented only 26.1% of 35,500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3,400 ministers worldwide (WEF, 2021). These incremental figures add up to a world where, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, gender parity will not be achieved for at least 99.5 years (WEF, 2020)—a prediction that has become even more pessimistic in light of COVID-19, which has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls.[42] These inequalities are often further deepened by intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion such as disability, age, ethnicity, and race.

This chapter discusses the gender transformative potential of arts and humanities-based youth-focused research through examples from GCRF funded projects. The first section talks broadly about the importance of working with young people to challenge gender stereotypes and promote awareness as a way to shape behaviours and attitudes in positive ways, sharing examples of GCRF projects that have taken this approach. The

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42   See for example UN Women (2020).

next section focuses on two projects that have successfully tackled the sensitive issues of sexual health and GBV with young people through innovative arts-based approaches that help them question and re-think engrained gender norms, behaviours and assumptions. The final section asks how effectively gender has been integrated into GCRF projects focusing on youth, highlighting good practices as well as lessons learnt.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Gender Awareness Among Young People through Innovative Participatory Approaches

Some of the GCRF projects illustrate powerful ways in which appropriately targeted arts and humanities-based approaches can contribute to the challenging of harmful stereotypes and encourage alternative thinking and behaviours among girls and boys. Gender stereotypes shape children's lives even before they are born. The seemingly natural choice of words and phrases used to describe boys and girls from the moment their sex is known underpin gender norms and behaviours. They reinforce ideas about acceptable or expected male and female attributes or characteristics, and about desirable or possible roles for women and men.[43]

Often so pervasive as to go unnoticed, gender stereotypes are systematically replicated everywhere from representations in film, media, culture, and entertainment; models of leadership and governance; books and educational materials; to fashion and children's toys. They are embodied in physical structures and infrastructure as well as in institutions, laws, and rules. To paraphrase Foucault, gender stereotypes are forms of power that are 'ubiquitous, and [appear] in every moment of social relations—hence, the operations of [gender stereotypes] are not departures from the norm, but rather [are] constantly

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43   According to the UN OHCHR a gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by or performed by women and men. A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives (OHCHR | Gender stereotyping).

present' (Gaventa, 2003). These are forms of power that prescribe socially acceptable, expected expressions of masculinity and femininity, while proscribing others. They contribute to personal and social tensions around the myths about women and men that rarely bear out in reality—'women as weak, passive, sensitive', men as 'powerful, self-controlled, breadwinners'.

None in Three(Ni3) - A Centre for the Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence. Photo credit: noneinthree.org

This gender-imbalanced picture of society has a self-fulfilling and harmful effect. If girls are unable to see positive representations of themselves at high professional levels and in high profile jobs, there is a very real likelihood they will not aspire to these roles. Additionally, boys grow up surrounded by images and role models that promote 'toxic' masculine ideals. This means they often learn that 'being a man' means mistrusting, hiding or rejecting emotions and expressing power in physical ways. This can result in risky and damaging behaviours such as GBV. Stereotypes and the significant underrepresentation of women in the media also play a significant role in shaping harmful attitudes of disrespect and violence towards women.

The discussion above captures the hold that gender stereotypes and norms have over human lives and experiences. Yet, a positive message is that change is always possible, particularly for young people who are still developing their sense of self and of their place in the world. Youth provides a window of opportunity for girls and boys, young women and men to question and disrupt these powerful ideas of masculinity and femininity and ask themselves 'What do I want? Who do I want to be?' This understanding was integral to the design and implementation of the GCRF projects outlined below.

Empowering Young, Marginalised Women through Innovative, Creative Approaches. Photo credit: Annie Spratt, Unsplash.

Spotlight 16: Empowering Young, Marginalised Women through Innovative, Creative Approaches in Uganda

Questioning the Form: Reimagining Identities through Zine Making in Kampala, Uganda is focused explicitly on the empowerment of two groups of young women with mental health issues, some of whom have practiced as artists.[44] Over the course of a three-day residential workshop the young women — some of whom spoke multiple languages and narrated using different oral and linguistic traditions — were supported to write poetry, create art, and produce zines in a safe space where they were able to express sensitive issues and feelings. A planned output of the project was an exhibition of the work, curated by the women themselves, to which policy makers would be invited. The PI Kate Pahl noted that the project not only enhanced the young women's skills but contributed to *'a shift in their sense of selves… they saw themselves as makers and were nurtured.'*

The exhibition of the young women's work took place in September 2021, attended by policymakers, and was a great success. The women were engaged in the curation process, supporting them to convey key messages about the policy impacts they wanted to see. Kate noted: *'This is about ways of indicating where voice lives — where women can express themselves in a gendered world… How can we encourage others to listen to different forms and ways of knowing? It's a question of whose voices count — their voices are expressed through what they write but also in non-verbal forms. What does it mean to really listen and engage with those less recognised forms? The women are discriminated against, but this is a form for them to come into their own space — a way to navigate and bridge the gap between policy and on the ground innovation, enabling the women to express their innermost thoughts and ideas.'*

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44   One was a group of refugee-background young women recruited through the mental health charity StrongMinds and the other group was composed of young women who were being supported through Artvism, a charity for Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LBTQ) women, some of whom had practiced as artists.

None in Three(Ni3) - A Centre for the Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence. Photo credit: noneinthree.org

The Language, Gender and Leadership Network worked with young women and adolescent girls in Uganda and Kenya to identify and address the key challenges they face to political representation and leadership. The women and girls—ranging from those who have already succeeded in leadership positions to those who are still in school—were encouraged to share graphic narrative stories about their gender identities as the basis for understanding the links between language, gender identity, and leadership. These stories have then been disseminated via a digital platform. The twin aims were to inform policy makers about the gender-based inequality challenges currently being faced, and to equip women and girls with the aspirations, role-models, and beliefs required to succeed in future leadership positions.

A Level Playing Field? The Practice and Representation of Women's and Girls' Football in South America aimed to explore and challenge gender stereotypes in football, with a focus on Argentina, Brazil and Colombia—where the game has enormous national significance. The project explores obstacles to women's and girls' participation in football, as players and spectators, and also considered the ways in which participation is mediated via gendered written and visual texts. A desired outcome was for the research findings to contribute to the improved equality of opportunity and of representation for women and girls in football and more broadly across the nations involved in the network.

Spotlight 17: Challenging and Inspiring Young People to Think Critically About Gender Stereotypes through Participatory Online Workshops

In July 2021 CTS piloted, in collaboration with the PRAXIS project, a two-part workshop to promote youth awareness and critical self-reflection on gender stereotypes. The workshop used a participatory action learning approach to help stimulate discussions between young women and men from different cultures, helping them recognise commonalities as well as differences in their experiences. For example, the participants were invited to write 'gender stories' and to identify actions for change at the levels of self, community, family, school, relationships, etc. The pilot workshop provoked deep discussion on often very personal issues of gender identity and norms and led to some of the female and male participants to consider how to challenge gender stereotypes in relation to their own actions and interactions with others. The workshop was very successful, inspiring participants in different ways. One participant said: '*What I take away from the workshop is the conversations we had. it will go on to shape a lot of my responses to gendered stereotypes in society and my life.*'

Another said: '*This workshop was a great chance to express myself.*'

Another participant noted: '*I have some thoughts I would like to share with you as it was difficult for me to speak today, but I listened very well to most of the workshop session. There is still a long way to go in each of the countries to talk about gender equality freely, but spaces like today's are important and start to change the discourse of each of us*

little by little. During the conversations, I thought about how important it is to think about proposals aimed at female empowerment, to participate in programmes that promote self-knowledge, self-compassion and I also think about the importance of talking about uncertainty, especially when mentioning the possible reasons why young women make the decision to abandon their academic education.'

Addressing the Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence and Abuse through Innovative, Arts-Based Approaches with Girls and Boys

As chapter 1 highlights, GBV is a growing problem faced by women and girls in both developed and developing countries, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.[45] At the same time, entrenched social norms, stigma, and lack of effective interventions often means that little happens to change this situation. These are extremely sensitive, often hidden issues and any available data only reveals the tip of a far larger iceberg. Yet these are vital issues to raise and understand through effective approaches with young people, in order to address harmful behaviours and attitudes within their local and national communities. A key problem is that the root causes of GBV are often not addressed, resulting in acknowledgement of the issues without meaningful change.

Interventions funded by GCRF have used innovative participatory approaches to engage young people in conversations about GBV and the linked issues of sexual health and behaviour.

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45   The SDG Report 2020 notes: 'According to surveys conducted between 2005 and 2017 in 106 countries, 18 per cent of ever-partnered women and girls 15 to 49 years of age experienced such violence by a current or former intimate partner in the 12 months prior to the survey' (UN, 2020, SDG Report (page 34). UN Women estimates that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives, and some national studies indicate that up to 70% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (UN Women, Facts and Figures: Ending Violence Against Women, https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures (accessed September 2020).

Challenging and Inspiring Young People to Think Critically About Gender Stereotypes.
Photo credit: Eyoel Kahssay, Unsplash.

Spotlight 18: Enabling Learning, Trust, and Self-Expression on Sexual Health Issues Among Adolescents through Creative, Participatory Approaches

[Promoting sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents through creative and youth-led practice in India, Malawi and Uganda](#) uses theatre, games, and role play to create a safe space in school environments for adolescent boys and girls to have frank discussions about issues relating to sex, bodies, and relationships, rather than imposing sex education in ways that may not be relevant or engaging. It is a critical area because of the high levels of teen pregnancies and subsequent school drop-out among girls in these contexts. This project provided opportunities to learn more about what is important to the young people, what their experiences and challenges are, correct areas of misinformation and identify practical interventions. Jane Plastow, the PI, said:

'It was very much about finding out where [the young people] were coming from and in that they were very much co-researchers. We found out there were, as is often the case, lots of myths and assumptions—this is particularly the case in situations where it is taboo to talk about sex. We were telling the kids that what they knew was important, even if a lot of the stuff they knew was wrong…We were able to understand boys' anxieties about themselves as young men and why they behaved the way they did.'

The project has also enabled the gentle reframing of notions of self and relationships for the adolescents. Jane explained: *'A key term used throughout the process was kindness rather than love, because love is overused and has become a sexualised term. Kindness had a sense of agency because a lot of the kids had very little kindness in their lives and were unkind to each other. The idea that was they needed to build empathy.'*

The success of the project is reflected in significant shifts in gender norms and behaviours that have occurred in the aftermath of these sessions. An evaluation showed that six months after the project had ended in Uganda, in all six schools only one girl had become pregnant compared to between six and eight per school prior to the intervention. In a context where being 'manly' signifies sexual pursuit, participating boys also reported 'giving up sex' because they realised it wasn't what they should be doing at this time and that it was abusive to girls.

Spotlight 19: Addressing the Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence With Young People through Contextually Relevant Digital Games

None in Three: Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence has stemmed from large-scale survey evidence gathered by the PI, Adele Jones. The data clarifies the need to look at GBV prevention, an area that is heavily neglected. She noted: '*We are very concerned about justice and services, but my view is that we can keep generating projects and programmes, but we are not really tackling the root causes of violence and a lot of those root causes stem from children experiencing violence themselves, having been exposed to violence, the normalisation of violence becoming socially acceptable behaviours and all that being strengthened by values and traditions around women and inequalities*.' Adele felt that a different approach is needed to stop violence in the future, and that the process of changing attitudes, norms, and values needs to start with young people while they are still shaping their attitudes and identities. She said: '*young people don't bear any responsibility for GBV but I do think they offer potential solutions*.'

Adele decided to take the unique approach of developing digital games that would be used in schools as part of a programme of work that sensitively tackles issues of child sexual abuse and violence. The project was piloted in Barbados and Grenada and then later in St Lucia, although full rollout was interrupted by COVID-19. The success of the pilot has led to grant funding to tackle different forms of gender-based violence in different contexts: child sexual abuse in Jamaica, child marriage and sexual coercion in Uganda, gender bias as an enabler of violence against women and girls in India, intimate partner violence within adolescent relationships in the UK, and online child sexual exploitation and abuse in Brazil (the focus of a separate grant).

Large-scale surveys are undertaken with young people to explore the extent and effects of children's victimisation and exposure to violence and this information is fed back to governments to improve children's services. The results also inform the research instruments used to evaluate the effectiveness of the games. Qualitative research with victims and perpetrators of violence is also undertaken in each country, which informs

the plotlines, themes, and characterisation of pro-social video games that aim to promote anti-violence and pro-social behaviours by improving children's emotional intelligence skills and helping them to develop empathy with victims. Efforts are made to ensure the games are culturally relevant and authentic in terms of language and the appearance of characters: '*the characters look like someone you would meet on your street or the grandmother in your house, or that is going to be your school.*' The games are tested for playability and accessibility and Young People's Advisory Groups in each country contribute to their creation. The games are subjected to rigorous randomised control trials before being introduced in schools.

Where the games have been introduced, they have proved incredibly successful, engaging children in an immersive way and opening spaces for discussion about these very complex, difficult, and personal issues. Adele noted: '*The game gives young people the language, tools, and permission to talk about violence and abuse and that is in itself important—the fact that we are having conversations in schools about abuse is crucial because the silence is killing us*.' Evaluations of the prototypes indicate that participating young people have gained more awareness of what violence is and had improved levels of empathy, that they have increased knowledge about where to go for help and how to report it, and feel more empowered.

The research is contributing to changes in the educational and policy environments. It is informing the development of facilitator resource packs for teachers, enabling them to design programmes where the games can be used. The research is also informing a package of proposed interventions and policy recommendations for governments and ministers and NGOs, as well as providing the basis for awareness-raising that will enable policy makers to better understand the issues. For example, in Europe an intervention is being proposed, which will support youth victims of sexual violence to gather evidence and to train professionals to work in sensitive ways with survivors of GBV.

Integrating Gender and Social Inclusion Dimensions into GCRF Youth Projects

This section discusses the extent to which gender and social inclusion dimensions have been reflected in the design and implementation of youth focused GCRF projects that are considered in this report.

The critical importance of integrating gender and other social inclusion considerations into research, policy, and practice is now widely understood and accepted, and is a legal requirement of all development assistance under the International Development Gender Equality Act.[46] As UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)[47] recognises, research and other development interventions that do not take gender into account risk exacerbating existing inequalities: *'working in a development context, including through research and innovation, can affect gender equality and gender relations, and it is important that UKRI ODA research and innovation considers this and ensures that research does not negatively impact gender equality'*. It states: *'UKRI wants to ensure that through GCRF and Newton Fund funding, inequality is not perpetuated; that the different rights and needs of all genders are recognised and addressed; and that women and men share the benefits of research and innovation projects.'*[48]

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46   The Act, passed in 2014, requires all development assistance and humanitarian assistance to countries outside the United Kingdom to 'contribute to reducing poverty in a way which is likely to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender' (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/9/pdfs/ukpga_20140009_en.pdf)

47   UKRI is a non-departmental public body of the Government of the United Kingdom that directs research and innovation funding and the steward of the Global Challenges Research Fund.

48   See: https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/gender-equality-and-international-development-research-and-innovation/

A gender-aware approach means at the very least considering '*How… any risks and unintended negative consequences on gender equality [will] be avoided or mitigated against, and monitored*' and ensuring that '*measures [are] put in place to ensure equal and meaningful opportunities for people of different genders to be involved throughout the project*.'[49] Yet, going further, development-focused research and other interventions can also actively contribute to promoting outcomes that are transformative in terms of gender and other forms of social exclusion such as race, ethnicity or disability, whether practical—for example through skills and confidence building of girls and women, and/or disabled people; or strategic—by revealing and addressing forms of discrimination based on gender and/or other dimensions of difference.

A significant proportion of the GCRF projects assessed in this report have incorporated a gender parity element in their design to ensure equal numbers of male and female participants. For example, **Youth LEAD** in Colombia ensured that both the mentors and children participating in the project were 50% male and 50% female, while both **MAP** and **Connective Memories** also ensured an equal gender balance among participants. Participants are selected in relation to gender balance between male/female participants in the 25 schools using the MAP methodology. Additionally, the MAP youth facilitators who were trained as Master Trainers included five males/five females. The 69 MAP adult trainers and 35 youth facilitators across the 25 schools were also selected in relation to gender balance. The MAP Youth Advisory Board includes one male representative and one female representative at a local and national level. Connective Memories considered gender balance in the selection of young people from the area where the research was conducted and also through discussing intersections of gender and generation in sharing stories.

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49   See: https://www.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/gender-equality-and-international-development-research-and-innovation/

Integrating Gender and Social Inclusion Dimensions into GCRF Youth Projects. Photo Credit: This is Engineering

Some projects such as **None in Three: Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence; Promoting sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents through creative and youth-led practice in India, Malawi and Uganda** and **PhotoVoice as an educational tool for intercultural learning and peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host community youth** have identified specific aims relating to gender equality, inclusion, and women's and girls' empowerment. In other cases, gender-relevant issues have emerged out of the process rather than being an overt research aim. In projects such as **Connective Memories: Intergenerational Expressions in Contemporary Rwanda, MAP and Street Art to Promote Representation and Epistemic Justice Among Rural Marginalized Zimbabwean Youth** sensitive participatory approaches have provided an enabling environment for the surfacing and sensitive exploration of gender-relevant issues such as the feminisation of poverty, GBV, early marriage and child pregnancy, cultural norms/taboos, and gender-based inequalities.

Questioning the Form was an exemplary project for both its focus on empowering marginalised women through opportunities to create and exhibit expressive art and poetry, and in its attention to creating an enabling environment for young women to be able to participate. Participating women were funded to stay in a hotel during the three-day residential course and—notably— were provided with funds to cover childcare costs during this time. This provided women with the freedom and space to reflect and develop their artwork and transmitted the message that they and their contributions mattered.

However, many projects have not taken explicit measures to integrate gender awareness and social inclusion into their planning and implementation, with the associated risks of potentially skewed or unrepresentative findings as well as missed opportunities for addressing inequalities. For example, Scott Burnett, PI for **Ilizwi Lenyaniso Lomhlaba** noted the implications of failing to take these dimensions into account from the outset. He noted that participants were self-selecting and that there was only one woman among all the farmers who were interviewed. This is despite the reality that women represent around 40% of the agricultural labour force in southern Africa[50] and are at the forefront of the fight for land justice. There was also a lack of gender balance within the group of young people being trained to develop the films. This inadvertently contributed to a male-dominated power dynamic within the group.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the power of arts and humanities approaches to begin transforming gender-biased norms and stereotypes with groups of young people. It has shown how innovative, arts-based approaches using engaging methods such as drama or pro-social interactive games can tackle and enable tangible changes in seemingly 'taboo' areas such as sexual health, gender-based discrimination, and GBV if they are designed in ways that are sensitive and responsive to specific contexts. It argues for the importance of preparatory research and relationship-building with project participants

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50   SOFA team and Cheryl Doss, (2011), 'The Role of Women in Agriculture', Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

as cornerstones of these approaches. The chapter also provided a brief analysis on opportunities, challenges and gaps for integrating gender into GCRF projects, highlighting good practices as well as lessons learnt. A clear lesson was that including gender-related approaches and aims explicitly in project planning is more likely to lead to more gender-transformative outcomes as well as tracking of these in a systematic way. Failing to take gender dimensions and other axes of difference into account in an explicit way in project design and implementation can not only result in missed opportunities; it can inadvertently contribute to the perpetuation or creation of inequalities.

Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC. Photo credit: Su Corcoran.

Chapter 6: Reflections on Research Process with Research Partners and Young People

Decolonising Research: Co-production with Young People—from Principles to Practice

This chapter provides critical analysis on the idea of co-creation by interrogating what co-production and handing over ownership to young people and partner organisations means in practice; and also identifying tensions within the notion of handing over control and trusting young people's judgment in participatory research processes and the delivery of outputs.

Co-production has different interpretations depending on the field where it is being applied, but essentially: 'Co-production in research aims to put principles of empowerment into practice, working 'with' communities and offering communities [or research partners and participants] greater control over the research process and providing opportunities to learn and reflect from their experience' (Durose et al., nd: 2). Many of the youth-focused projects informing this report included a co-production element, either as a central driver of the research process or as part of a mixed methodology. Co-production was often described as critical to authenticity and relevance, with the aim of ensuring the research captured the specific experiences and concerns of the young participants and partner organisations and enabled meaningful processes and outcomes. For example, in **Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo** the research aspired to be 'context-driven', with an emphasis on giving each (participating) country team control in shaping the approach and research content. This process was kick-started by bringing together the artist, academic, and practitioner partners from each country to participate in a meeting in Uganda—a consultative, creative space to brainstorm and identify key issues for further exploration. The resulting workshops, designed by each country team, brought young people together with youth workers, policymakers, practitioners, and artists to co-produce artistic outputs.

For many of the UK-based researchers, co-production implies principles of power sharing, democracy, and ownership. These principles have informed processes of training, with several projects using a 'training of trainers' approach as part of their methodology. In **StoryLab Skills Training For Democratised Film Industries** there were conscious efforts to democratise the film training process and move beyond the 'top-down' model of knowledge transference. In the second phase of the project, rather than bringing in an 'expert' to deliver the training, participants from the initial workshop in Colombia were engaged as trainers. They were invited to a workshop where they co-designed the workshop they would deliver in two different communities. Participants from the two communities were then brought together to share their experiences in a 'meta workshop' convened by the trainers and project leads.

Several of the projects recognise the enormous value of supporting local partners as intermediaries in delivering training, both in terms of their deep, experiential understanding of the issues faced by young people and the contexts in which they lived and also for creating sustainable processes that would continue beyond the lifetime of the projects. The UK-based partners of **Belonging and Learning** set clear boundaries around their own involvement, fully respecting the judgement of the local teams they were working with and aiming to provide an enabling environment for their expertise and *'innovative ideas on how to work with young people and situation art in education.'* **Enhancing Resilient Deaf Youth in South Africa** trained a group of deaf adults to train the deaf young people in film-making and photography. Gradually they took over the training and adapted the methodology so that it was more appropriate for deaf ways of learning, so that by the end of the project the PI was able to sit back and observe.

In **Promoting sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents through creative and youth-led practice in India, Malawi and Uganda,** there was a recognition in Uganda that adolescents would respond better to young local trainers who reflected the values and norms of the community and were better placed to build bonds of trust to enable discussions of sensitive issues relating to sex and relationships: '*who* delivers the training is as important as *how* it is delivered'. The six Ugandans (three female and three male) who received the training were then inspired to establish their own

company, which will facilitate similar processes with other groups of young people. The training of trainers approach was also a key component of **Troubling the National Brand**, with positive implications for sustainability. PI Paul Cooke explained that participatory film approaches have now been embedded into the organisational approach and structures of the Bishop Simeon Trust. Films communicating the specific perspectives of the young people through their own words and images are now produced every four or five months and disseminated to key stakeholders through platforms that include the organisation's website.

Youth boards or steering groups have also been established by some projects to ensure that young people are directly involved in decision-making and in shaping the terms of the research and outputs as far as possible. In **None in Three: Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence** the programmes have been developed in an iterative way with youth advisors in each country. The advisors contribute to the research design from the outset and are brought in and their perspectives heard at every stage. They trial the games and comment on content, style, the use of language, and other aspects of the games. For example, youth advisors from the UK noted that the clothing styles of the interactive game characters were not convincing and should be changed to reflect what young people would actually wear. The youth advisors are also involved in the dissemination stage and have organised events for young people such as conferences and campaigns about violence.

Spotlight 10: CTS Youth Research Board

The CTS Youth Research Board is a group of eleven researchers aged 18-24 from South Africa, Rwanda, Colombia, Venezuela, Nepal, India, and Kosovo. The aim of the CTS Youth Research Board is to evaluate the overall CTS project and to identify what they see as the key issues emerging from the project. In the first phase of the project, the research board participated in several arts-based research skills strengthening and knowledge exchange workshops and worked with artists and academics to create a series of arts-based research outputs including a public artwork called 'Public Untruths', which is currently displayed at the University of Pristina. In the second phase of the project, the

Youth Research Board designed qualitative research on the three themes they felt had emerged most significantly from CTS: Memorialisation; the daily lives of young people with a specific focus on unemployment; and the value of arts-based methods in research. They interviewed young people, CSO partners and academics working on six CTS projects in Kosovo, Rwanda, South Africa, Colombia, India, and Malaysia. In the final phase, the research board used their findings to develop a campaign on the change they wanted to see and launched their campaigns at a showcase event in November 2021.

Navigating Power Dynamics and Project Ownership in the Context of Youth-Focused Projects

Many of the interviews conducted with GCRF PIs revealed that connections with local partners often lead to approaches that are 'more than the sum of the parts' and which enable research and learning to gain increased relevance and representativeness. The active engagement and reflective learning of participating organisations also potentially facilitates sustainability beyond the immediate life of projects as insights and new skills are brought to bear in future planning and activities.

A key message is the importance of ensuring the right fit between researcher partner organisations by ensuring there are shared overall goals and thematic relevance and a clear negotiated understanding of project aims, roles and ownership. Many of the researchers reflected on the value of investing in a longer-term commitment with individuals, communities, and research partners, for the generation and sustainability of meaningful work. Jane Plastow has been working in one informal settlement area of Uganda, Walukuba, Jinja since 2015 and has established relationships with the community and schools there. She noted that *'meaningful art doesn't get done in short bursts.'* This longitudinal perspective has allowed for an incremental, co-produced approach to research design that ensures greater relevance and ownership for local communities. Jane's research design is grounded on responsive, participatory action research principles. She works with communities to try to identify emerging needs and incorporate them into funding proposals. She takes a 'collaborative, anthropological approach', working with an intergenerational, multi gender, voluntary arts-based group

that includes an anthropologist. The group runs workshops every week and discusses emerging issues and ideas, which then inform projects and proposals.

Many of the researchers interviewed for this report explained that relationships and trust built over time with research and facilitation partners are often critical to the success of projects in terms of engaging youth, contributing to positive change and building in continuity. The critical value of academics and partners having a non-hierarchical relationship built on mutual respect and—crucially—respect for one another's methodologies and ideas was highlighted. This not only improves the smooth running of projects: it allows for the maximisation of partners' skills and knowledge. Many of the researchers saw themselves as 'enablers' rather than project leads. Jessica Mitchell, PI for **The use of creative arts to engage Nepali schools with antimicrobial-resistance and create positive behaviour change on health-seeking behaviours** stressed that Herd International, their partner organisation, was integral to the project, with a lot of the project management sitting within Nepal. She noted that she was happy for them to get on and do the work in the way they thought best: *'They know the culture, the systems, and the people—and work on the foundations they had created.'*

This has been particularly significant in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. The two main Indian partners working on the **Art of Healing** project in Kashmir were an art therapist and a socially engaged arts practitioner who used a diverse set of art activities and approaches. Michael Buser, the PI, had worked with both partners previously on a project in Rajistan and said that they had built up bonds of trust and understanding. Due to COVID-19 restrictions he was unable to go to India and the partners led the entire project with his remote support. He said: *'if the relationship was completely new it may not have worked so well.'*

Some researchers also pointed to the ways in which power relations can inadvertently influence the space of research and, perhaps the authenticity of the process and findings. For example Michael Buser acknowledged that not having been present physically during the project diminished his ability to tell the story properly but also felt he might be a distraction if he was there: *'for the project delivery if I was in the room, it wouldn't help.'*

These observations raise questions about the role of researchers in co-produced projects. A point made by some researchers is that funding structures can create or reinforce North/South, partner/academic hierarchies in ways that are not helpful for the research processes and outcomes. Su Corcoran noted: '*It raises the question of what is research— it isn't only led by academics: research also takes place outside of ivory towers and we should be more aware of the process.*'

A critical question relates to ownership at the stage of producing academic outputs. Some of the researchers remarked on the tensions between accepted academic conventions of knowledge sharing and the desire to give full ownership and recognition to research partners and practitioners in the lower-income countries where they were working. Su Corcoran raised concerns about exclusive notions of expertise that are often inherent in donor and institutional expectations, which often dictate who leads on publications. She noted that her team had developed structures and processes for working together in an environment characterised by horizontal relationships, where all participants had the status of experts and all stakeholders were involved in writing academic outputs and recognised as authors. **Questioning the Form** also took this inclusive approach to dissemination, putting the end-of-project report production in the hands of the project partners and involving the groups of young female participants in curating the artwork for an exhibition about the project. Kate Pahl said: '*it's their project to claim'. She asked: 'How do we ensure that the outputs are relevant for the women and are not just about promoting the UK-based researchers' careers?*'

Though complex to manage, this process was a key part of the project ethos of co-production but one caveat raised by Su was the lack of direct youth involvement in producing project outputs. She stressed that for youth voices to be really heard they would need to be enabled and respected as authors and co-authors in academic and other types of publications.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided critical insights into processes of arts and humanities-based research with young people, based on the interviews with PIs and Co-Is. It has interrogated what co-production and participatory arts-based research should and can look like in practice as well as identifying constraints to achieving true ownership or 'handing over the stick' to research participants. It has highlighted the importance of fostering relationships of trust with partner organisations, ensuring time is devoted to creating shared understandings and goals. These relationships and shared goals often mean that projects have greater impact and sustainability. The chapter has also reflected on unintended benefits of the COVID-19 restrictions, which prevented some researchers from being able to be present in the field but often allowed local research partners to demonstrate their capacity, skills, and in-depth local knowledge. Youth Boards have been recognised as effective tools to engage young people right from the outset of projects through to advocacy and dissemination. However, the power of youth and research partner voices are often undermined by the perception that they are less academically viable.

Enabling young people to tell the stories they want. Photo credit: Nathan Dumlao, Unsplash.

Conclusion

This report has focused on youth concerns and voices in the context of research funded by the AHRC as part of the GCRF research portfolio. It forms part of a series of PRAXIS reports that collectively assess the relevance and value of Arts and Humanities approaches for global challenges, through 'deep dives' into salient topics and research approaches. The central question informing the report and the research which underpins it is: *What is the distinctive contribution of arts and humanities research for engaging and empowering young people in the context of global challenges?* The starting point for the report was the ways in which specific global challenges are impacting on youth, with reference to recent data. It focuses on crises in the delivery of education; the availability of employment and the growing political alienation of young people; the impacts of conflict on youth and the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and discrimination. It draws attention to the worrying rise in mental health issues among young people. It also highlights ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these existing issues.

The report argues for the critical importance of both taking youth into account in research, planning, and programming and ensuring that young people are front and centre of these processes, addressing the silences and gaps in development-oriented programmes. It stresses that leaving young people out not only risks failing to meet the SDGs but means failing the next generation and contributing to a wide range of associated social problems.

The report considers the value of art and humanities-based approaches for articulating and amplifying youth voices. It problematises the concept of 'youth voice', asking what this means in practice and exploring different ways in which this has been understood and enabled in different GCRF projects. The link between facilitating the articulation of often difficult, painful emotions, thoughts, and memories and promoting positive mental health is explored through multiple projects in different countries. Continuing the emphasis on voice the report highlights the value and importance of story-telling in the empowerment of young people and of methodologies that enable them to tell the stories they want to tell rather than the ones they or others feel they *should* tell as critical foundations of agency and ownership.

The report goes on to discuss the importance of arts and humanities-based approaches for creating enabling, empowering educational environments for young people that foster critical reflection, creativity and fun, often in ways that have built-in longevity. It then explores the potential of arts and humanities-based approaches exemplified through GCRF-funded projects to engage young people in challenging the entrenched gender stereotypes and norms that often perpetuate gender-based discrimination and violence. Positive examples illustrate the power of culturally relevant, targeted, co-designed projects in contributing to tangible shifts in behaviours and attitudes among young people.

The focus of the interviews informing the report was often on *process* rather than findings: many of the respondents pointed out that process was an integral, critical part of the arts-based methodologies they were using. This emphasis on process is reflected throughout the report. It is also highlighted in a dedicated final chapter which considers the vital roles of research partners and of the young people themselves in arts and humanities-based research as well as the enormous but often unspoken importance of relationships with them as an integral part of research 'success.' The chapter raises critical questions about co-production, highlighting tensions related to power, authority, and ownership in relation to youth-focused research and suggesting ways in which these could begin to be addressed.

The GCRF projects outlined in the report illustrate practical, innovative, and often highly effective arts and humanities-based research approaches that have engaged young people—especially the most marginalised living in fragile situations—as critical actors. They provide examples of what can be achieved with often modest budgets, energy, enthusiasm, and flexible project design. All of the projects have facilitated learning about young people's situations in specific contexts but—more importantly—many were generated with and for young people as co-creators, in ways that considered their concerns and frustrations as well as their aspirations. Many of these creative approaches enabled deep reflection and learning, as well as providing knowledge, new experiences, and practical skills. They allowed space and time for the young people—and often also their families, teachers and community members—to question and rethink existing knowledge and perceptions, to think about who they are and who

they want to be, and to engage critically with forms of implicit and explicit power. In turn many of the approaches encouraged the young people to recognise their roles as allies in social change processes, contributing to their empowerment in ways that have resonance far beyond the life of the projects.

A key message that emerged strongly through the course of the research for the report is that arts and humanities research approaches should not just be considered 'nice to have' inputs when there is sufficient funding. Rather they are invaluable tools for working with young people—particularly those using creative participatory methodologies—enabling results that simply would not be possible using alternative methodologies. Certainly, some of the approaches may not be as easy to scale up or replicate as more traditional development research methods because of the emphasis on contextualisation, creative expression, deep understanding, and relationship-building. Yet it is often these very qualities that lie at the heart of their effectiveness, meaning that any additional investments of time, energy, and funds are likely to contribute to sustainable, meaningful, improvements to the lives of young people.

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Annex 1: List of GCRF Projects with a Youth Focus

Project name	Countries
1. PhotoVoice as an educational tool for intercultural learning and peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host community youth	South Africa, Turkey and Uganda
2. Enhancing resilient deaf youth in South Africa	South Africa
3. Building Inclusive Civil Societies with, and for, Young People in 5 Post-Conflict Countries (Changing the Story)	Multiple ODA countries and regions (Colombia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Kosovo and South Africa)
4. Far apart but close at heart: How do arts organisations in Latin America support the mental health of young people online during a global pandemic?	Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Peru
5. Phone panel survey to evaluate how COVID-19 and related mitigation interventions are impacting women and children in Sierra Leone	Sierra Leone
6. Promoting sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents through creative and youth-led practice in India, Malawi and Uganda	India, Malawi, Uganda
7. The iBali (story) Network: Democratising knowledge through creative storytelling with youth who are excluded from learning in urban African Schools	Pan-African (Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Sierra Leone)

Project name	Countries
8. Education in Divided Societies Network: the role of school collaboration in societies emerging from conflict	Northern Ireland (NI), Lebanon, Jordan, North Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), and Kosovo
9. Navigating Futures: arts education as a route to youth empowerment and pedagogical innovation	Marshall Islands
10. From Displacement to Development: arts education as a means to build cultural resilience and community-led arts production in the Marshall Islands	Marshall Islands
11. The Political Economy of Education Research (PEER) Network	Central Asia and SSA
12. Elephant conservation and indigenous experiences in Cambodia: Shaping environmental awareness through participatory filmmaking with young people	Cambodia
13. Interrogating the value of theatre-based methodologies as a research tool for addressing the effects of violence on young people's education pathways	Brazil

Project name	Countries
14. Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP): Informing the National Curriculum and Youth Policy for Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal	Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal
15. Supporting Vulnerable Children to become Youth Leaders in South Africa: Shaping the Future of the Isibindi Safe Park Model Nationally	South Africa
16. Ugandan Youth and Creative Writing: New Perspectives on Conflict and Development	Uganda
17. Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC	Kenya, Uganda, DRC
18. Building an intercultural pedagogy for higher education in conditions of conflict and protracted crises: Languages, identity, culture	Columbia, Gaza, and Turkey.
19. The use of creative arts to engage Nepali schools with antimicrobial-resistance and create positive behaviour change on health-seeking behaviours	Nepal
20. A Level Playing Field? The Practice and Representation of Women's and Girls' Football in South America	Argentina, Brazil and Colombia
21. Building Trust for Truth-Telling Among Former Child Soldiers: Animation for Inclusion and Peacebuilding in Colombia	Colombia

Project name	Countries
22. Children's Literature in Critical Contexts of Displacement: Exploring how story and arts-based practices create 'safe spaces' for displaced children	Mexico, Egypt
23. The Art of Healing in Kashmir: how creative activities can support child wellbeing in areas of conflict	India
24. GCRF Development Award: Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP)	Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia, Nepal
25. In the name of the father: Otino Onywalo Ilum - docu-dance theatre and children born of war	Uganda, Bosnia, Norway
26. Supporting Just Response and Recovery to COVID-19 in Informal Urban Settlements: Perspectives from Youth Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa	SSA
27. LeaPS: Learning from the Past to create a Sustainable society	SSA
28. Ubwuzu: Shaping the Rwandan National Curriculum through Arts	Rwanda
29. Narratives for Sustainable Biodemocracy: Bhutan and Beyond	Bhutan
30. The Port-au-Prince-Rio Connection: 'Collateral Damage' by UN Troops in Haiti and Brazilian Troops in Rio	Haiti and Brazil
31. Conflict Resolution through Classical Literature	UK, Brazil, Colombia
32. Local Heritage and Sustainability: promote reflection and sharing within and across communities	Malaysia, Mozambique, Brazil

Project name	Countries
33. Using Digital Tools to Challenge Xenophobia and Support International Development in South Africa	South Africa
34. Capturing values-based legacies of community-led development with GPI in Bhutan	Bhutan
35. Life-Saving Lullabies: Reducing adolescent maternal and neonatal deaths in Zambia	Zambia
36. Overcoming Barriers to University Education in South Africa	South Africa
37. StoryLab Skills Training For Democratised Film Industries	Colombia
38. Picturing Climate: Participatory Photography and Narrative Storytelling for Climate Change Education	Cuba, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan, and the UK
39. Creative Writing and Translation for Peace	Cameroon
40. Disability under Siege - Development Award	Lebanon, Jordan, Pal
41. Decolonising Peace Education In Africa	Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe
42. Minorities on Campus: Discrimination, equality and politics of nationalism in Indian HE	India
43. None in Three(Ni3) - A Centre for the Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence	UK, China, Jamaica, Pakistan and Uganda,

Project name	Countries
44. Language, Gender and Leadership Network	Uganda, Kenya
45. Creative Network Plus: Baseline Research and Development Project (BREDEP)	Turkey, Uganda, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Lebanon and Ethiopia
46. Culture for Sustainable and Inclusive Peace (CUSP)	Ghana, Mexico, Morocco, Palestine, Zimbabawe
47. Art And Reconciliation - Open Calls and The Living Museum: Innovation, Research and The History Museum Of Bosnia and Hercegovina	Bosnia and Herzegovina
48. Exploring Resilience in South Sudan through an Arts Based Curriculum	South Sudan
49.Troubling the National Brand and Voicing Hidden Histories: Historical Drama as a tool for International Development and Community Empowerment	South Africa, Brazil, India
50. Questioning the form: Re-imagining identities through zine-making in Kampala, Uganda	Uganda
51. Nubian agricultural knowledge	Sudan
52. The Politics of Performance on the Urban Periphery in South India	India
53. Great Latin American Women	Argentina
54. Rape Cultures of Resistance: Wielding Religious Texts and Images Towards Collaborative Reform	Lesotho, Botswana, South Africa

Project name	Countries
55. Forgotten Food: Culinary Memory, Local Heritage and Lost Agricultural Varieties in India	India
56. CPAID, POR, RECAP, TOR	Uganda, Sierra Leone, Kenya, South Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, DRC, CAR
57. The Art of Disaster Risk Reduction: An arts-based approach to strengthening community and institutional capacity in Colombia	Colombia
58. Widening participation and increasing access to Cultural Heritage and Natural Science Activities in Georgia	Georgia
59. Mapping community heritage with young people in rural South Africa (GCRF AHRC Changing The Story several projects)	South Africa
60. Dominica as a Centre of Excellence for the Preservation & Celebration of the Creole Culture through Language, the Arts & its Indigenous Kalinago	Commonwealth of Dominica
61. Global Grace	Bangladesh, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Philippines, UK

Annex 2: List of Projects Explored through In-depth Interviews

1. PhotoVoice as an educational tool for intercultural learning and peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host community youth
2. Enhancing resilient deaf youth in South Africa
3. Building Inclusive Civil Societies with, and for, Young People in 5 Post-Conflict Countries (Changing the Story)
4. Far apart but close at heart: How do arts organisations in Latin America support the mental health of young people online during a global pandemic?
5. Promoting sexual and reproductive health education among adolescents through creative and youth-led practice in India, Malawi and Uganda
6. Interrogating the value of theatre-based methodologies as a research tool for addressing the effects of violence on young people's education pathways
7. Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP): Informing the National Curriculum and Youth Policy for Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal
8. Supporting Vulnerable Children to become Youth Leaders in South Africa: Shaping the Future of the Isibindi Safe Park Model Nationally
9. Belonging and learning: Using co-produced arts methodologies to explore youth participation in contexts of conflict in Kenya, Uganda and the DRC
10. The use of creative arts to engage Nepali schools with antimicrobial-resistance and create positive behaviour change on health-seeking behaviours
11. Children's Literature in Critical Contexts of Displacement: Exploring how story and arts-based practices create 'safe spaces' for displaced children
12. The Art of Healing in Kashmir: how creative activities can support child wellbeing in areas of conflict
13. GCRF Development Award: Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP)
14. Supporting Just Response and Recovery to COVID-19 in Informal Urban Settlements: Perspectives from Youth Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa
15. Ubwuzu: Shaping the Rwandan National Curriculum through Arts
16. Using Digital Tools to Challenge Xenophobia and Support International Development in South Africa

Annex 3: In-depth Interview Guide

> Can you describe the project and the approach you have taken? Why this project and why this approach?

> What has been the role of young people in the project and what are the desired implications for them? To what extent did this project engage youth at different stages (including planning?)

> What has been the process of working with partners and how were they selected?

> What are the ethical and safeguarding issues associated with the project and how have you addressed these?

> To what extent have you taken gender into consideration in the project?

> What changes are you hoping to achieve or contribute to as a result of the project? What do/will the young people gain from it?

> To what extent do you feel you will or have achieved your desired outcomes? Were there/will there be any unexpected or unintended outcomes?

> What are emerging themes from the project?

> Have you faced any challenges in the work and if so, how have you tackled them?

> What are emerging lessons from the project – did you make any changes to your original plan? Is there anything you would do differently now?

> Are there policy implications from your project? If where will they have most resonance and what are your processes for influencing/informing policy?

PRAXIS

PRAXIS focuses on Arts and Humanities research across the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and Newton Fund portfolio. Specifically, its aims are to consolidate learning across research projects funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), to amplify their impact and policy relevance, and to champion the distinctive contribution that Arts and Humanities research can make to tackling urgent development challenges.