Key Reflections on 'What Works' from across the AHRC GCRF and Newton Portfolio

A Report by PRAXIS: Arts and Humanities for Global Development

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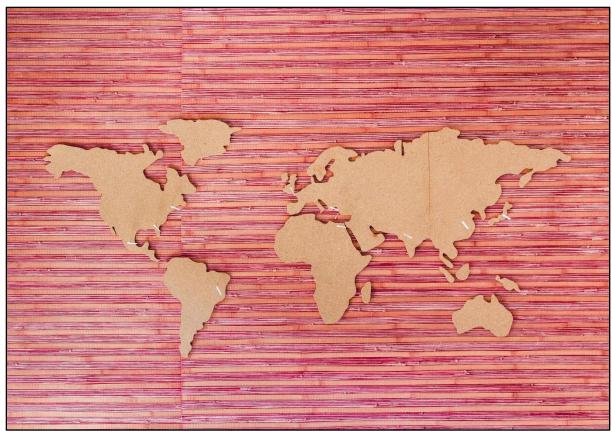
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Executive Summary

This report explores key aspects of 'what works' in Arts and Humanities (A&H) research to address global challenges. The report draws on findings from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and Newton funded projects featuring in a series developed by PRAXIS: Arts and Humanities for Global Challenges. The series explores four key areas: Heritage; Conflict and Displacement; Youth Engagement; and learning from impact of COVID-19. This report highlights some of the key strengths, characteristics, and opportunities of these projects, while also exploring why and how research projects and their funders could improve their approach for future rounds of funding in this area.

Section 1 highlights how GCRF and Newton projects have addressed a range of trenchant global challenges using A&H approaches in six cross-cutting areas: poverty alleviation and sustainable socio-economic development; conflict and displacement; gender equality and social inclusion; mental health and well-being; inclusive, equitable and quality education; climate adaptation and resilience. The highlighted projects demonstrate opportunities to achieve transformative change from the ground-level to the level of international policy making. An important part of this impact relates to the research process and methods that underpin A&H approaches.

Section 2 explores four key methodological areas related to AHRC GCRF and Newton projects: arts-based methods; culture and place sensitivity; equitable partnerships; and co-production and community engagement. While these approaches are not unique to A&H disciplines, GCRF and Newton projects have demonstrated their applicability to addressing critical issues in international development, such as progress towards more equitable partnerships between North and South and (co)producing meaningful community engagement and participation.

Section 3 provides an overview of some critical long-term aspects of conducting A&H research for global challenges, focusing on whether and how projects achieved scalability, legacy, and sustainability as well as providing some reflection on what did not work so well among AHRC GCRF and Newton research projects. In line with these critical reflections, the section also includes a brief exploration of what projects learned from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The section highlights areas where A&H projects would benefit from more guidance in terms of evaluating impact in ways that remain sensitive to the specificity of social, cultural, and spatial considerations in some research contexts and approaches. The report concludes with some key reflections on four structural and methodological areas:

- **Co-production Strengths and Requirements** explores the value of co-production as a methodological and philosophical approach, providing some core requirements that researchers and funders should consider when carrying out or assessing co-production in A&H research.
- **Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Equitable Partnerships** provides insights from A&H projects on approaches that are conducive to the development of more equitable partnerships within research projects, while noting the ongoing systemic and structural barriers that need to change over time.
- **Achieving Scale and Sustainability in A&H projects** explores some key caveats and barriers for achieving scale and sustainability and considers how these might be overcome with more guidance from funders of A&H research.
- **Future Ways of Working** draws on the closing section of the report to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for some significant changes in research practices and consider which research practices might be useful to maintain.

Introduction

Over four years, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) have made over 300 awards under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Newton portfolios. 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, persisting inequalities, inclusive education, and rapid urbanisation.

PRAXIS: Arts and Humanities for Global Development, a research project 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. 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 for Global Challenges and Conflict and Displacement. In light of the global pandemic that continues to affect research partnerships and ways of working, 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 critical issue of young people's political and social engagement and agency, given the seismic shifts that are affecting global populations.

This brief report explores commonalities among research projects across all four strands with a view to providing key reflections and insights on 'what works' across the AHRC's GCRF and Newton portfolios. The concept of 'what works' in research projects can be varied and can rely on different methodological approaches. The report does not aim to provide a comprehensive evaluation of data, findings, outputs, or outcomes among GCRF and Newton projects. Instead, it focuses on highlighting a selection of key characteristics, features, and approaches of A&H projects that are explored in much more depth in four reports published over 2021 and 2022 on Heritage; Conflict and Displacement; Youth Engagement; and learning from impact of COVID-19.

Using a critical lens to explore core characteristics and approaches among these portfolios, the report aims to shed light on how and why A&H projects are effective, as well as noting some key gaps and limitations. The conclusions framed in this report are based on the largely qualitative data gathered and published across the four reports and therefore cannot be used as conclusive evidence of impact. Rather they offer informed perceptions of how A&H projects, at their best, can develop research that offers critical insights into global challenges and can also offer opportunities for transformative action in sustainable development. Section three explores some of the challenges that projects face when seeking to evaluate their impact and it is worth mentioning here that a lack of concrete impacts of evaluation data does not mean that projects had no impact or did not work, rather they may not have developed the tools to monitor and evaluate their outputs. The implications of this are explored further in the conclusion when we propose opportunities for funders to encourage and support researchers to develop evaluation methods that are appropriate for A&H projects and sensitive to their philosophical and methodological needs. Each section is outlined below.

Section 1 draws on examples from GCRF and Newton portfolios to demonstrate how A&H projects have successfully addressed a range of global challenges: poverty alleviation and sustainable socio-economic development; conflict and displacement; gender equality and social inclusion; mental health and well-being; inclusive, equitable and quality education; climate adaptation and resilience. While these only represent a small selection of global challenges addressed across the portfolio, they

were chosen for their relative prominence among the projects and for the vital role they play in sustainable development.

Section 2 provides an exploration of specific methodological aspects of A&H approaches employed by GCRF and Newton projects. These include arts-based methods, or creative and artistic methods; culture and place sensitivity; equitable partnerships; and finally, co-production and community engagement.

Section 3 uses a critical lens to reflect on the longer-term impact of A&H GCRF and Newton projects and to explore aspects of their legacy and sustainability, including their potential influence on policy and their capacity to be scaled up. This section also provides some key insights into what we learned from research projects' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report concludes with a tailored set of recommendations (structured as reflections) on five key aspects of AHRC GCRF and Newton project methodologies and approaches: co-production strengths and requirements; opportunities and challenges for developing equitable partnerships; achieving scale, legacy, and sustainability in A&H projects; future ways of working.

Section 1: Arts and Humanities for Global Development

This section explores how AHRC projects, funded via GCRF and via the Newton Fund have addressed key global challenges and United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ranging from mental health to education: poverty alleviation and sustainable socio-economic development (SDGs 1, 8); conflict and displacement (SDG 16); gender equality and social inclusion (SDGs 5, 10, 11); mental health and well-being (SDG 3); inclusive, equitable and quality education (SDG 4); climate adaptation and resilience (SDGs 2,13). Each of these was identified as a significant theme across the GCRF and Newton portfolios and each of them, to a degree, cuts across each of the four PRAXIS reports and demonstrates the interconnections between global challenges. Each sub-section highlights the work of a GCRF or Newton project to exemplify how A&H approaches can address these challenges by working closely with communities and using creative and artistic methods to identify and develop pathways to transformation and action.

Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Socio-economic Development

Addressing poverty remains an urgent global challenge given the billions of people who live on a knife-edge in terms of their daily lives and livelihoods. Several GCRF and Newton research projects have included a focus on poverty alleviation and have done so in ways that aim to be more inclusive, people-centred, and socio-economically sustainable. Projects have also sought to be more inclusive of marginalised peoples, and to address gender inequality, especially given the greater proportion of women and girls living in poverty. For example, the Network Plus **Rising from the Depths: Utilising Marine Cultural Heritage in East Africa to Help Develop Sustainable Social, Economic, and Cultural Benefits** sought to strengthen capacity at international, national, and local levels to protect, utilise, and enhance the potential of marine cultural heritage for sustainable development by supporting the implementation of 29 projects in Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Madagascar. On the ground tangible benefits have accrued for local populations, for example the project **MUCH to Discover in Mida Creek** developed sustainable income generation schemes in Kenya collaborating with a women's cooperative that are achieving economic gains for the local community starting from local cultural heritage and traditional practices, and in Madagascar the **Reharbouring Heritage** project developed an arts-based festival, attended by 3000 people, to raise community awareness around marine cultural heritage and fishing issues as enabler to tourism and economic development for the region.

Conflict and Displacement

Conflict affects millions of people in contexts that are often rendered more challenging due to socio-economic and gender inequalities. Individuals and families are often forced to flee from conflict, whether within or beyond the borders of their countries of residence. According to Reliefweb's Alert 21, in the decade between 2010 and 2019 at least 100 million people were displaced worldwide. GCRF and Newton projects have demonstrated how A&H approaches are particularly well-suited to addressing sensitive and challenging issues in unpredictable settings. For example, **Creating New Social Imaginaries and Critical Democratic Communities in Post-war Sri Lanka through Traditional Culture and Art** developed a network for scholars, artists, activists, and local communities to explore how traditional arts, cultural practices, and rituals can help with the promotion of human rights and democracy in Sri Lanka. The project focused on overlooked and undervalued traditions and arts that could contribute to imagining a more inclusive and equitable cultural landscape. In bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, the network has facilitated the formation of rich cultural alliances

across traditional divides, diffusing learning at several levels including via Sri Lankan higher educational institutions.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

Achieving gender equality remains a significant global challenge, reflected in the many global instruments, agencies, and organisations that seek to address the root causes of existing gender disparities. A substantial proportion of GCRF and Newton portfolios integrated a gender lens into their project. Beyond the focus on gender equality projects also addressed social inclusion through the lens of human rights, inequality reduction and inclusion of minorities as well as through the concept of transformative justice and democratic processes. Elements of successful projects include a strong focus on understanding and responding to the cultural context and putting in place carefully designed processes for addressing root causes of inequalities. For example, the success of **Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health Education among Adolescents through Creative and Youth-led Practice in India, Malawi and Uganda** was built on strong and positive relationships with local partners developed by the Principal Investigator (PI) over several years and undertaking participatory project planning with them. By working with local intermediaries, it was possible to work with young people in school settings. Through this process a safe environment was created for young people to discuss sensitive and challenging issues relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights in a series of sessions based on performance and expression. The project achieved significant shifts in gender norms and behaviours among participants. A pre/post evaluation found that six months after the project had ended in Uganda, there was a drop in unintended pregnancy across six schools and boys reported changes in attitude, indicating they were more aware of the potential for their sexual behaviour to be abusive. While not enough to prove causality, these study findings are promising and deserve attention for addressing a critical aspect of gender equality.

Mental Health and Well-being

Mental health and well-being represent a growing area of focus for A&H projects. Indeed, health strategies have failed when they have not included a focus on the critical role of the socio-cultural context and values that shape health decision-making. Several GCRF and Newton projects aimed to improve mental ill-health and well-being, particularly among marginalised and disenfranchised groups such as refugees and displaced people, including young people, and in communities affected by conflict. A number of projects used approaches that were sensitive to local context—taking into consideration languages, cultural practices, and other forms of heritage. Projects also sought to move beyond the conventions of language and draw on creative and participatory approaches to enable 'embodied expression'. For example, **Idioms of Distress, Resilience, and Well-Being: Enhancing Understanding about Mental Health in Multilingual Contexts** explored how local languages may be used to express concepts of distress and well-being; seeking to develop capabilities by drawing on local expressions, or idioms. Drawing on Indigenous and mother tongue languages, the project translated linguistic data into artistic expressions and performances. This process created wider impacts through intercultural and multilingual training and human development activities with refugees and displaced people. The benefits of working multilingually were especially significant where mental health issues were stigmatised and/or there was no access to psychotherapeutic services.

Inclusive, Equitable, and Quality Education

Access to quality education is integral to sustainable development and intergenerational exchange. A considerable proportion of GCRF and Newton projects have addressed education, demonstrating

the centrality of A&H approaches to achieving inclusive and quality education. Effective projects have demonstrated the potential for innovation in several areas, including a shift from educator-led styles of teaching to more co-productive approaches between educators and students; the importance of embracing play, creativity, and joy; reaching beyond formal to informal and alternative sites of education; inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and other minorities, and providing a platform for young people's voices in policy reform. For example, **The Use of Creative Arts to Engage Nepali Schools with Antimicrobial-resistance and Create Positive Behaviour Change on Health-seeking Behaviours** used participatory video to engage adolescents as active participants in health behaviour change. Working with Herd International, the project developed story boards with young people to communicate messages about the risks of antibiotic use, successfully empowering the young people to be agents of change in their communities. The project gained the attention of Nepal's Department of Health, opening up possibilities for the participatory video approach to inform national policy and planning.

Climate Resilience and Adaptation

The climate emergency is one of the most pressing global challenges of our era and is both a cause and a consequence of other significant global challenges, such as poverty, conflict, and global inequalities. Communities that have made the smallest contribution to climate change in terms of their carbon footprint are often on the frontlines of its impact, e.g., disenfranchised, poor, and rural communities, as well as women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalised groups living in low-lying Small Island Developing States, desertic areas, high-altitude zones, the circumpolar Arctic, etc. Although the climate emergency has been recognised as a human rights crisis, both international organisations, governments, and experts have often neglected to consider its cultural dimension and the correlation between climate change and cultural rights (United Nations, 2020: 5-6). While A&H disciplines are integral to addressing this gap, science and technology approaches have generally been favoured. However, a growing number of GCRF and Newton projects have focused on climate change, in particular on climate resilience and adaptation. For example, **Changing Farming Lives in South India, Past and Present** used oral histories with women small farmers in India to explore and document cultural and traditional practices in their growing of millets to support food security and agricultural resilience in the face of a changing climate. The project underlined the importance of cultural heritage practices and performances (i.e., songs, ceremonies, prayers, rituals, knowledge about the universe) in supporting climate resilience. It also worked in partnership with a local NGO Green Foundation which is using the findings to inform training on sustainable and organic farming and the importance of addressing gender equality in farming roles and responsibilities.

Section 2: Arts and Humanities Methodologies and Characteristics

This chapter explores the value of A&H methodologies and characteristics, highlighting their potential for addressing global challenges and producing sustainable development through the lens of four key areas: arts-based methods, or creative and artistic methods; culture and place sensitivity; equitable partnerships; and finally, co-production and community engagement.

Arts-based Methods

Music, visual arts, dance, photography, film, among other creative media, have been widely used by GCRF and Newton projects and have offered new and productive ways to address global challenges. Among other benefits, arts-based methods have supported meaningful communication with individuals and community groups, including those traditionally marginalised, demonstrating their ability to "value alternative and/or uncomfortable histories, to disrupt power dynamics, and to support transformative change" (Giliberto, 2021: 226). Reflecting on this disruption of power dynamics, one PI noted that "arts as research practice can unsettle boundaries and hierarchies between academic researchers and other knowledge holders" (Gill-Leslie, 2021: 23). Creative and arts-based methodologies can be deployed to promote inclusivity and are able to "activate" several types of engagement; emotional and intellectual, to present multiple views and perspectives across socio-economic, gendered, racial, and geographical boundaries. In this context, the creative process itself was often considered to be as important as the final project output (Giliberto, 2021: 226).

In this context, arts-based and creative methods were described as 'embodied,' in terms of how they provided access to experiences that allowed expression beyond the 'rational' or 'cerebral,' enabling a more direct and meaningful engagement with the full spectrum of human experience, including the emotional and unconscious or spiritual domains. This particularly resonated with projects that aimed to focus on research participants as equipped to experience the range of human experiences, to move beyond reductive 'victim' discourses. For example, **PhotoVoice as an Educational Tool for Intercultural Learning and Peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host Community Youth**, a project working with refugee and receiver communities in Turkey, South Africa and Uganda used the concept of storytelling through images as a way of allowing young people to articulate experiences of hope, love, and joy to create new, positive stories with themselves at the centre (Brody, 2022: 70).

Arts-based or creative methods are also notable for their flexibility. In one example, a PI described having to switch approach when it became clear that the young, displaced participants they were working with were not comfortable using the creative illustration method planned for: they turned to creative writing instead. This flexibility was found to be important across all contexts, but is particularly valuable for working in insecure or unstable settings or with sensitive issues, e.g., collecting LGBTQ life stories anonymously or using participatory filmmaking to address gender-based violence (by telling stories *with* people rather than about them).

Finally, another key feature of the methods is the importance of reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the way in which researchers reflect critically on all aspects of the research journey, including their own role within it. While reflexivity is a core characteristic of all good research, it is particularly valuable when methods and approaches are fluid and changeable, as creative and arts-based approaches tend to be. This is also connected the importance of process over outcome: "the multi-pronged or open-ended approach of many A&H methods—where they do not presuppose a product or specific outcome—are exactly geared towards deeper engagement with what works, what does not—and critically, *why*." (Gill-Leslie, 2021: 31)

Culture and Place Sensitivity

Over the past decades research projects have been increasingly challenged to demonstrate scalability. This important aspect of the report is covered in Section 3. At the same time, A&H approaches also emphasise attentiveness to local context, especially related to culture and place, and provide culturally sensitive approaches and solutions. In this context, the approach of A&H projects differs from other 'top-down' projects, which are often carried out without an in-depth understanding of local cultures and realities as well as local needs and expectations. This is critical for research being conducted where local cultural beliefs, practices and traditions are particularly attached to their geographical location. This is often the case for Indigenous populations and other local groups and should be considered a crucial element of research design and research methods: the ability to recognise and adapt to the unique elements of a cultural and geographical landscape, and to build trusting relationships with local communities. An example of this is the case of the project **Enduring Connections**, a research project that focused on the nation of Kiribati, a Small Island Developing State threated by rising sea levels. The project developed a series of short films that powerfully portray the catastrophic threat of climate change for the survival of their culture, which relies on daily connections with ancestral shrines that cannot be transplanted to another context. Through a creative, experimental, and participatory approach, the project also supports a process of decolonisation and indigenisation of heritage practice. By hearing local voices and perspectives, the project helped the research team to be self-critical and to understand the importance of collaborative research and building reciprocal relations with communities, so that the research benefits them in the ways that most matter to local people. Carrying out fieldwork, on-site activities, and pro-actively engaging a local grassroots organization (KiriCAN) to understand communities' needs, the project has evolved over time to identify new goals to better respond to local (environmental) priorities. The films have been shown widely, including most recently as part of programming for the Resilience Hub, in the Blue Zone at Glasgow's COP26, and attest to the importance of considering culture and place as integral to action on climate resilience and adaptation.

Equitable Partnerships

The development of more equitable partnerships between Southern and Northern research institutions, partners and individuals is a cornerstone of GCRF and Newton funding and is a key reporting requirement for these projects. It also contributes to the achievement of SDG 17 "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development". This reflects an ongoing effort to rebalance towards greater ownership and leadership of research and development agendas by colleagues located in the Global South. While there remain considerable barriers to achieving truly equitable partnerships, particularly due to unpredictable funding streams and shifting political agendas, GCRF and Newton projects have demonstrated progress towards this goal. Projects have developed hundreds of partnerships with local partners, from community-based NGOs to local academic institutions and development agencies, to promote ownership of research processes and practices. Many projects have explicitly placed the development of equitable partnerships with their research partners at the heart of their design and methodology, in some cases using methods of co-production to achieve this. One of the projects that stands out in this respect is **Deepening Democracy in Extremely Politically Fragile Countries: Networking for Historical, Cultural and Arts Research on Parliaments and People**. This project, based in Myanmar, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and the UK has disbursed more than £800,000 in awards to individuals unlikely to gain grants from mainstream sources: women, early career researchers, those outside the capital and those identifying as an ethnic minority. The focus on

equitable partnerships has driven approaches and innovations such as individually tailored grant support; 'collaborative ethnography' to monitor, evaluate, and learn about the project's management processes and to enable reflection on diverse internal perspectives and plural decision-making; inquiring into democratic processes of the programme to reflect on how best to address academic hierarchies.

The COVID-19 pandemic produced some significant changes in how partnerships were managed and experienced by PIs, researchers, and their research partners. In some cases, partnerships were lost. For example, there were projects working closely with in-country humanitarian or development NGOs whose priorities, understandably, had to shift to respond directly to COVID-19. Other projects lost resources during the government cuts in April 2021 and had to halt their activities. However, more positively, the pandemic was also a catalyst for some partnerships to develop more equitably. The responsibilities and expectations of research partners were redefined across many projects. Research partners often had to provide input on the ground and therefore gained greater ownership and control over the research process. The flexibility and adaptability of all project team members were key factors in success, as was the strength of the existing relationships between PIs in the UK and their research partners 'on the ground.'

Co-production and Community Engagement

Reflecting the cultural shift towards more equitable partnerships, many GCRF and Newton projects reported using collaborative and participatory approaches that sought to engage local participants and community groups to become active 'co-producers' throughout the research process, in large part to ensure that the research generated is of value to local communities and can have a longer legacy. There is no single definition of co-production (other related terms are co-design and co-creation) but in the context of international development, researchers use approaches such as relationship building, consultation, building trust, the use of intermediaries, among others, to foster meaningful collaboration. These approaches were also strongly connected to the concept of 'community engagement,' with research projects actively promoting hands-on experience to stimulate engagement and foster meaningful conversations with diverse communities, including both non-specialised and marginalised groups. Co-production approaches were also often connected to the creative and arts-based methods described above, as in the following examples:

> *A project in Latin America highlighted how asking someone to choose a piece of music they love, and begin a conversation on forced displacement around that, allowing the participants to guide, manage, and control the discussion— which resulted in a reduction of the potential for re-traumatisation… A PI working in India also highlighted how co-production guaranteed the authenticity of the project's theatre production—thereby ensuring the best chance of communities being receptive and engaged to the project's message.* (Gill-Leslie, 2021: 26)

As the above example also highlights, these methods are integrally connected to principles of power sharing, democracy, and ownership. In line with these principles, projects also used methods such as 'training of trainers' to ensure that local participants were engaged to deliver training to their peers and within their own communities. This approach was critical for blurring the boundary between who is the 'expert' and the 'non-expert,' as a way of attempting to collapse some of the hierarchies that can exist between researchers and research participants.

The previous sub-section highlighted changes in the ways research partnerships were managed and experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes prompted greater use of co-production approaches as power relations shifted, exposing existing hierarchies and offering new ways of

addressing them. Relationship building is a key component of successful co-production, and its importance is underlined by the contrasting experiences of two projects affected by COVID-19. **The Art of Healing** is a project located in Kashmir that was able to continue during the pandemic with few serious issues, due to the strong relationship in place between the PI and its two main Indian partners: an arts therapist and an arts practitioner. Having worked together previously on a project in Rajasthan, the trust that had been built between them was integral for the project to be carried out with only the remote involvement of its PI.

Section 3: Learning about What Works (and What Doesn't) in Arts and Humanities Global Challenges Research

This section explores some of the most important impacts of the GCRF and Newton portfolios, with a view to understanding what makes these research projects work well and what hinders them from achieving their aims. To understand 'what works' (and what doesn't) we explore project scale and replicability, legacy and sustainability, policy impact, gaps, and challenges, and finally we will focus on the lessons learned by projects that experienced impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and how these may affect future ways of working.

Scalability

Funding for international development research has increasingly paid attention to developing mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating, and learning from research projects. One of the indicators considered critical for success is project scalability; considering whether and how a research project might be scaled up or replicated from one context to others, whether locally, nationally, or internationally.

Across the GCRF and Newton portfolios there are several projects that have been scaled up, with key examples included below. However, it is worth noting that there were challenges for projects in attempting to scale up and it was also challenging to learn whether and how projects had in fact scaled up. This reflects two key issues: first, projects themselves faced the twin challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic (explored more below) and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding cuts that occurred in March 2021. Both events impacted on the ability of projects to achieve their full potential, whether this involved scaling up or developing policy outputs and other types of 'large-scale' impacts. Second, there were considerable gaps in available project information on scale and replicability as well as limited feedback in interviews about specific plans to scale up projects or attempt to replicate the lessons in different contexts. There could be a range of reasons for this. In part, it may relate to the fact that A&H disciplines have traditionally focused on context-specific approaches, due to the importance of place and space sensitivity (indeed this is a strength of A&H approaches, as discussed in Section 2). It may also relate to different philosophical views in A&H disciplines about the nature of evidence and scepticism about the ability to measure A&H research outputs using methods that have generally been developed in Science Technology Engineering and Maths (STEM)) disciplines (although it is worth noting here that the concept of scaling up is similarly challenged, and challenging, in STEM projects). Finally, there are context-specific reasons for GCRF and Newton projects to avoid focusing on scalability. For example, some projects working with communities living in precarious or unsafe settings highlighted that attempting to scale up these projects by adding project partners or adding locations could in fact put research participants at significant risk. Notwithstanding these justifications and mitigations, the limited information and/or evidence from some GCRF and Newton projects available on their scalability and replicability suggests that this is an area where projects could potentially benefit from more support and direction from funding bodies.

In contrast, where projects have focused on scalability, there are some strong examples of how this can be achieved in A&H disciplines that were relatively varied in approach. For example, several projects have received follow-on funding from UK funding bodies or other sources. In many cases this has allowed projects to build on early success and develop projects further within the same context (see for example **Moving with Risk** and its funded follow up project **The Art of Disaster Risk Reduction**). While fewer such projects have been identified, there are also those that have paid

considerable attention to evaluating their outputs and have scaled up successful interventions in new contexts. Among these is **None in Three: Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence**. This project, originally piloted in Barbados and Grenada, has received grant funding from a range of other sources to expand to UK, Brazil, and India, among others. The project has developed a series of pro-social online games for young people to explore common stereotypes about gender roles and relations as a way of exposing and addressing attitudes that perpetuate gender-based violence. The games are carefully developed and adapted to each setting to ensure that they reflect the different populations they serve to reflect nuanced differences in how gender relations and norms manifest across cultures.

Legacy, Sustainability and Policy Impact

While there are, as yet, relatively few case studies demonstrating example of scaling up projects or interventions from one context to another, there are numerous examples highlighting how GCRF and Newton projects have attempted to leave a legacy and/or produce sustainable impacts and/or outcomes. They have achieved this through a range of approaches, for example: by developing tools, databases, and models; by sharing knowledge, expertise, and research findings through participation in advisory committees, expert groups, and consultations and national and international levels; by developing relationships and sharing findings and outcomes with local and national stakeholders such as local authorities, non-government, and civil society organisations. Projects have also made excellent use of social media and other communication platforms. For example, the project **Pacific Community Filmmaking and Gender, Impact and Public Engagement** used participatory filmmaking to explore sensitive topics such as gender-based violence. While its dissemination activities were curtailed to a degree by the COVID-19 pandemic, one of its films released via YouTube has had over 17,000 views. While these numbers are impressive, further evaluation is required to understand the true legacy of the films, in terms of understanding their impact on the attitudes and behaviours of the viewers. A youth-focused project **Enhancing Resilient Deaf Youth in South Africa** has also made strides to enable sustainability by establishing a deaf educators' film group and through the creation of an online platform called Eyebuzz which, among other aims, responds to the lack of media for deaf people in South Africa.

There are several examples across the GCRF portfolio of research projects influencing decision-making processes at all levels, including policymaking. As noted in the previous section on legacy, projects have developed tools to support decision-making processes, including the development of strategies, guidance, and action plans. Research projects have also developed relationships and partnerships with organisations and agencies in a position to influence policy or have made direct connections with local and national government representatives and bodies. For example, Jon Henderson, PI of **Rising from the Depths: Utilising Marine Cultural Heritage in East Africa to Help Develop Sustainable Social, Economic, and Cultural Benefits** was included in the first Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission global meeting on the roadmap for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2019 which in turn led to his inclusion on the organising committee of the Ocean Decade Heritage Network ensuring that the network's outputs will feed directly into the UN Decade.

Projects have also found innovative and creative ways to increase the visibility and voice of marginalised groups—for example, **StoryLab Skills Training For Democratised Film Industries**, where young people trained in film making skills and given the opportunity and space to advocate for themselves and speak directly to those in power. Another project that has achieved similar goals is **Troubling the National Brand and Voicing Hidden Histories: Historical Drama as a tool for International Development and Community Empowerment** whose PI, Paul Cooke, worked with

NGO Bishop Simeon Trust to develop a proactive policy approach by creating films with young people that are now produced and disseminated 2-3 times per year to key stakeholders. Other projects have found ways to directly influence educational practices for example **Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP): Informing the National Curriculum and Youth Policy for Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal** and its connected project have both produced opportunities for arts-based methods to inform national curricula on peacebuilding. MAP uses arts-based approaches to enable discussions among young people about issues that are important to them. Through a participatory process, these stories are turned into short plays which form the basis for proposing policy-based solutions. A key element of its connected project **Ubwuzu: Shaping the Rwandan National Curriculum through Arts** was to facilitate young people's engagement in policy making. The project conducted 2019 national and regional consultations, engaging a Youth Participation Working Group to represent each province, which was responsible for directly influencing the development of the Curriculum Framework. Finally, **Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education through Heritage and Performance**, is also focused on peacebuilding through education and has as one of its end goals the reduction of drop-out rates (highest among young men) among tribal communities in Kerala, India. The project found creative ways to enhance educational practices, including with theatre-based approaches that allow participants to express themselves using their own languages and cultural values. The project has developed a relationship with local government and has been asked to integrate these approaches into national curricula.

Challenges and Missed Opportunities (or, What Doesn't Work)

The section above on scalability highlights challenges in learning about whether and how projects have achieved impact beyond their immediate contexts. While there are mitigating factors for many projects impacted by COVID-19 or by the ODA cuts that occurred in April 2020, it is important to note that there are some gaps in GCRF and Newton projects' practices and approaches when it comes to learning about whether and how they achieved impact.

Many projects were unable to provide systematic evaluation data, whether qualitative or quantitative, to explore project outcomes and impact. While projects are expected to provide routine self-evaluations that are submitted through a central system, interviews revealed some gaps in tracking or recording impact and change. Project materials available centrally via the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Gateway to Research reveal that many projects have not developed theory of change models or other indicators of change that could support the collection of evaluative data during the research process. As noted above there are philosophical differences between disciplines that can lead to some disagreement about how A&H approaches, in particular those that are artistic and creative, are unsuited to methods of quantitative evaluation. This is an area where more guidance may be required to allow projects to reflectively address such philosophical and practical questions from the start and find ways to creatively develop evaluation and measurement tools that are suitable for A&H approaches. A significant challenge faced by many GCRF and Newton projects arose when, in March of 2020, the World Health Organisation declared that the spread of COVID-19 and the relative inaction of countries to deal with it, had led to a global viral pandemic. The impact of this global health crisis on GCRF and Newton portfolios is discussed next.

Learning from the Impact of COVID-19 on Research Projects

As countries around the globe started to enter lockdowns during the Spring of 2020 it became apparent that COVID-19 would impact on every aspect of people's lives. Considering these transformations, PRAXIS changed course to include a thematic strand on the impact of COVID-19 on GCRF and Newton projects. A year-long research project was conducted, including collection of data

through a dedicated survey which had 80 individual responses (38.5% of GCRF and 40.6% of Newton PIs completed the survey) and through 21 in-depth interviews carried out between April and July 2021. The study findings were stark: data collection had been impacted causing projects to be delayed and/or reconfigured to meet the demands of the new situation; research teams had to relinquish or take on new responsibilities depending on their location and situation which impacted on their partnerships; PIs were experiencing significant practical, psychological, and ethical challenges. While the report explores these areas in much more depth, this report will highlight how researchers adapted to the most significant challenges they faced in the following two sub-sections on mental health challenges and practical and ethical challenges.

Mental Health Challenges

PIs were candid about the human costs of the pandemic. They described an increased burden of mental health challenges experienced by themselves and their research partners. However, they also reflected on the challenges they and others faced in being open about this burden and reported experiencing a reticence to share mental health concerns with others, hoping the issues would resolve by themselves. For researchers, mental health concerns bridged their personal and professional identities: they may have experienced the death or illness of loved ones or colleagues at home and in the countries of their research projects; they experienced anxiety due to their family situation, worrying about the well-being of relatives and children, while also experiencing acute anxiety and stress related to the progress of their research projects. They often felt torn between the responsibilities of both. Researchers were also very aware of the disparities between their own situations and those of colleagues and communities in more disadvantaged contexts. Gendered inequalities were exacerbated across all contexts, with women generally taking on more childcare and caring responsibilities during lockdowns. This was experienced as both an extra anxiety and source of stress, and as an impetus for taking action. For example, one project provided funding for childcare for their researchers and others actively sought to address practical and logistical inequalities by sending medical supplies and funding vaccinations. These experiences of PIs, researchers, and research partners and participants highlight the need to consider mental health risks and mitigations more carefully in future guidance on research practices.

Practical and Ethical Challenges

There were specific challenges for GCRF and Newton projects considering the creative and co-produced methodologies they often employ. Reducing in-person contact was a significant challenge, but one that was met head-on by projects through their ability to adapt and find innovative approaches to achieve the planned outcomes. As well as using digital technology to communicate, some projects found ways to allow participants to use technology to develop creative outputs. The impact on research ethics was another significant theme. Projects were reconfigured and re-framed constantly to address the ever-changing global evolution of the pandemic. However, there were times when this flexibility had ethical implications for the projects: for example, where there were different lockdown procedures in place, UK-based PIs were at times concerned for the safety of research partners and participants. They may have had more freedom to meet in person, but PIs were acutely aware of the potential risks of these research encounters. There were also ethical implications around emergent technologies, such as using WhatsApp messaging for data collection. For example, in terms of data sharing, the provenance and ownership of data shared on WhatsApp groups with research participants were sometimes unclear. These practical and ethical challenges point towards the need to develop clearer guidelines and frameworks for hybrid research practices that blend virtual, digital, and physical approaches.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has highlighted strengths and opportunities for A&H research in tackling global challenges. The first section provided an overview of some key challenges that AHRC GCRF and Newton projects have addressed; the second focused on some core methodological considerations of the projects while the third and last section explored wider implications, impact and issues related to assessing whether and in what ways these projects are effective. To bring together some of the core messages, this conclusion will provide tailored reflections that highlight key areas for consideration. These focus on four structural and methodological aspects of AHRC GCRF and Newton funded A&H research projects: co-production strengths and requirements; opportunities and challenges for developing equitable partnerships; achieving scale and sustainability in A&H projects; and future ways of working.

Co-production Strengths and Requirements

Co-production processes are able to:

- Facilitate the interrogation of power dynamics in local settings and among research partners.
- Integrate local knowledge, culture, and values and support reciprocal knowledge exchange, reflexivity, and learning.
- Strengthen and empower local organisations to take ownership of research processes and outputs.

Co-production processes require that:

- Researchers consider local communities' expectations and views from early in the research process and be reflective about their own preconceived ideas so they can be willing to adapt or even completely change research aims and objectives in line with local needs.
- Researchers and research partners remain open to constantly addressing hierarchies and power imbalances among research teams, to work towards more democratic research processes, and to build more truly equitable partnerships between UK-based and overseas partners.

Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Equitable Partnerships

Opportunities for developing equitable partnerships:

- A&H approaches, while not inherently more inclusive, can be deployed in creative ways to build trust and inclusivity, which are important building blocks for developing shared decision-making in research partnerships.
- Co-production processes, which are commonly used across A&H projects, can be conducive, when used appropriately, for developing more inclusive and equitable research partnerships.
- While the COVID-19 pandemic brought huge challenges for research projects, the pandemic also opened up new opportunities for non-UK research partners to take on more ownership of the research process. Research in this area would allow for these transformations to be explored further, with a view to ensuring that these gains are maintained.

Challenges for developing equitable partnerships:

- While there is considerable will among researchers and PIs to work towards more equitable partnerships, there remain structural barriers related to financial and logistical systems inherent to academic institutions and funding that need to be addressed over time.
- While COVID-19 opened up opportunities for more shared responsibility, there is a risk that these shifts will not translate to post-COVID-19 arrangements within research teams—there may be a return to the 'status quo'. This deserves more attention from funding bodies and researchers.

Achieving Scale and Sustainability in A&H Projects

While there are many positive examples of AHRC GCRF and Newton projects achieving scale and sustainability, there are some barriers and important caveats to consider and address:

- Funding bodies of A&H projects need to provide clear guidance to ensure that sensitive evaluation and monitoring approaches are developed from the earliest conception of the project, although there should be flexibility to ensure that these fit the project methodology and context.
- A&H projects should be encouraged to consider scalability from the earliest stages of their development. However, it should be noted that scalability may not always be a priority, for example in projects dealing with contexts of cultural, social, or spatial specificity.
- A&H projects should be required to reflect on and include adaptations to address their carbon footprint, to consider and mitigate the risk of potential disasters (related to climate and/or health, e.g., pandemics), as well as to consider the intellectual sustainability of their research outputs and outcomes.

Future Ways of Working

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for some significant changes in research practices:

- There should be continued recognition and support for the hybridisation of research methods, delivery, communication, and dissemination in terms of blending virtual, digital, and physical approaches;
- While travel for research purposes, such as to conduct fieldwork or to develop and maintain research partnerships, will remain essential under some circumstances, projects should consider alternative approaches to reduce carbon emissions.
- Funding bodies, academic institutions, and academic researchers should carefully consider the development of innovative and robust ethical frameworks to ensure that research teams are equipped to identify and mitigate potential ethical risks, including in relation to their mental health and well-being, and to support an equal, diverse, and inclusive research environment.

Annex 1

List of Exemplar Projects

Project Title	Principal Investigator and Lead Institution
Rising from the Depths: Utilising Marine Cultural Heritage in East Africa to Help Develop Sustainable Social, Economic, and Cultural Benefits.	Jon Henderson, University of Edinburgh
MUCH to Discover in Mida Creek	Caesar Bita, National Museums of Kenya
Reharbouring Heritage	Jonathan Skinner, University of Surrey
Creating New Social Imaginaries and Critical Democratic Communities in Post-war Sri Lanka through Traditional Culture and Art	Kiran Grewal, Goldsmiths, University of London
Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health Education among Adolescents through Creative and Youth-led Practice in India, Malawi and Uganda	Jane Plastow, University of Leeds
Idioms of Distress, Resilience, and Well-Being: Enhancing Understanding about Mental Health in Multilingual Contexts	Alison Phipps, University of Glasgow
The Use of Creative Arts to Engage Nepali Schools with Antimicrobial-resistance and Create Positive Behaviour Change on Health-seeking Behaviours	Jessica Mitchell, University of Leeds
Changing Farming Lives in South India, Past and Present	Sandip Hazareesingh, The Open University
PhotoVoice as an Educational Tool for Intercultural Learning and Peacebuilding between Forcefully Displaced Populations and Host Community Youth	Melis Cin, Lancaster University
Enduring Connections	Sara Penrhyn Jones, Bath Spa University
Deepening Democracy in Extremely Politically Fragile Countries: Networking for Historical, Cultural and Arts Research on Parliaments and People	Emma Crewe, SOAS
The Art of Healing	Michael Buser, University of the West of England
Moving with Risk	Roger Few, University of East Anglia
The Art of Disaster Risk Reduction	Hazel Marsh, University of East Anglia
None in Three: Development, Application, Research and Evaluation of Prosocial Games for the Prevention of Gender-based Violence	Adele Jones, Daniel Boduszek, Nadia Wager, University of Huddersfield

Pacific Community Filmmaking and Gender, Impact and Public Engagement	Kirsten MacLeod, Edinburgh Napier University
Enhancing Resilient Deaf Youth in South Africa	Andrew Irving, University of Manchester
Troubling the National Brand and Voicing Hidden Histories: Historical Drama as a tool for International Development and Community Empowerment	Paul Cooke, University of Leeds
StoryLab Skills Training for Democratised Film Industries	Erik Knudsen, University of Central Lancashire
Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP): Informing the National Curriculum and Youth Policy for Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal	Ananda Breed, University of Lincoln
Tribal Education Methodology: Sustainable Education through Heritage and Performance	Sreenath Nair, University of Lincoln

Annex 2

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