



International Research Coalitions: UK universities learning to be better partners

Richard Axelby, Emma Crewe, Sewit Haileselassie Tadesse, Jastinder Kaur,
Amir Massoumian, Myat Thet Thitsar and Bethel Worku-Dix

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of findings and recommendations	1
Introduction	3
A short history of Global Research Network on Parliaments and People	4
Learning themes	6
1. A sustainable legacy	7
2. Establishing partnerships.....	9
3. Grant-making.....	13
4. Financial management.....	15
5. Enhancing skills, knowledge and capacity.....	18
6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning.....	21
7. Communication	23
8. Advocacy and influence	25
9. Impact on climate.....	27
10. Collaborating within a network.....	28
Appendix 1 - Application form template.....	31

Summary of findings and recommendations



In 2017, the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People at SOAS launched a new programme called 'Deepening Democracy'. This programme was designed to offer grants and training for scholars and artists in Ethiopia and Myanmar studying the relationship between parliaments and people. Deepening Democracy was founded on the premise that national research capacity to scrutinise parliaments and wider political worlds is a vital element of democracy; without it, processes of democratic accountability are left underexplored. Democracy is not a static phenomenon, and as such the public should play a part in deciding what democracies should look like through various forms of engagement. Scholars and artists have the potential to make a valuable contribution to scrutinising and deepening democracy. Moreover, the exchange of ideas between scholars and artists internationally can enrich debates. However, these collaborations will only be successful if they are supportive and inclusive rather than undermining and controlling.

Deepening Democracy was launched in response to the pervasive perception that researchers and research organisations located in the Global South have limited capabilities. The Global Research Network on Parliaments and People recognised that this was misguided. While resources for research and higher education may be limited in the Global South, and are unevenly distributed between and within nations, there are no limits to the talent, skill and commitment found in any place. This is why when we set up grant-making within the Deepening Democracy Programme, we encouraged Myanmar and Ethiopian scholars to apply as Principal Investigators.

The quality, quantity, innovation and standard of ideas in research proposals were superb and highlighted the commitment and talent of scholars in both countries. Their talent was further demonstrated through the outputs generated by their projects. The success of these projects is, at least in part, attributable to the multi-disciplinarity of the work, the mutual collaboration between scholars and creative industries and, most importantly, the fact that researchers were given ownership of their work.

The need to democratise international research coalitions is long overdue. To enable other universities (especially in the UK) to learn from our experience of managing international research coalitions, offering grants and training and collaborating to influence policymakers, we offer our reflections on our experience in this learning paper. The report is timely and of even more pressing importance following recent cuts which were made to Overseas Development Assistance by the UK government. Further to this, based on the findings discussed in this report, we agree with the recommendation made by one of our Ethiopian colleagues:

“The UK government should continue to fund challenge-led research in the Global South. While there are so many interventions that can be made to bring about a positive change, research-led interventions are the most effective and consequential interventions that will have a thoroughgoing impact.”

GRNPP grantee



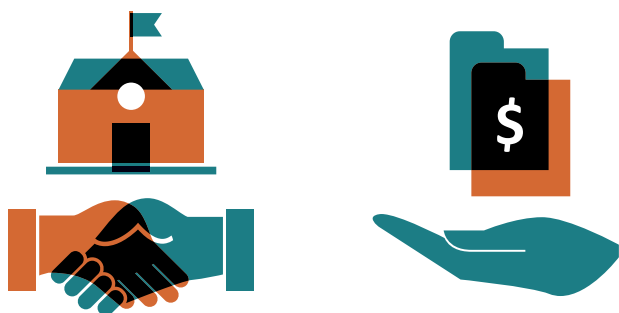
Table 1:

Key recommendations for partnership working

1. Good management of people, resources and partnerships is based on learning oriented towards decolonising, thinking long-term and continual collective review.
2. New programmes benefit from reflecting on the weaknesses of earlier initiatives. While partnership can be difficult, when differences are dealt with sensitively, then coalitions can be the most productive way of working.
3. Global assumptions about hierarchies of capacity, knowledge, and skills are often part of the justification for centralising control of funding. These assumptions deserve to be challenged.
4. When establishing partnerships, think about legacy and legacy impact from the outset. Encourage all parties to be honest about their aspirations, constraints and expectations, and tailor agreements accordingly.
5. Plan and agree on arrangements for decision-making that value decentralised knowledge, recognise the autonomy of national organisations and actors, and nurture long-term capacity development for all. Autonomy gives national partners the opportunity and confidence to make the most of their capacities, whilst micro-management undermines these capacities.
7. Communication in a coalition is multi-faceted, multi-scalar and multi-directional. The potential for misunderstanding is huge, especially on digital channels. Take the challenge of diverse languages seriously – there are no cheap and easy solutions.
6. If there are political sensitivities, rely on national and local experts for advice about how to navigate them.
8. Do not create a large coalition project unless you have close contacts in a place already. Start small and build up your capacity gradually.
9. Invest time and energy in working out inclusive strategies – how can you make sure that women, early career researchers, those from ethnic minorities, groups facing inequalities, and people living far from the capital can access opportunities? Ask the question, ‘Who am I leaving out?’ at every turn and keep developing strategies for being inclusive.
10. If your organisation is grant-making, then spend time working with potential and actual grant holders to ensure that their proposed budgets will cover the full costs of research. Develop strategies for allowing them to vary their plans and budgets as the project progresses. Flexibility is an unusual but valuable approach in grant-making.
11. Be ready to invest time in making sure institutional arrangements are well-planned and efficient, international financial transfers are made without delays and that training is part of financial monitoring.
12. Tailor individual or group mentoring, guidance or training to specific and contextual values, incentives, preferences and pressures. Capacity development should be facilitated in ways that can be replicated and adapted by others.
13. Monitoring and evaluation are more interesting if the emphasis is on learning rather than policing. Collaborative ethnography can be a good way to take account of diverse voices and complex causality and attribution. It requires reflexivity, a sense of history (and many other disciplines), and attention to plurality.
14. A broader approach to **research ethics** is needed. As just one example, reducing impact on climate change needs to be developed collaboratively within international partnerships – we suggest 10 climate rules that do not diminish research quality in section 9.

Introduction

The primary audience for this report, which focuses on the management rather than the results of the Deepening Democracy¹ programme, **is academics and professional staff working at UK universities** and who are involved with planning or managing large international research collaborations. The learning that is shared in the report by those who managed the programme could also be of interest to **policymakers, grant-makers and governments** when making decisions about where to invest resources, how to commission research, and how best to support research capacity development around the world.



Beyond the immediate impact of research that resulted from each project we funded, involvement in the Deepening Democracy programme resulted in wider impact for all participants such as increasing involvement in civil-society networks. Such broader impacts were explored using an abductive² approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning that drew on multiple data collection methods including recorded meeting minutes, visit reports, diaries, Skype/Zoom discussions, appraisal of documents, informal conversations, and SurveyMonkey questionnaires. This approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning is based on ethnographic research principles in the sense that it utilises long-term continuous interaction, is attentive to new possibilities and unanticipated outcomes and considers a range of perspectives.

The learning gathered contributed to both practical and academic understanding of the international collaboration process and how to move towards more equitable, decolonising and democratic partnerships. The key reflections identified are the basis of this report.

By providing broad recommendations and practical guidance, the report could be helpful for those developing collaborations in a range of settings. The recommendations and guidance provided emerged from engagement with a network of researchers and professional staff across Ethiopia, Myanmar and the UK.

A flexible [monitoring and evaluation framework](#) was developed during the project, used to support accountability, continual improvement and learning through reflection including on how to be better partners.



¹This programme was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Global Challenges Research Fund (AH/R005435/1)

²For details see E. Crewe (2021) *An Anthropology of Parliaments* (London: Routledge), p. 198

A short history of Global Research Network on Parliaments and People

In 2014, Emma Crewe (Principal Investigator at SOAS) and Ruth Fox (Co-Investigator at Hansard Society) designed an international programme to scrutinise parliaments. Emma and Ruth wanted to create opportunities for scholars in Bangladesh and Ethiopia to study the relationships between their parliaments, politicians and society, and to bring together political scientists, anthropologists and development studies scholars, who study related topics but tend to work in silos. Over a three year period, Emma and Ruth worked with three senior academics (Nizam Ahmed, Zahir Ahmed and Meheret Ayenew) and five junior researchers in Bangladesh and Ethiopia³. The teams in each country produced a series of **research** outputs exploring the interaction between parliament and civil society, but they were not driving their own research agenda.

Over the following three-year period, this developed into a new programme - Deepening Democracy, which was funded by a Global Challenges Research Fund 'Network Plus' grant⁴. A network - the Global Research Network for Parliaments and People (GRNPP) - was also created, and together the team embarked on a mix of grant-making, training, advocacy and research. Our Network programme had a larger

coordinating team in SOAS (Richard Axelby, Emma Crewe, Jastinder Kaur, Bethel Worku-Dix and later Amir Massoumian); Co-Investigators (Co-Is) Niraja Gopal Jayal in JNU (Delhi), Ruth Fox at Hansard Society (London), Cristina-Leston Bandeira in Leeds University and Mandy Sadan then in SOAS; and partner organisations: **Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation** led by Myat Thet Thitsar in Myanmar, **Forum for Social Studies** then directed by Meheret Ayenew, and **Setaweet** in Ethiopia with Sehin Teferra at the helm.

The Deepening Democracy programme challenged pervasive assumptions underlying global hierarchies of knowledge, with project results highlighting that:

- **Scholars in Myanmar and Ethiopia can and do effectively design and undertake interdisciplinary research to an excellent standard**
- **A UK university and its partners can establish an efficient and ethical capacity for grant-making at speed**
- **Respectful partnerships between stakeholders in the Global North and South is possible, but relies on strong relationships, effective communication, flexibility and proper resources**
- **Capacity-strengthening should not be overlooked, with no opportunities missed for learning, mentoring and exchange of knowledge.**



³The programme was 'Parliamentary effectiveness: public engagement for poverty reduction in Bangladesh and Ethiopia' funded by an Economic and Social Research Council and Department for International Development grant (ES/L005409/1). For their outputs, see the library on www.grnpp.org.

⁴www.ahrc.ukri.org/the-global-challenges-research-fund/gcrf-network-plus/.

What has this involved?

Grants

50 grants ranging from £5k to £100k. Over half of the awards went to Principal Investigators (PIs) under the age of 40 - 24 for projects led by women and 26 by men; 44 led by Myanmar/Ethiopian scholars, 1 Bangladeshi, 3 diaspora scholars and 2 white Europeans. Some PIs held more than one grant, so the total number of PI scholars was 33 - 17 women and 16 men. The Co-Investigators (Co-Is) and other team members were overwhelmingly citizens of Myanmar or Ethiopia. For most of the researchers this was the first time partnering with an international organisation.

Events

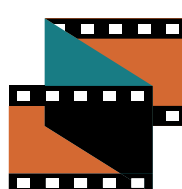
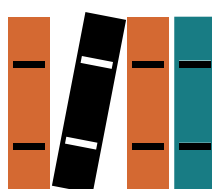
Over 250 events. From small meetings with politicians to large conferences - including a festival showcasing art for research collaborations in Yangon for politicians, activists, scholars, artists, and an exhibition about women's political struggles in Addis Ababa. Grantees' research has been showcased on our [website](#), at various events in Myanmar, Ethiopia and the UK, and by SOAS. Deepening Democracy was one of three [SOAS programmes](#) mentioned when the university was ranked 3rd for impact globally on SDG16 in 2019.

Publications

A wide range of publications can be [seen in the GRNPP output library](#), including a monograph about Parliaments in South Asia by Nizam Ahmed, another about the Rohingya by Nasir Uddin, an overview of the Anthropology of Parliaments by Emma Crewe and a book about women Ethiopian parliamentarians by Mahlet Fitsum. Setawet published a feminist journal with one of our grants, [Writing our Rights](#), featuring articles by GRNPP-funded scholars.

Multi-media

All our grantees have produced a creative element, including a film by [Arsema Worku Tiduneh](#) about how democracy begins in families and another by [Olisalari Olibui Tongolu](#) and Tesfahun Hailu Haddis that weaves film, theatre and scholarship into one project about the representation of the Mursi. Training was often involved, with the production of docu-animation by students at the [Yangon Film School](#) as just one example. Innovation was always part of the work, clearly seen in Mercy Mulugeta's creation of an online platform ([Bridge](#)) enabling MPs and their constituents to engage in moderated dialogue.



Learning themes



A sustainable legacy



Monitoring, learning and evaluation



Establishing partnerships



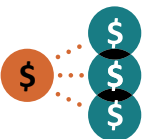
Communication



Grant-making



Advocacy and influence



Financial management



Impact on climate



Enhancing skills, knowledge and capacity



Collaborating within a network



1. A sustainable legacy



When colleagues based in the Global South were asked how those in the Global North could be better partners, they answered: “assume that you are working together for a long time” (an Indian political theorist) and “keep imagining you are in the other person’s shoes” (a Somaliland writer). Both encourage commitment and accountability. This highlights the importance of considering the impact of projects in the longer term. As a result, throughout work with the Deepening Democracy programme, we have asked ‘how can we engage in the most supportive way so that all those involved can benefit for the longest time possible?’

However, this way of thinking and indeed working is not always easy. One grantee pointed out:

“Most of the time my interactions were a mutual learning process based on long term commitment to the professional relationship. While there were long discussions with my CO-I about not being extractive, when tensions were high, the commitment to a co-creative process seemed to wane”

GRNPP grantee

Thinking about the legacy of project work needs to be sewn into the beginning of any coalition. In the Deepening Democracy programme we focused on enabling partners and grantees to develop skills, knowledge and capacity to scrutinise democracy or investigate how the practice of democracy is experienced by different groups. It was our responsibility to create the communication channels to find out - and keep finding out - what legacy would be beneficial (and to whom), how it could be created and sustained, and who should do what. Continual flexible adjustment to changing needs creates a strong legacy. To do this we had to develop our own capacity.

One Ethiopian grantee recently summarised his experience of the grant-making aspect of this programme (also named P4P - parliaments for people), indicating that we developed the capacity to enable learning:

“Taking part in the P4P project was a learning process, especially when the constructive comments and challenges came from the proposal reviewing team. It sharpened my understanding of exactly what a proposal is. I also learned a lot from my interaction with the GRNPP colleagues as did my whole research team.”

GRNPP grantee

The areas of capacity development that we focused on emerged out of reflecting on our experience. As this learning paper makes plain, we discovered in the process of grant-making that research organisations in Myanmar and Ethiopia had few opportunities to design and manage their research programmes. To change this, we built in guidance on budgeting and financial reporting into the process of applying and then managing their grants. As our coalition progressed, we discovered more about the mechanisms of exclusion facing specific groups. Female scholars were being excluded in Ethiopia, and certain ethnic groups in Myanmar, and so Setawet and EMReF created new targeted programmes to address these problems. We were determined that our legacy would not be to reproduce academic inequalities in each country. We kept asking, "who is getting left out of what processes?" However, we were also aware of several challenges that would require longer commitments to overcome the inflexibility of universities and grant-makers; norms and orthodoxies that constrain younger researchers; or resistance to new ideas and approaches.

As one grantee from Ethiopia reported:

"The project is different from other grants with its potency to establish extended and wider networks and on the fact that it lays down the foundation for us to engage in other future projects."

GRNPP grantee

While tempting to focus on the more tangible, measurable strategy of producing written advice, in this coalition we gave more attention to unseen processes of mutual learning. Even if this appears to be less immediately measurable, the power of collective learning shows over time because the more sophisticated your capacity to forge close relationships, learn and develop, the better results and impact you can achieve. The learning occurs in the everyday practice of working together, guided by the long-term needs of the programme (and the goal of deepening democracy), rather than the immediate demands of planning approaches (such as logical frameworks).

To achieve a lasting legacy and network we found that four processes were key:

1. Producing advice through documents and other outputs
2. Facilitating learning events
3. Collective learning through working together and reflecting on progress and setbacks
4. Creating new connections (including between partners/grantees and new funders)



2. Establishing partnerships

When starting to work with others, you need to establish what kind of partnership each side is interested in and what they can offer. It is also important to be aware of historical, political and social contexts, including global and local hierarchies created in part by a history of unequal distribution of resources and the flawed assumptions and rationalities that they travel with. All too often, partnership working involves subcontracting work to researchers from the Global South rather than utilising principles of co-design or indeed allowing researchers from the Global South to lead research, development projects and advocacy, as we did in the programme.

The Network Plus programme, an Arts and Humanities Research Council and Global Challenges Research Fund funded initiative, offered us the opportunity to work differently. Once the SOAS team had decided on countries to work with, a member of the SOAS team met with the Director of Research (Myat The Thitsar) from the Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) to discuss principles for building trust and establishing the SOAS, EMReF partnership (see Table 2).

The reasons for this continued inequality in partnership working relates largely to flawed assumptions by those in the Global North, that:

- 'Locals' in the Global South lack sufficient capacity, knowledge and skills
- It is acceptable to impose strategies, plans and research agendas on researchers from the Global South rather than investing in national designed plans
- It is justifiable to claim the credit for others' ideas because work is being created for 'locals'
- Corruption in the Global South is assumed to be high thus justifying the need for excessive control and monitoring to prevent fraud or financial mismanagement

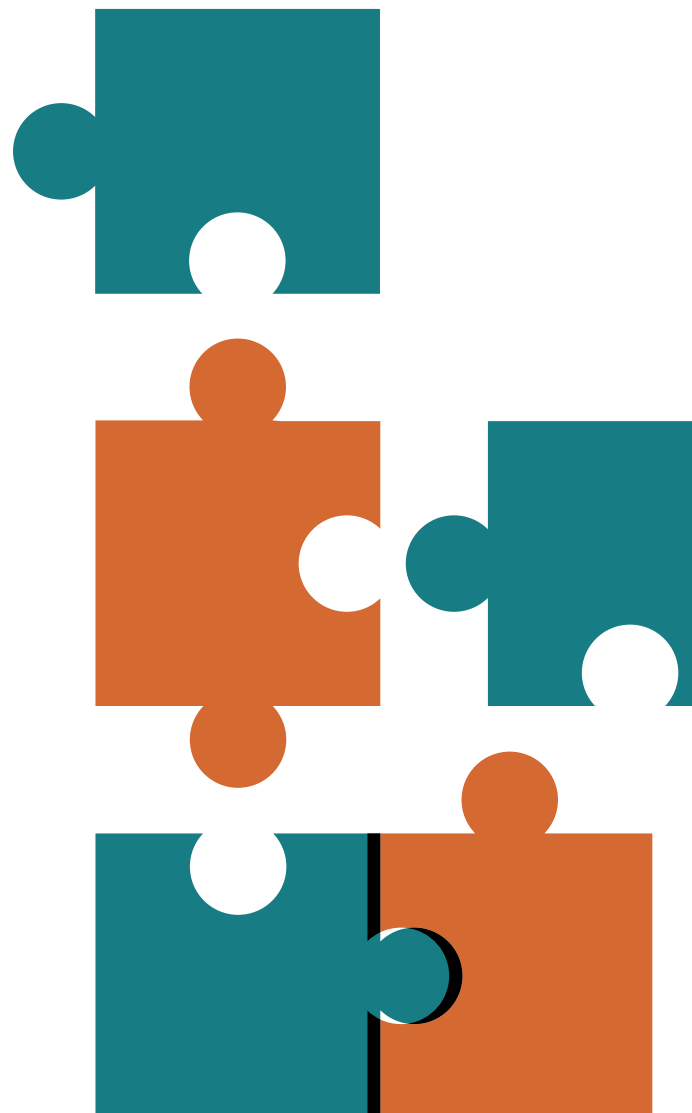
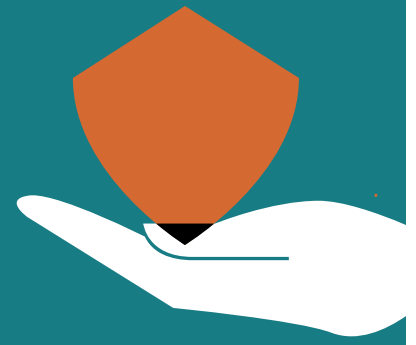


Table 2:

Building trust and establishing the SOAS-EMReF partnership



In early conversations between Emma Crewe (SOAS) and Myat The Thitsar (research director at EMReF) they assessed whether trust could be established between the two organisations. Emma reassured Myat The Thitsar that to ensure effective partnership working, it would be important to ensure that both parties would be honest and collaborative, and as much control of design, implementation and evaluation of the project would be given to EMReF as possible.

It was also agreed that SOAS would not organise visits at inconvenient times, or demand responses at short notice, and would understand that plans and budgets change when using participatory approaches. SOAS also agreed that meetings would be arranged regularly to ensure understanding of research pressures and aspirations on both sides. The research director from EMReF reassured Emma that research on parliaments would be prioritised, that they were committed to facilitating capacity development for other organisations, inclusive of all ethnic groups in Myanmar, and that they had good financial management.

These pledges and working guidelines were followed throughout the project, helping to maintain a close and trusting collaboration. Other members of SOAS and EMReF also worked according to the principles to support joint working, reflection and mutual support.

Consultation:

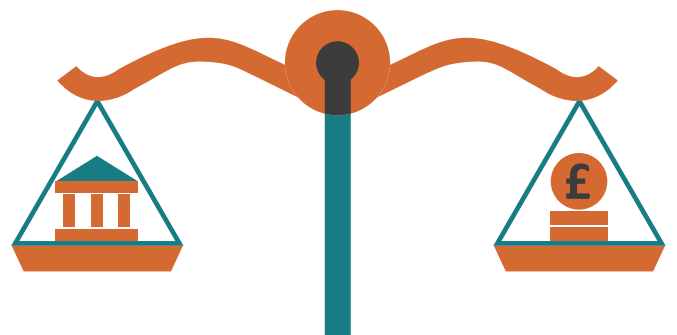
Within weeks of the start of our Deepening Democracy programme, the SOAS PI and the Programme Manager visited Myanmar to meet representatives from EMReF to discuss plans for setting up a grant-making, research and advocacy programme. SOAS visited Myitkyina in Kachin State to make it clear that working with researchers from outside the big cities, was a priority for us. A range of stakeholders were consulted about how to design the programme to be as inclusive as possible. The largest challenge was that of linguistics, with over 100 languages spoken in Myanmar (and over 80 in Ethiopia).

Launch:

In the second month, SOAS and partners had a formal launch event in London where actors discussed the plans for the project, as well as the management and governance processes of the programme with the executive team.

Detailed planning:

As part of the planning process, SOAS and partners discussed what partnership means in practice. This was discussed at an early stage because it was recognised that if talk of 'equitable partnerships' stays at an abstract and vague level then it is easily betrayed later in the relationship. Other topics of discussion included ethical, practical, financial, and intellectual issues that were important to this specific partnership. To finalise the plans, a discussion with the advisory panel was arranged a few months later. The visit to Myanmar, and the three years of previous work with the Ethiopian partner (2014-2017), made it possible to undertake detailed planning from the basis of shared knowledge and understanding.



Partnership agreement:

Despite the trust that was built between SOAS and the partners, we all recognised that it was important to get a written agreement about key details of the partnership to allow parties to hold each other to account. While conversations, and other kinds of informal communication, can avoid jargon, legalese and pompous language, the partnership agreement needs to be precise and comprehensive. It is worth discussing the purpose of such a document and making sure that the obligations and expectations of all sides are fully expressed. SOAS did this with partners (EMReF, FSS and later Setaweet), being honest about our expectations of each other. Although SOAS held control of the funding, a power imbalance that could not be wished away, we all agreed that this would not justify secrecy, issuing orders or causing inconvenience to our partners.

Culture and approach:

Decision-making about the key concepts of the programme, including who to award grants to and how to organise training, required the agreement of the whole executive committee (PI, Co-Investigators [CO-Is], and partners). For other concepts that were less significant, SOAS did not consult the whole committee. Opportunities for all participants to review documents, express dissent, and offer constructive critique, were incorporated into all stages of the project. The culture they were aiming to develop was one of honest, respectful, efficient and collegiate exchange. This became the character of the network's way of working.

Learning:

The partnerships created with grantees were different from the partnerships with those who co-created the programme (i.e. Co-Is and EMReF, FSS and later Setaweet). During the project, all participants learned from experience and adjusted the way we entered into relationships with recipients of grants.

Key lessons:

1.

Being flexible and open to difference:

Institutions, policies, and practices that are considered normal in one place may be unfamiliar in another. To avoid good ideas getting lost in translation we had to be flexible and adapt to differences. Recipients of our grants had to be affiliated with a host institution. In many ways, this was sensible. Host organisations can receive financial transfers, uphold financial standards, and can oversee all aspects of grant management and reporting. But we ran into challenges around what counts as an institution. If we had restricted ourselves to universities, then that would have limited eligibility to those with academic affiliations and we wanted to encourage not just scholars, but also artists, activists, think-tanks, advocates and people from creative enterprises.

By being open to difference, we were able to accept applications hosted under a wide range of organisations. For fledgling organisations established and run by young researchers, we provided support on developing appropriate internal management policies and procedures. For instance, where appropriate we advised on setting up institutional bank accounts that could receive foreign transfers. In the rare instances when this was not possible, and with agreement from an appropriate governance body, on a few occasions we transferred to an individual. By working in this way - being flexible, open to difference, and providing support - we helped to build institutional capacity in ways that didn't constraint organisations or force them to conform to unfamiliar and inappropriate working practices.

2.

Clarity on constraints:

SOAS was constrained by its own rules, and by those of its funders, so these agreements had to comply with certain demands. For example, we had no choice but to ask for receipts for every item of expenditure – the phrase ‘we report on actual spending’ was often invoked. But we got better at identifying which conditions could not be changed and where there was more flexibility. We tailored agreements to individual circumstances as much as possible (e.g., making advances where needed, varying arrangements about when to make transfers, advising about how to use receipt books), which made financial pressure and reporting less onerous for grant holders. It also saved money – grant holders reported to us that the inflexible approaches to getting evidence of spending would mean having to take more expensive options – car rather than bus, restaurant rather than food stall.

3.

Communication style:

We learned to develop a more personal, informal style for non-legal communication where possible. Many scholars and artists had not had a relationship with a grant-maker before and were somewhat alarmed by the legalistic language of contracts at first. We realised that while the contracts had to be precise, impersonal and formal, the rest of our communication could be more reassuring and friendly. From the start, we prioritised meeting recipients of grants in person and explaining to them the aims and ambitions of the programme (see Learning Theme 6 on communication).

The way you establish a partnership will have a profound effect on working practices for the duration of a project. Initial exchanges are important; the more time you put into thinking about how to create a respectful relationship between both the individuals and the institutions, the smoother the partnership is likely to go.

Whilst there is no guarantee as changing circumstances can intervene and a good partnership can turn sour despite the best intentions, investing in partnerships in the early stages pays off later.

3. Grant-making

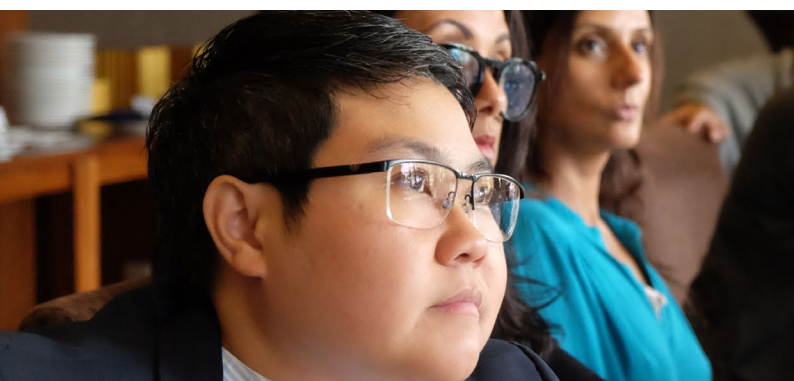
Throughout the grant-making processes, we treated each relationship as unique with different challenges and possibilities. We aimed for an approach to working with grantees that combined rigour with flexibility. Ultimately, we wanted to ensure that the best projects were supported according to their needs, and that great researchers were permitted the time and space they needed to produce results that would deepen understandings of democracy collectively through inquiry, scrutiny and debate.

The first challenge was to identify the projects that we would fund. We wanted to make sure that scholars and artists who do not normally get funding - especially women, young people, people belonging to ethnic minorities, those outside the capital and those on the periphery - had a good chance of winning grants, whilst also ensuring that our choice of projects was made on merit. To support those who do not normally get funding, SOAS and partners organised workshops across both countries to alert people to the opportunity, and to explain how to apply and what we were looking for. We advertised the workshops via Facebook, websites, Twitter and e-networks. The best promotional tool was word of mouth, especially after the early rounds of grants were awarded, eliciting a flood of enquiries and applications. We provided detailed information on our websites (in English, Amharic and Burmese) about how to apply with detailed guidance.

With the benefit of hindsight, the application form we developed was more complicated than it needed to be - for example, we asked how they would contribute to UKRI's Overseas Development Assistance goals whereas this could have been done later if awarded - so we have provided a simplified version of our form in [Appendix 1](#). As much as possible, the application form, and the assessment process as a whole, were aimed at determining what applicants were capable of, rather than setting obstacles that showed that they could not meet our expectations.

The next challenge was to assess and agree on the winning applications. We developed a detailed plan (i.e., modelling the grant-making process) with three possible choices for the panel:

- a. To agree to reject outright (reasons were communicated to the applicant by email).
- b. To request revise and resubmit at a future date (suggestions for changes were offered and a second application could be worked up in partnership with EMREF/FSS/Setaweeet, Co-Is/PI or our Programme Manager).
- c. To agree to award the grant (though conditions could be attached by the decision-making panel).





Over time we reviewed who was getting the grants and were pleased that those winning them were often new to receiving foreign funding. One grantee wrote to us from Myanmar in a survey of our impact:

“P4P funded project is not just the first funded project at xxx, it is the first proposal we have ever written. Therefore, feedback and help from the GRNPP team during the proposal development was particularly helpful... xxx has now become both locally and nationally well-known and recognized organization, providing research services for national, local and international organizations.”

GRNPP grantee

Rather than using set criteria to grade applications, our assessment panel produced written reports that considered each proposal – including the applicants and host organisation – as a whole. The emphasis here was on applicants’ potential and the potential impacts of their proposed research – what they might do in the future rather than what they had done in the past. We chose realistic projects rather than those that were over-ambitious. Asking grantees to reflect on what they might have done differently one replied:

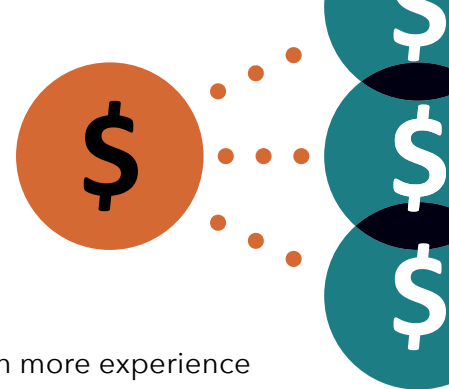
“At the start of the application the ultimate goal of any applicant is to win the grant. This makes many applicants (including me) come up with too ambitious work plans with limited resources and time frame. I should have made the objectives easily achievable and manageable that can properly match the fund and the time”

GRNPP grantee

Early in the process we realised that few women were applying for grants in Ethiopia. It was at this point that we teamed up with a feminist movement – Setaweeet – who organised a women’s scholars programme, offering coaching and support in applying for funds. Setaweeet awarded additional grants to women scholars, thereby enabling us to reach a 50:50 male: female ratio in PIs in both countries. The most serious barrier to good communication was linguistic. We have always said that grant outputs might be in any of the languages spoken in Ethiopia and Myanmar. However, our shortcomings with language meant that the application form and GRNPP reports had to be completed in English. This created extra work for people who do not speak English as a first language. Our partners at EMReF and FSS helped in tackling this problem – developing information packs in Burmese and Amharic and working closely with those needing support and advice. Once our grantees embarked on their research, EMReF, FSS, Setaweeet and SOAS provided a continual stream of advice and discussion for grantees in response to demand and need.

The PM and PI attended every grant assessment panel meeting. Occasionally one partner or Co-I was unable to attend due to illness or poor internet connection. We were usually able to reach a consensus about which grants to award within a few hours, typically assessing 15 applications at each monthly panel meeting.

4. Financial management



From the proposal design stage, it was clear that a bespoke strategy for financial management was essential to the successful implementation of our Deepening Democracy programme objectives. We appointed a full-time Finance Officer to liaise with partners, grantees and SOAS's research, human resources, and finance offices. One of the first steps taken was to formulate a Financial Management Strategy that provided a sound basis for the way we managed the grants as well as our finances. Our priority was to offer a coherent and transparent approach throughout grant budgeting, delivery and reporting, and to provide clear financial guidance for every step of the project implementation process.

Since we gave grants to researchers who did not necessarily have much experience in project management, and some were even completely new to it, we were prepared to give as much support and advice as required. We wanted to be in a position to respond to each individual and organisation and their specific circumstances in a tailored way. The countries in which we were working, were experiencing high levels of volatility, displacement and conflict which meant protecting our investments was even more complicated than it might have been in more stable places. SOAS had limited experience of grant-making, although the [Endangered Languages Document Programme](#) was a rare exception from which we took much advice.

a) Due diligence and budgeting

We could have done more in advising grantees about budget preparation and the need to make this process as consultative and as inclusive as possible.

We found that those with more experience in applying for funding from international organisations valued their labour and costs at a more realistic rate. Those with less experience tended to under-budget their time, equipment, travel and administrative costs.

A key challenge with grantees was due diligence. All too often, due diligence is treated as a tick-box exercise focussing on the existence - or lack thereof - of systems and processes thought to symbolise good governance and management. Although due diligence required us to request from our grantees a series of documents about finance and ethics in their host organisation, we recognised that statements and policies alone do not guarantee sustained capacity. The way we viewed and implemented due diligence evolved with experience, developing methods appropriate to each situation. With the increased number of grants given, we learned what kinds of thinking and activities were required to set up equitable relationships. We knew we needed to foster trust between our team and partners, as well as grantees and their host organisations, and discovered what that meant in practical detail through experimentation and dialogue. We discussed grantee research organisation practices as well as policies and sought ways to fill gaps if policies were missing. Throughout we tried to do this in ways that were meaningful but not time-consuming.



However, partnerships and successful implementations of programmes are not just dependent on the existence of sensible rules and good processes, but also on ongoing goodwill and mutual trust allowing both implementation and innovation on what has been agreed. Financial management relies on honest and reflective communication as much as research does.

Once the panel had made a decision about awarding a grant, we did not mention the amount awarded in the first letter to grantees but stated that we would like to work with them on their budget before confirming the amount. Then, the Finance Officer, Programme Manager and PI scrutinised the details of the project's budget thoroughly. We viewed budgets as thinking tools - approximations that might be subject to modification according to how the research project developed over time. Flexibility and variance are especially needed with participatory and emergent research. When grantees struggled to get costings accurate and clearly presented through lack of experience of budgeting, we advised about how to make adjustments. We explained these with care to grantees, seeking their agreement or making further modifications if necessary.



Jeepah Civil Society Development Organisation project.
Illustrations by @Min Arkar Htet



Jeepah Civil Society Development Organisation project.
Illustrations by @Min Arkar Htet

b) Financial transfers and reporting

Once the budget was agreed, we explained that budgets and financial reports can tell a story about the future or past as much as text. We asked award holders to alert us if further changes were needed, stating that we were likely to be sympathetic and understanding about the reasons for variations to budgets and plans. When grantees contacted us to say they wanted to vire (i.e., move items between budget lines), and to spend more on one activity and less on another, we did not see this as poor budgeting. As long as they gave a good reason, we were reassured that they might be adjusting their research according to what they found or uncovering new potential. We were flexible with the timing and size of transfers - larger proportions for advances were needed for small organisations or for projects that had considerable upfront costs. The vast majority of projects were completed on or just under budget and delays that occurred were caused by the Myanmar coup and conflict in Ethiopia rather than financial mismanagement.

In contrast to our flexibility with budgeting, we were strict in requiring receipts for every item of expenditure.

SOAS and our donors required this (given the choice we would have preferred to allow an element of per diem for travel and subsistence for researchers). We explained what the requirements were and for what reasons. We invested a huge amount of time advising about financial reporting - helping grantees to get their numbers accurate. When one struggled to understand a complex rule about overheads, in despair he emailed: "why can't you just trust us?" We explained that we trusted them to be honest with the funds and to produce a good standard of work. However, we had to follow the rules and explain how we had spent public funds.

Despite this, colleagues found the demands onerous - see this comment from a colleague in Myanmar regarding the reporting demands:

"The accounting expectations for small expenses was truly beyond the capacity of a small organization in a third world country without trained staff accountants or digital infrastructure available. The time and effort to become compliant was a hardship to both to the GRNPP/SOAS and to the xxx organisation. This is also fairly meaningless in terms of real management value to the funder."

GRNPP grantee

We advised grantees about how to prepare reports and provided templates to help with this. We used the financial reports to get in dialogue with the grantees about the progress of their projects, what challenges they had encountered and how they planned to mitigate new risks should they arise.

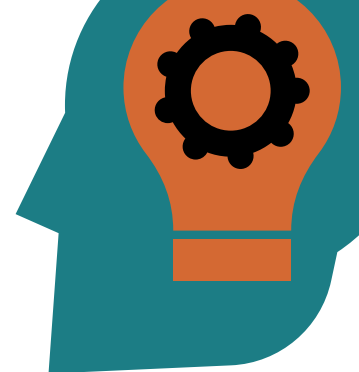
We discovered that a combination of accounting and anthropological expertise in the team was powerful in developing a capacity to support grantees in their area of greatest inexperience.

Our biggest challenge was the issue of financial transfers. The variety of hosting organisations created a diversity of problems in transferring funds. In Myanmar, we learned about the legal, political and procedural hindrances when receiving foreign transfers. To have a bank account that receives international transfers, an organisation in Myanmar needs to be registered under a government ministry - a constraint for activist organisations that do not want to be censored. The situation worsened with the 2021 coup. In Ethiopia, organisational bureaucracy played a major role in delaying the availability of funds to researchers, especially in universities, with the considerable time needed to comply with complex employment and tax law. Our approach in both places has been to be guided by the advice of national and local experts and to create bespoke processes that would allow us to make financial transfers without unnecessary risks. Grant-makers tend to overlook or underestimate the impact of such challenges.

Internally, we learned that SOAS processes are not very well set up for the transfer of large or frequent international payments. Most universities have processes in place for receiving tuition fees and paying invoices or salaries and consultancies, but frequent and irregular transfers often created a backlog of outgoing requests and delays from the viewpoint of grantees. To adjust to grant-making, SOAS has been improving communication between departments and providing clarity on inter-departmental responsibilities. We have contributed to this by encouraging information-sharing on practical issues, regular communication and reflective sessions.



5. Enhancing skills, knowledge and capacity



It is not only policymakers and academics in the Global South who denigrate the knowledge of researchers in the Global North, but people in those regions themselves - undervaluing their knowledge and especially that of women, young people, ethnic minorities and those living far from urban metropolitan areas. This is partly the product of a post-colonial world where inequalities based on political economy trickle into hierarchies of knowledge. Knowledge is then valued according to its source rather than an empirical study of its use in practice. This has the effect of silencing knowledge producers in the Global South who do not always know the richness of their lived experience, learning and analysis. Since they are often not in a position to speak up loudly in the few global spaces of dialogue that they gain access to, their knowledge becomes more deeply hidden.

As a vital part of creating more democracy within research coalitions, and also within society more broadly, steps are needed to create knowledge development pathways - making better use of existing knowledge, creating opportunities for debating and linking different bodies of knowledge, and improving scholars' capacity to communicate their plural and diverse wisdom.

To deepen democracy, and achieve more inclusive public engagement, the exchange and discussion of knowledge must be more inclusive. In both Ethiopia and Myanmar knowledge recognition and exchange has been exclusionary through a mixture of colonialism and authoritarianism. The knowledge of and about racialised ethnic minorities have been systematically and institutionally excluded and distorted by majorities at different levels. In Myanmar, EMReF has been challenging institutionalized discrimination and persecution by the Myanmar military, supported by the majority of the Bamar Buddhist population before the 2021 coup, and developing a research curriculum to expand societal understanding about the exclusionary nature of existing knowledge and its negative impact. Their approach to knowledge is entangled with a theory of being, in the sense that excluding knowledge is a form of violence against people, and has had a profound influence on the way GRNPP conceives of the role of knowledge in partnership.

Unequal arrangements in which 'international' partners draw on (at times even exploit) the linguistic skills and location-specific knowledge of local assistants remains common in development work and research projects and coalitions.



[Strengthening parliamentary representation in Ethiopia.](#)

[Illustration: @Wondesan](#)

Too often it is assumed that those that hold the funds also possess knowledge and skills that need to be passed on to 'local' partners. On meeting grantees it quickly became apparent that they were adept at using a range of research methods and had the conceptual knowledge derived from previous employment as providers of empirical data for others (often for people from the Global North) to analyse and present. If a 'lack' existed, SOAS and partners found that it was in the confidence needed to submit grant applications to international funders and the experience of doing so. The talent, skills and knowledge possessed by grantees more than justified the time spent encouraging excellent research ideas, supporting applicants to hone proposals, and working together to develop skills such as budgeting.

Throughout the programme, we have been in constant dialogue with all stakeholders regarding their needs, preferences and interests and how we might support them to make the best use of their knowledge. Grant-making has only been a part of our partnerships – each grant has been accompanied by tailored mentoring, training and negotiation. We mainly advised through ongoing mentoring and discussion but also uploaded [advice to our website](#), including themes like how to [write grant applications](#) and podcasts on how to get [published in journal articles](#). In terms of support and training, in each relationship, we would discuss what they felt that they needed and were interested in. Since it was not always immediately apparent to grantees and partners what the PI, Co-Is, the SOAS team, EMReF, Setawet, FSS and other grantees/partners could offer, even establishing the nature of support required careful research and ongoing dialogue. We realised the need to be modest about what we could offer and to consider that training provided should have practical utility beyond the confines of the Deepening Democracy programme. In our facilitating of support and training, we recognised that all learning is mutual, and everyone involved should take something away from the process.

Above all, we wanted to ensure that training events and project visits emphasised fun, creativity and the importance of multi-disciplinary collaboration.

One Ethiopian grantee wrote to us about his experience:

“With colleagues, we were awarded a large grant. What I consider the most enlightening experience was the seminar that the GRNPP team organized in Addis Ababa to promote the project. In this workshop, the leaders of the project gave a very good introduction about the project and the types of researchers which the project will be supporting. The other important new experience that I have in participating in this project is the collaboration that we developed with performance artists. The collaboration was one of its kind in Ethiopia.”

GRNPP grantee

Through conversations with partners and grantees, our focus shifted from training provision to the promotion of their [outputs, always under their own names](#). In short, the capacity to do research already exists, but it is not sufficiently recognised or nurtured. Researchers in the Global South often lack the resources, know-how and networks of contacts required to bring their work to the attention of an international audience. As well as advising on how to submit articles to prestigious peer-reviewed journals, we created opportunities for Global South scholars to travel to the UK and present their work at conferences and seminars in the UK and to provide evidence to the UK Parliament's International Development Select Committee.

While a lack of money means scholars in the Global South struggle to attend conferences and events at European universities, they are also faced with visa application regimes that seem designed to exclude people from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Overcoming these barriers is helped by tenacity and sound knowledge of the appeals process, but doing so gets harder each year.

Alongside individually tailored training, we facilitated group learning and peer-to-peer support. In both Myanmar and Ethiopia, opportunities were created to run writing workshops and hold festivals and conferences to share learning and encourage scholars to establish their networks. At the same time partnerships in Myanmar and Ethiopia have developed differently, partly because of different kinds of political turbulence and exclusion and partly because our grantees tend to be in NGOs in Myanmar and universities in Ethiopia. However, we underestimated the complexity for grantees navigating different assumptions between each other. Clashes over the methods for collecting and interpreting data between nationals were even more complicated if combined with different starting points in terms of knowledge.

For example, in the words of one grantee:

We could have warned grantees about this more explicitly in our guidance, encouraged more debate in cross-learning workshops and offered more support about working across disciplines and nationalities as well as within a range of inequalities.



“I have always been a great believer in interdisciplinary research/studies until I actually tried to do it. Interpreting methodologies or even data from two different perspectives was challenging. Mine is a more localized interpretation focused on historical context and current relevance and my Co-I is from a more global context and different disciplinary lens... As an intersectional feminist, it was very challenging for me to separate the gendered nature of people's experiences... Furthermore, managing expectations proved to be difficult when there was limited contextual understanding of Ethiopian politics. At times, the exchanges were extremely emotionally draining.”

GRNPP grantee

6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning



Like any ethnography, it involved an intensive mixed methods approach:

- Information was gathered from each grantee, and recorded in minutes, visit reports, diaries, Skype/Zoom discussions, appraisal of documents, informal conversations, SurveyMonkey questionnaires (August 2020)
- We tried to visit every grantee in both countries, some twice, though in Ethiopia this was hampered due to political turbulence and Covid-19. The varied forms of information from visits contributed to collective fieldnotes, recording our relationships with each project

We developed a flexible monitoring and evaluation 'framework', with the aims of increasing accountability, continual improvement and learning through reflection. Beyond the immediate research that resulted from each project, we wanted to gain a sense of the wider impact created through involvement in the Deepening Democracy programme including opportunities to participate in wider academic and civil-society networks. To achieve both rigour and depth, and to avoid a superficial public relations exercise, we adopted an abductive approach which drew on multiple methods to chart the development of relationships and the wider impacts of grant giving.

We viewed this approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning as ethnographic in the sense that it was founded on long-term participant-observation; relied on reflexivity, an interdisciplinary approach, a sense of history and attention to plurality; and was bounded by a community or network. More specifically, this was a process of collaborative ethnography, requiring continual discussion with grant-makers and other stakeholders, that generated a huge amount of knowledge - plural and contested, with much of it intangible and unanticipated.

By reviewing and debating evidence from these documents and notes, analysing and contesting the findings they contain, we were able to recognise a variety of perspectives, commonalities and differences (including within our own team). For our own learning, we dissected each area of the grant-making processes. We debated what we discovered about how the team worked, what we have learned, and what we could have done better. These reviews helped us develop our management practices and contributed to our academic understanding.

They also helped us work out challenges and barriers, both those we could try and surmount and those beyond our control. To give an example, one grantee Co-I visiting Ethiopia reported difficulties with their host organisation; he had difficulties with...

“The relationship with the organization who was supposed to administer the grant. Our ability to undertake research was blocked or restricted significantly by the bureaucratic rules imposed by the host organization. Another problem was the xenophobia and racism that is present against non-white researchers in the country. I was seen [as a] suspicious spy by the communities and law enforcement institutions.”

GRNPP grantee

This form of collaborative ethnography for monitoring, evaluating and learning from the programme works well for taking account of plural and diverse views rather than concluding that one programme is either a success or failure as if making a binary choice. Treating this as a complex research project itself has involved debating across our differing perspectives on the value of various aspects of the programme within the team and among stakeholders. After all, managing relationships within research coalitions that aspire to conduct inter-disciplinary research that promotes collaboration across NGOs/ universities, creative industries and policymakers always means navigating profound differences (including languages) and inequalities with flexibility.

Our methods in both research and management have demanded improvised practical judgement (as the philosopher John Dewey called it) in the causes of ethics and efficiency. Anthropology has been a good training for several of us managing this programme with its focus on context, relationships and communication. We learned that research is a vital part of managing partnerships, just as ethical and efficient management is an important aspect of research coalitions. Since an ethnographic approach to evaluation is rather unusual, and anthropology as a discipline is a marginal discipline in many countries, we under-estimated the potential interest in this within both Myanmar and Ethiopia. It would have been helpful if we had provided more detailed explanations about ethnographic evaluation (not only to scholars but also staff from finance and administration within our partner organisations and key grantee research organisations) to find out if there was support for this approach and to ensure even broader participation.



7. Communication



Understanding:

Understanding each other as people dealing with specific pressures, and maintaining regular communication, has encouraged the sort of open and honest communication required to build trust and share problems where they arise. Occasionally we struggled to understand each other but mostly communication in our network was constructive; in the words of one grantee:

“The team administering the P4P grant has been some of the most helpful people I ever worked with. I was always listened to, the troubles and problems we, as a research team, experienced were understood by the team in the UK. This was very very important.”

GRNPP grantee

This is particularly important given the politically volatile context of the countries in which we work. Regular communication with partners and grant-holders has also kept us updated on the political situations in Ethiopia and Myanmar. It allowed us to gauge the likelihood of problems arising and to determine measures to minimise risk. Establishing close relationships was crucial in allowing us to have honest conversations about difficulties and to reassure grant-holders and their host organisations that their safety was our top priority.

From dissemination to advocacy:

Throughout the programme, our focus has moved from grant-making and capacity-strengthening to advocacy. Our communications activities have reflected this. For example, our website initially functioned as a repository of information for potential applicants, including research themes, downloadable application forms, FAQs, and testimonies by successful applicants. Over time, the website’s target audience has shifted from potential grantees to international communities of practice, especially researchers, civil society organisations, donor agencies and even parliamentary select committees interested in:

- democratic stability and inclusion, and relationships between people and Parliamentarians;
- aid, development and [SDG16](#), and
- flows of resources, knowledge, and expertise between Global North and Global South.

In seeking to engage with these communities, we have reconceptualised the website as an evidence-based advocacy tool by focusing content on the high-quality research and outputs generated across 50 funded projects. This ‘evidence’ combined with our robust and continual process of reflexive evaluation and learning as a team, providing the foundation for our outreach and efforts to create meaningful dialogue and change.



A further consideration for GRNPP more widely was deciding whether to pursue an integrated or more federalised communications strategy. Much depends on identifying and responding to changing needs on the project, the multiple audiences you are dialoguing with and aiming to influence, and the country contexts in which you are working. Communication is multi-faceted, multi-scalar, and multi-directional. It requires an enormous amount of labour, and an ability to communicate at different pitches, with differing amounts of depth, and using different modalities. This is further complicated by differentials in available and desired communications platforms, and their relative 'reach'. European audiences predominantly use Twitter; while in Myanmar using Facebook does not eat into one's data so is the primary choice for sharing opportunities or news amongst stakeholders there, with Messenger being the preferred channel for staying in touch and WhatsApp providing a similar function in Ethiopia. Hence, it is vital to consider with care exactly how to communicate what kind of information to whom.

Decolonising and decentralising:



While it is possible to develop partnerships anchored in assumptions about the superior role and relevance of Global North partners, we believe it is unwise and unfair to do so. Therefore, the GRNPP aim is to be supporters and allies, and to prove our worth as such, to partners and our grantee cohort. At the same time, we leveraged our understanding of the international development and aid world, to encourage institutional changes in policy and practice that could result in more equitable relationships across the Global North and South. This dual scale of communication requires a delicate balance between nurturing people and processes, providing the space and capacity for them to fulfil their ambitions, communicating to them the mundane but vital needs around project reporting, and disseminating their insights in ways that help bring them deeper into global knowledge networks and create receptiveness to them.

Communications need to take account of hierarchies in the accessibility of funding between CSOs based in capitals, and other main cities, and those operating country-wide and in remote or hard-to-reach areas or regions. This inequality can impact on the relations between the nation-wide CSOs and local CSOs with the latter at times perceiving regular communication as a form of intervention in their local affairs or exploitation of local knowledge. The communications required for building partnerships to develop inclusive relationships need to be guided by the values of humanism and democracy and leave enough time and space for debate. In our coalition, the communication of humanist and democratic values, including by arts and creative industries, played a vital role in shifting opinion within key sections of civil society towards human rights and against authoritarianism.

8. Advocacy and influence

We encouraged the UK Parliament's International Development Select Committee (IDSC) to increase evidence-taking from experts in the Global South, increasing the number of witnesses giving oral and written evidence from Africa and Asia. We also persuaded the IDSC and UKRI to host an international conference in the UK House of Commons on Mobilising Global Voices, with members of our grantees' cohort participating in a reverse evidence session, turning the tables so that the MPs on the IDSC could experience what it feels like to be witnesses.



Table 3.

Key tips for giving evidence to UK Parliament select committees

- You can find the ongoing inquiries and calls for evidence on Parliament's website
- Keep the evidence short (usually no more than 3,000 words) and include a summary at the beginning
- Explain who you are and why they should take you and your evidence seriously
- Write in an accessible language but provide references and other sources of evidence
- Use numbered paragraphs
- Include quotable statements (so you are more likely to be referenced in inquiry reports)
- Make recommendations that the government can act on
- Committees can sometimes accept submissions late
- If you are asked to give oral evidence, study all the written and oral evidence so far
- Committee staff will give advice, so it is worth talking to them beforehand

SOAS advised potential and actual Network Plus PIs on effective grant-making and shared learning across the UK on how to work towards decolonising global research coalitions. As a grant-maker, we used our experience of modelling a new way of doing development research to encourage a change in praxis, structure, and mindset. Meanwhile, EMReF advocated the good practices of partnership developed collectively within GRNPP to their other contemporary partners and other Myanmar CSOs. After three years of partnership working with SOAS and others within the GRNPP, EMReF advocated autonomy in the implementation of projects and ethnographic evaluation to other international funders and other CSOs.

At other times, we provided useful entry points for those with local embodied and embedded knowledge and expertise to influence stakeholders and effect change. As one grantee put it: “the P4P programme is different from other projects by its public relations work which frequently publicises outputs of our work, which helps to initiate more dialogue.” In Ethiopia, noticing that workshops aimed at attracting potential grant applicants had few women attending, we generated conversations that led to a new partnership in the country which redressed the gender imbalance of our grant cohort in the country. Setawet championed innovative forms of support for female scholars and held an all-women academic conference in the context of a chronically male-dominated university sector. They have also established Ethiopia’s first feminist journal as part of our partnership.

In Myanmar, EMReF led an additional follow-on project - Reducing Inequalities in Public Engagement - with SOAS support. They established and convened an alliance of concerned citizens drawn from a range of civil society organisations and communities who are finding ways to break down the barriers that divide them and use this strength-in-unity to advocate for more inclusive democracy, as well as hold the country’s government to account in robust ways.



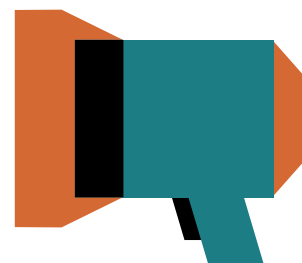
As EMReF’s Director, Myat Thet Thitsar put it:

“Sincere and simple self-reflection of one’s values in very informal ways among the members of the civil society is one way of breaking down barriers and more importantly, of advocating transformative values. Each of us is responsible for pointing to declining values in the society and responsible for correcting ourselves and strengthening humanist and democratic values”

GRNPP partner

EMReF also galvanised artists and researchers to collaborate in the pursuit of democratic inclusiveness, as well as courageously bringing often silenced topics and conversations into the public domain - for example, regarding the Rohingya, governance in the context of Covid-19, migrant lives and livelihoods at risk as a result of the pandemic, and the mid-2020 campaign ‘Don’t Call Me Kalar’ about ethnic respect. This RIPE project illustrates the dividends that a flexible, creative/artistic and iterative approach can bring to bear on project outputs, outcomes, and impacts. In the hands of EMReF, RIPE responded to emergence and entanglements in Myanmar society and politics in ways that magnify the project’s potential achievements concerning SDG16; SOAS’s role is to actively listen, learn, and support as needed, all sadly interrupted by the coup in February 2021.

9. Impact on climate



Our approach is based on the creation and maintenance of close relationships and enduring networks. Skype and Zoom are great for instant communication – but do not compare to meeting face-to-face.

However, we realise that travel comes at a price. Recognising that the costs of climate breakdown impact most heavily on those least able to bear them, we have committed ourselves to doing all we can to reduce our carbon footprint.

It's not perfect but doing nothing is no longer tenable. If we all look carefully at our choices, and the effects they are having, and report them in accountable ways, then we have the potential to make a difference. This is part of a broader approach to research ethics⁷. We aim to expand the conventional requirements for ethics, which tend to focus on consent and data protection, with other aspects that we are concerned about aspects of public harm and good, such as climate change, changing racism and intellectual property rights.

⁷For details please consult our learning paper: An Ethical Approach to Research, <https://grnpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Ethical-Approach-to-Research-GRNPP.pdf>, accessed 19 August 2021.

Table 4:

10 GRNPP climate rules



1. No (or minimal) travel to international conferences
2. Video-conferenc and meet virtually as much as possible (though importantly we recognise that not everyone has the technology)
3. Go paperless as/when possible
4. Avoid plastic products where possible
5. Actively look for ways to recycle
6. Minimise car and taxi use
7. Cut out domestic flights (buses and trains are more interesting)
8. Fewer long-haul flights - staying longer allows you to establish friendships with partners and learn about the country where they work
9. When we do fly, we will have at least three major objectives to achieve and we commit to offsetting the cost through schemes such as climatecare.org
10. Encourage others to consider the carbon costs of their research, where possible to adopt practices – such as those recommended by [Flying Less in Academia](#) – that help decarbonise research

10. Collaborating within a network



The successes within this programme have arisen out of the enthusiasm of a committed group of researchers and professionals. In addition to the Co-Is and project partners - all leaders in their field - we were lucky to recruit a talented team in SOAS.

The network is not only sustained by committed and talented individuals - it is the quality of the connections between them that enable a collective to fly, bumble along or sink. At the heart of connections is relationships.

How do you make sure relationships within a network operate both efficiently but also ethically; with dynamism and a good sense of proportion; with both flexibility but also a clear sense of direction. We have found that having an in-depth knowledge of the world you are operating in - whether that is your own research office or parliament in Ethiopia - is the first key. No one individual can attain knowledge of all the relationships within a research network; this means that knowledge is inevitably diffused across various individuals and groups.

Table 5.

What works well when networking?



These principles are likely to make it easier to create democratic processes within a programme. When working in complex networks it is easier to maintain a sense of commitment and enthusiasm if key members:

- Recognise the differences between those involved based on their identity but also their environment
- Find strategies for dealing with weak internet, and working in multiple languages, to avoid excluding key stakeholders
- Understand the politics, incentives, values and pressures that different people face and work out sensible ways to accommodate or challenge them as appropriate
- Make learning, professional development and capacity development central to everything the network does. This will improve the likelihood of attracting members, the incentives for strong ethics and high productivity, and contributing to sustainable benefits



A UK grantee points to the need to challenge inequalities in networking:

“I would like to see stronger commitments to/conditionality re the inclusion of Ethiopian researchers, women researchers, and those from disadvantaged parts of the country (e.g. lowland areas). Grantmakers should also include strong commitments to/requirements for the accessible/affordable publication and dissemination of outputs within Ethiopia – and not just at the federal level.”

GRNPP grantee

Our grantees raise important questions about the most effective ways to challenge global, national and local hierarchies in academia. While tempting to make claims about decolonising international research coalitions, we are cautious for various reasons. Scholars writing about post-colonialism have been asking these questions for decades (notably Edward Said⁸ and Valentin-Yves Mudimbe) and more recently relating neo-colonialism to other structural inequalities (e.g., based on gender). The achievements of one SOAS programme cannot extend beyond a tiny dent in complex inequalities.

Nonetheless, our impact is not insignificant. One Myanmar grantee indicates what achievements have been possible:

“The work is to be published in near future, I was personally invited by national TV to speak on the relationship between people and parliament because of this work. The total exercise was about learning so that I can do similar but better projects in the future because of lessons from that project. As a citizen and a member of a professional citizen the project opened for me opportunities to engage in the building of democracy.”

GRNPP grantee



⁸Edward Said (1978) *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books) and Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1988) *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

We share this learning on managing research coalitions - highlighting the importance of who controls research design and management; dealing with financial risk and promoting fairness in intellectual property rights; and creating equality of opportunity in evidence-giving to parliaments - in the hope that we could be part of a wider movement for deepening democracy in research coalitions. We will give the last word to one of our grantees:

“I have some experience of working with other projects (some UK based) which I enjoyed a lot. But I see the P4P grant is unique from others in many ways. First, it empowered the researchers. It is the researchers who are responsible to design, plan and lead their projects in a manner that suits their research skill and the problem they know at grass root level. In this manner when I compare with other projects I see P4P empowering researchers. Second, the P4P grant will not only give funds but also supports a lot. The whole team is supportive. They organized workshops and different events so that the researchers can learn, share and showcase their experiences. This is unique which I didn't get from other projects. Another very important and unique thing from GRNPP is its emphasis on universities located in peripheral areas. This is a point many funders don't take into consideration.”

GRNPP grantee



Appendix 1 – Application form template

Application form for research grants

Checklist for applicants

• Have you read the information pack for applicants?	YES / NO
• Have you informed your referee that they should email their references to [insert email] and that we do not accept generic reference letters?	YES / NO
• Have you included: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Application form◦ Fully itemised budget◦ CVs for all applicants◦ Statement from your host institution in support of the project, explaining their view of the proposal's objectives, methods and plan for communications, and confirmation of the budget	YES / NO YES / NO YES / NO YES / NO
• Is your application signed by the person who provided the host organisation statement?	YES / NO
• Have you signed this application yourself as well?	YES / NO
• Please email the signed copy of this application form to [insert email]	

Criteria that the grant-giving panel will consider when assessing your application

• Clear and coherence research questions and methods
• Contributing to deepening democracy
• Aligned with one of our three themes
• Taking account of gender and ethnic inequalities
• Clear roles and responsibilities for all involved

Application form

1. Name and contact details of Main Applicant (Principal Investigator) (name, job title, postal address, phone, email, nationality). (Please also attach a 2-page CV):
2. Contact details of host organisation (contact person, job title, postal address, phone, email, website):
3. Name and contact details of Co-Applicant(s) (postal address, email) (please attach maximum 2-page CVs for each including research experience):
4. Title of the project:
5. Referees' details (name, postal address, email address). One reference in support of the application should be emailed to [insert email] (reference templates are available on our website):
6. Provide a summary of the project:
7. List all co-applicants, partners and participants and explain what they will do.
8. Describe your aims and objectives (please include what is the potential of the research to contribute to the long-term deepening of democracy?):
9. What are the research questions and methodologies you will be using in your project?
10. We ask you to include at least one arts and humanities discipline and/or creative enterprise in the research project? How will you do this?
11. Tell us about the ethics, risks and safety in your research project and how you will address potential challenges.
12. Provide a timeline of activities for the duration of the project. List the different phases and the significant milestones of your research.
13. List the intended academic and non-academic outputs that will result from this project and how you will amplify your influence and impact?
14. Budget summary. Please explain your budget in summary including other sources of funding for this initiative if relevant:

Signature of Main Applicant:

Signature from the representative of the host organisation:

Data Protection

[insert the relevant data protection clause of the organisation awarding the grant]