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GLOBAL RESEARCH NETWORK ON PARLIAMENTS AND PEOPLE

International Research Coalitions: Learning to be better partners

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GCRF Global Challenges Research Fund
SOAS University of London

1. Summary of findings and recommendations

In 2017 the Global Research Network on Parliaments and People launched a new programme – Deepening Democracy – to offer grants and training to scholars and artists in Ethiopia and Myanmar to study the relationship between Parliaments and People. The programme 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 impoverished. Democracy is developing (or weakening) around the world and the vernacular forms that it should take in the future should be decided through public engagement by nationals, citizens and residents in each place. National scholars and artists have a valuable contribution to make in deepening democracy. International exchange of ideas can enrich processes but only if supportive and inclusive rather than undermining and controlling.

The response to our offer of grants to scholars in Myanmar and Ethiopia exceeded our high expectations. We were overwhelmed by both the quantity and the high-standard of substantive ideas in the research proposals that we received in the year after the grant scheme was opened in 2017. The commitment and talent of women and men scholars in these two countries was demonstrated by the quality and diversity of the outputs generated by the resulting projects over the last four years. The quality and innovation were partly achieved by multi-disciplinarity and combining with creative industries, but also by making sure that researchers had ownership and control over their own work.

The perceived low 'capacity' of researchers and in research organisations located in the Global South – especially in Sub-Saharan Africa – commonly claimed by universities and funders in Europe, is misguided. While resources for research and higher education are unevenly distributed between and within nations, talent, skill and commitment is found everywhere in equal measure. At times, people in the Global South do not value their own knowledge. 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 briefing.

Despite the cuts to Overseas Development Assistance by the UK government in March 2021, we agree with the recommendation of 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."*

Table 1. Key recommendations on partnership

- Good management is based on learning; learning in international coalitions needs management processes that are oriented towards decolonising, thinking long-term and continual collective review
- New programmes benefit from reflecting on the weaknesses of earlier initiatives. While sometimes painful to admit how much partnership can be a struggle – dealing with differences and sometimes conflicts – it can be generative if handled sensitively
- Global assumptions about hierarchies of capacity, knowledge, and skills are often part of the justification for centralising control of funding. These assumptions and structures of controls deserve to be challenged
- When establishing partnerships, think about legacy from the outset and encourage all parties to be honest about their aspirations, constraints and expectations, and tailor collective/joint agreements as far as possible
- Plan and agree arrangements for decision-making that value decentralised knowledge, recognise the autonomy of national (rather than expatriate) organisations and actors, and nurture long-term capacity development. Autonomy will give the national partners the opportunity and confidence to make the most of all of their capacities in implementing their project whereas micro-management will undermine them
- Communication in 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 extremely seriously – there are no cheap and easy solutions
- If there are political sensitivities, rely on national and local experts for advice about how to navigate them. Never take political risks on behalf of others. Don't create a large coalition project unless you have close contacts in a place already, so start with a smaller initiative first
- Invest time and energy in working out inclusive strategies – how can you make sure that women, early career researchers, ethnic minorities, BAME and people living far from the capital can access opportunities? It is often the experience of inequality and lack of confidence that holds some back from applying for grants, not incapacity. People often don't realise what they know and the more marginalised they are, the more they tend to undervalue their own knowledge. Ask the question, 'Who am I leaving out?' at every turn and keep developing strategies for being inclusive
- If your organisation is grant-making, then spend plenty of time working with 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. Keep explaining this; flexibility is an unusual approach in grant-making
- 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 always part of financial monitoring; financial micromanagement and arduous bureaucratic demands should be avoided where possible

- Tailor any 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
- Monitoring and evaluation is far 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 discipines), and attention to plurality.
- Action on climate change in international research is long overdue – we suggest 10 rules that don't diminish research quality (see 11)

2. Introducing this report

The primary audience for this report will be academics and professional staff in UK universities planning or already managing large international coalitions. Through a mixture of broad ethical principles and detailed practical guidance, we hope it will be useful even if readers would have to adapt to their own circumstances. We also hope that our learning from practice might influence policy-makers (especially grant-makers, governments and university managers) to invest more resources into opportunities and research capacity development in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South/Central America ('the Global South'). It is written by the core team engaged in day-to-day management of a large programme – Deepening Democracy[1] – within SOAS, the Director of the Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation, who ran our programme in Myanmar, and one of our grantees in Ethiopia. While our colleagues in Myanmar and Ethiopia produced stunning outputs about democracy in their countries (see www.grnpp.org), this paper focuses on the management rather than the results of the programme.

This learning emerged out of our engagement with a network of researchers and professional staff across Ethiopia, Myanmar and the UK. In the second year we developed a flexible monitoring and evaluation 'framework', while aiming for 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[2] approach which drew on multiple methods to chart the development of relationships and the wider impacts of grant giving.

Since four of us are anthropologists, we viewed this approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning as ethnographic in the sense that it builds from long-term continuous interaction and in

[1] This programme was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Global Challenges Research Fund (AH/R005435/1).
[2] For details see E. Crewe (2021) An Anthropology of Parliaments (London: Routledge), p. 198.

its attentiveness to new possibilities, unanticipated outcomes and the expressed perspectives of interlocutors. It relies on reflexivity, an interdisciplinary approach, a sense of history and attention to plurality. More specifically, this was a process of 'collaborative ethnography', requiring continual discussion with grant-makers and other stakeholders, that has generated a huge amount of knowledge – plural and contested, with much of it intangible and unanticipated.

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), and so on
- we tried to visit every grantee in both countries, some twice, though in Ethiopia this was hampered due to both political turbulence and Covid-19. The varied forms of information from visits contributed to collective fieldnotes, recording our relationships with each project

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. Some of those reflections have been written up in this paper. They also helped us work out 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 suspicious spy by the communities and law enforcement institutions."*

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. 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 [ROs}) to find out if there was support for this approach and to ensure even broader participation.

3. A short history of Global Research Network on Parliaments and People

In 2014 Emma Crewe (SOAS) and Ruth Fox (Hansard Society) designed an international project about scrutinising parliaments. The idea was to create opportunities for scholars in Bangladesh and Ethiopia to study the relationships between their parliaments, politicians and society. Political scientists dominate parliamentary studies in Africa and Asia, while research on society is the preserve of development studies scholars, so we thought, "Why not bring them together?" Over three years we worked with three senior academics (Nizam Ahmed, Zahir Ahmed and Meheret Ayenew) and five junior researchers in these two so-called 'fragile' democracies.[3] They produced some fascinating and innovative research about the interaction between parliament and civil society, but the whole process was strongly led by Emma and Ruth and resulted in individual scholars (predominantly men) producing their own superb publications. The collective action was weak.

Three years later this morphed into a new programme – Deepening Democracy – funded by a Global Challenges Research Fund 'Network Plus' grant[4], an unusual form of funding that allowed UK universities to give grants and commission researcher in the Global South. Our Network programme had a larger co-ordinating 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. Together we created a network – the Global Research Network for Parliaments and People (GRNPP) – and embarked

[3] The 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).

[4] https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/internationalfunding/the-global-challenges-research-fund/gcrf-network-plus/

on a complex mix of grant-making, training, advocacy and research, the results of which can be seen on our GRNPP and partners' websites.

This Deepening Democracy programme (2017-2020) presents a challenge to several pervasive assumptions underlying global hierarchies of knowledge. Collectively we have proved that:

- scholars in Myanmar and Ethiopia can design and undertake interdisciplinary research to an excellent standard of scholarship;
- a UK university and its partners can establish an efficient and ethical capacity for grant-making at speed;
- and respectful partnerships between Global North and South, relying on strong relationships and effective communication, are entirely possible if reflective, flexible and properly resourced.

What has this involved? GRNPP has awarded 46 grants – 22 for projects led by women and 24 by men; 40 in Myanmar/Ethiopia, 1 Bangladeshi, 3 diaspora, and 2 white Europeans; over half with Principal Investigators (PIs) under the age of 40 – ranging from £5k to £100k. Some PIs held more than one grant, so the total number of PI scholars was 33 – 17 women and 16 men, 28 of these were Myanmar or Ethiopian nationals based in their countries.

The network as a whole has held hundreds of events – from small meetings with politicians to large conferences – including a festival showcasing art for research collaborations in Yangon, for politicians, activists, scholars, and artists. Books, journal articles, newspaper stories, blogs have been published, including a monograph about Parliaments in South Asia by Nizam Ahmed, another about the Rohingya by Nasir Uddin, and an overview of the Anthropology of Parliaments by Emma Crewe, see our outputs library. Films and animations have delighted audiences, including one starring Olisalari Olibui and Tesfahun Hailu that weaves film, theatre and scholarship into one project about the representation of the Mursi. Grantees' research has been showcased on our website, at various events in Myanmar, Ethiopia and the UK, and by SOAS. Ours was one of three SOAS programmes mentioned in its ranking as 3rd as a university globally for impact on SDG16 in 2019.

Capacity-strengthening has been at the core of this programme with few opportunities missed for learning, mentoring and exchange of knowledge. Who is in control of capacity? Only individuals and organisations themselves can develop their own capacity and outsiders, especially if foreign, should not aim to drive such processes. But outsiders can assist and support, rather than hinder and undermine, whether carrying out due diligence, joint research or advocacy, the exchange of skills, knowledge and reflections have been embedded in all activity. The authors of this paper (and often our Co-Is), have been in continual dialogue with grantees and partners to review progress and ascertain further needs or requests for support. Whether delivered by ourselves, or by Co-Is, partners' staff, mentors or external experts, reciprocal learning runs through all our relationships.

In this policy briefing we reflect on what we have learned (also drawing on our own past experience of working for universities, foundations and INGOs), especially for the benefit of coalitions and grant-making programmes based at universities.

4. A sustainable legacy

When one of us asked two colleagues how Europeans 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 pieces of advice encourage commitment and accountability over time. If you are serious about being a good partner, you have to anticipate the likely impact your programme might have in the longer-term. Our guiding principle has been to ask ourselves: how can we engage in the most supportive way so that all those involved can benefit for the longest time possible? This 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."*

Thinking about legacy needs to be sown into the beginning of any coalition, not thought about half way through. It requires decisions about priorities – what do you want to leave behind? In this programme we were 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. Beyond our overall sense of priorities, as soon as we became more specific about what sustainable benefits were needed in a place, SOAS and partners tried to be responsive to grantees. 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?

You have to think about legacy from the beginning, but creating a sustainable legacy of benefits requires a flexible approach so that you can respond to changing and individual needs as the programme progresses. One Ethiopian grantee recently summarised his experience of this programme (nicknamed P4P – parliaments for people), indicating that we developed the capacity to enable learning:

> *"The whole process of my stay with P4P project was learning point for me. Especially, the constructive comments and challenges that came from the proposal reviewing team was amazing. It sharpens my understanding of exactly what a proposal is. I also learn a lot from my interaction with P4P team and my research team the benefits of cooperation and doing together in which I got as a result of engaging in the project."*

The areas of capacity development that we focused on emerged out of reflecting on our experience. As this brief makes plain, we discovered in the process of grant-making that research organisations (ROs) in Myanmar and Ethiopia had had few opportunities to design and manage their own research programmes. So, 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. As we realised that women scholars were being excluded in Ethiopia, and certain ethnic groups in Myanmar, our partners Setaweet and EMReF respectively created new mini-programmes to address these problems. We were determined that our legacy would not be to reproduce academic inequalities in each country. So, we kept asking, who is getting left out of what processes? At the same time, it is important to recognise the insurmountable barriers that can't be challenged by one coalition, whether it is the inflexibility of universities and grant-makers; norms and orthodoxies that constrain younger researchers even more than more senior ones; or a resistance to new ideas and approaches.

Aspiring for a sustainable legacy required attention to four main strategies to enable capacity development:

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).

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 foundation for us to engage in other future projects." 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 a logframe.

5. Establishing partnerships

The starting point of working with others is to get into a conversation about what kind of partnership each side is interested in and is in a position to offer. Historical, political and social contexts are a part of this. Recognising the global hierarchies – created in part by a history of unequal distribution of resources and the flawed assumptions and rationalities they travel with – can be important if not already obvious and understood between those involved. In the countries

the SOAS has been working in since 2017 (mostly Myanmar and Ethiopia) we understood that the practices within international partnership in these places have been strongly influenced by the fact that government and INGOs receive large amount of aid. All too often partnership entails processes of sub-contracting rather than co-design. Research, development projects and advocacy led by Global South researchers and activists is far rarer.

To put it bluntly, the culture of aid gives license to European visitors to behave with extraordinary arrogance. They often assume that:

- 'locals' in the Global South lack capacity, knowledge and skills
- it is acceptable to impose their own strategies, plans and research agendas (rather than investing in national designed plans), and claim the credit for others' ideas, because they are creating work for 'locals'
- corruption is assumed to be high thus justifying the need for excessive control and monitoring (even micro-management) to prevent fraud or financial mismanagement

This 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 our countries, one of us (Emma Crewe) met with the Director of Research (Myat The Thitsar, working closely with her sibling Myat Thet Thitsar) in the NGO Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) that had been recommended as a potential partner (see table 2).

Table 2. Trust and establishing the SOAS-EMReF partnership

In the conversation between Emma Crewe and Myat The Thitsar both scrutinised the other to assess whether trust could be established. Emma reassured Myat The that her idea of partnership was not to pretend we (SOAS and EMReF) were equal if we (SOAS) held the purse strings, but that we would be honest, collaborative and give our partners as much control of design, implementation and evaluation as possible.

SOAS wouldn't organise visits at inconvenient times, we wouldn't demand responses at extremely short notice, and we would understand that plans and budgets change if you take participatory approaches to research seriously. We would discuss regularly to deepen our understanding of each other's pressures, dreams and ideas. Myat The, Research Director, reassured Emma that EMReF prioritised research on parliaments and was committed to facilitating capacity development for other organisations, inclusive of all ethnic groups in Myanmar, and serious about good financial management.

We have fulfilled those sacred pledges, which the overall Director (Myat Thet Thitsar) agreed with as well, knowing that to break any of them would jeopardise what has become a close and trusting partnership and friendship. The rest of the SOAS and EMReF teams have joined this

culture of collaboration not through instruction, but by developing their own relationships through joint working, reflection, mutual support and having interesting conversations.

Within weeks of the start of our Deepening Democracy Programme, the SOAS PI and Programme Manager visited Myanmar to meet our new partner, EMReF, to discuss detailed plans for setting up a grant-making, research and advocacy programme. SOAS visited Myitkyina in Kachin State as well as Yangon to make it clear that we wanted to work with researchers outside the capital, and beyond Burma, from the outset. During this trip we consulted a range of stakeholders about how to design our programme to be as inclusive as possible. We realised that our biggest challenge was going to be linguistic. With over 100 languages spoken in Myanmar (and over 80 in Ethiopia) simply translating into and from the majority language of Burmese (and Amharic) would not necessarily help those with other first languages.

In the second month, SOAS and partners had a formal launch in London and discussed the plans, management and governance of our programme with the executive team and then with our advisory panel a few months later. The visit to Myanmar, and three years of previous work with the Ethiopian partner (2014-2017), hugely enhanced the possibility of detailed planning from the basis of some shared knowledge and understanding. Nonetheless, some of our colleagues from Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, UK, and the US had scarcely met before so plenty of time was built in for getting to know one another, especially explaining to each other our disciplinary, experiential and cultural backgrounds and assumptions.

We discussed partnership and what it means in practice at an early stage. If talk of 'equitable partnerships' stays at an abstract and vague level then it is easily betrayed later in the relationship. So, discussions covering the ethical, practical, financial, and intellectual issues that were important to this specific partnership. It is important to get written agreement about key details of partnership where possible as this then allows all 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. We did this with partners (EMReF, FSS and later Setaweet), trying to be honest about our expectations of each other. Ultimately, however, SOAS held control of the funding. This power imbalance could not be wished away, but we all agreed that this would not justify secrecy, issuing orders or causing inconvenience to our partners.

Decision-making about the programme – who to award grants to, how to organise training – required the agreement of the whole executive committee (PI, Co-Is, and partners). But with less significant decisions, SOAS did not consult the whole committee. We did promise to make sure that we would create opportunities for all participants to express dissent, scrutinise the co-ordination by SOAS and offer constructive critique, making it plain that this way of working would help not hinder our efforts. The mini culture we were aiming for was one of honest, respectful

and collegiate exchange. This became the character (or even sub-culture) of our network's way of working.

The partnerships we created with grantees were inevitably different from the partnerships with those who co-created our programme (i.e., Co-Is and EMReF, FSS and later Setaweet). With the benefit of hindsight, we realise that initially when creating grant agreements with those researchers who won awards, we were unnecessarily formal and, in some respects, inflexible. Quite quickly we learned from experience and adjusted the way we entered into relationships with recipients of grants:

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 to a host institution. In many ways, this was sensible. Host organisations are able to receive financial transfers, uphold standards of financial and probity, and are able to oversee all aspects of grant management and reporting. But what counts as an institution? If we'd 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 – including theatre groups, self-help groups, film schools, the education wing of an ethnic armed organisation, and tech companies.

   For fledgling organisations established and run by young researchers, we provided support on developing appropriate internal management policies and procedures. Where appropriate we advised on setting up institutional bank accounts that could receive foreign transfers; and in the rare instances when this wasn't possible, and with agreement from the host's trustees, 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. As examples, 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 couldn't be changed (because we were not allowed to vary it), and where we might be flexible while staying within the rules. 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. And 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 communication below).

The way you establish a partnership will have a profound effect on working practices for a long time. Those first few exchanges are vitally 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. There is no guarantee. Changing circumstances will always intervene and a good partnership can turn sour despite the best intentions, while a fractious one can become productive. But usually investing in partnerships in the early stages nearly always pays off later.

6. 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 to produce brilliant results that would deepen understandings of democracy collectively through inquiry, scrutiny and debate.

The first challenge was to select the best projects. We wanted to make sure that scholars and artists that don't normally get funding – especially women, young people, people belonging to ethnic minorities, those outside the capital and on the periphery – had a good chance of winning grants and, at the same time, we made the choice on merit. So SOAS and partners organised workshops across both countries to alert people to the opportunity but also to explain how to apply and what we were looking for. We advertised via Facebook, websites, Twitter and e-networks. The best promotional tool proved to be the oldest, 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 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 what they couldn't meet our high expectations (e.g., see the point about language below).

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 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/Setaweet, Co-Is/PI or our Programme Manager [PM]).
c. To agree to **award the grant** (though conditions could be attached by the decision-making panel).

Rather than use set criteria to grade applications, our assessment panel would produce written reports that considered each proposal – including the applicants and host organisation – as a whole. The emphasis here was on applicants' potential and the impacts of their proposed research – what they might do in the future rather than what they'd done in the past. We chose projects that were realistic rather than 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."*

The PM and PI attended every grants assessment panel meeting. Occasionally one partner or Co-I was unable to attend due to illness or failing internet, but these monthly meetings were taken seriously by all. We were usually able to reach a consensus about which grants to award with a few hours, typically assessing 15 applications at each monthly panel meeting.

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 recent 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 P4P 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."*

But we realised that very few women were applying for grants in Ethiopia. It was at this point that we teamed up with a feminist movement – Setaweet – who organised a women's scholars

programme, offering coaching and support in applying for funds. Setaweet 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've always said that grant outputs might be in any of the languages spoken in Ethiopia and Myanmar. However, our own shortcomings meant that the application form and resulting reports had to be completed in English. This obviously created extra work for people who do not speak English as a first language. Our partners at EMReF and FSS were a massive help 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, Setaweet and SOAS provided a continual stream of advice and discussion for grantees in response to demand and need.

7. Financial management

From 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 she took during the project initiation stage was to formulate a Financial Management Strategy (FMS) that provided a sound basis for the way we managed the grants as well as our own 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 of 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. We were working mainly in two countries experiencing high levels of volatility, displacement and conflict – Myanmar and Ethiopia – 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 of applying for funding from international organisations valued their own labour and costs at a far more realistic rate. Those with less experience tended to chronically under-budget their own 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 (or sometimes even indicate) sustained capacity. The way we viewed and implemented due diligence evolved with our own experience, developing methods appropriate to each situation. With the increased number of grants given, bringing different setups in organisations, we learned what kinds of new thinking and activities were required to set up equitable relationships. We knew we needed to foster trust between our team and our 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 (RO) 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 very thoroughly. We viewed budgets not as perfect predictions that must be adhered to, but rather 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.

Budgets often reveal how carefully people have designed their research plans but not always. Many award recipients had never previously held a grant so did not have much experience of budgeting. In many instances the funding requests were set far too low considering the amount of work that was being proposed. In other instances, budgets were constructed in ways that would constrain activities and make reporting difficult. After reviewing budgets, we identified adjustments (usually increases) and explained these with care to grantees, seeking their agreement or making further modifications if necessary.

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. So, when they 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 successfully completed on or just under budget and delays were caused by the Myanmar coup and conflict in Ethiopia rather than financial mismanagement.

Conversely, we were clear that we had to be completely inflexible about needing 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 meticulously exactly what the rules and 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 reach a fabulous standard of work (we had already seen their report and film), but that we had a responsibility to account for the money they had spent to strangers. We had no choice but to follow the rules – we needed to be able to tell a story down to the nearest pound about what we had done with public funds. Another colleague from Myanmar expressed frustration about 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."*

We gave advice to many grantees about how to prepare reports and provided templates to help with this. We used the financial reports as a way 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 surprisingly powerful for developing a capacity to support grantees in their area of greatest inexperience.

The issue of financial transfers was our biggest headache – one we navigated continuously. 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 don't want to be censored. The situation has become far worse since the 2021 coup. In Ethiopia organisational bureaucracy played a major role in delaying availability of funds to researchers, especially in universities, with considerable time needed to comply with complex employment and tax law. Our approach in both places has been to be guided by the advice from our local

partners 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 (not necessarily scheduled based on an institutional flow of payment schedules, such as salaries, but on project needs) 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.

8. Enhancing skills, knowledge and capacity

It is not only policy-makers and academics in Europe and the US who denigrate the knowledge of researchers in Africa, Asia, the Middle and South/Central America, but people in those regions themselves – undervaluing their own 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 own lived experience, learning and analysis. Since they do not speak up loudly in the few global spaces of dialogue that they gain access to, their knowledge becomes still 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, it is vital that the exchange and discussion of knowledge are 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 sadly common in development work and research projects and coalitions. 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 foreigners) 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 (with which they were less familiar).

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 on-going 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 PI, Co-Is, the SOAS team, EMReF, Setaweet, FSS and other grantees/partners could offer, even establishing the nature of support required careful research and on-going dialogue. We realised the need to be modest about what we could offer and to consider that training offered 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 recently about his experience:

> *"With colleagues, we were awarded a large grant. What I consider the most enlightening experience was the seminar that the P4P 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."*

Through conversations with partners and grantees our focus shifted from training provision to the promotion of their outputs (books, journal articles, working papers, policy briefings, guides, project reports, media articles, films/animation, and other creative work), always under their own names. In short, the capacity to do brilliant 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 giving advice on submitting 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 International Development Select Committee. While a lack of money means Global South scholars struggle to attend conferences and events at European Universities, they are also faced with visa applications regimes that seem designed to exclude people from Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Overcoming these barriers requires tenacity and a sound knowledge of the appeals process.

Alongside individual 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 own 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 in universities in Ethiopia. However, we under-estimated 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:

> *"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, a more localized interpretation focused on historical context and current relevant and my Co-I 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."*

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.

9. Communication

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 one of the most helpful people I ever worked. I was always listened to, the troubles and problems we, as a research team, experienced was understood by the team in the UK. This was very very important."*

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, which remain volatile and subject to intermittent communal violence and state repression. 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.

Over the course of 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 46 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.

While it is possible to develop partnerships anchored in assumptions about the superior role and relevance of Global North partners, we believe it is ultimately unwise and unfair to do so. Therefore, our 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.

A further consideration is 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.

Communications need to take account of hierarchies in 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 tends to 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 partnership with the aim of developing inclusive partnerships needs to be guided by the values of humanism and democracy and leave enough time and space for debate. In the case of our programme, communicating humanist values had a profound impact on attitudes within Myanmar civil society, which remains strongly divided when it comes to the issue of human rights. Rights violations against the Rohingya people, long persecuted by the Myanmar military, are far from recognised by all. The divisions within civil society groups were intense when State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi defended the case which accused the Myanmar military of genocide against ethnic minorities in Myanmar including Rohingya people. In our coalition communication of humanist and democratic values, including by arts and creative industries, played a vital role in shifting opinion within key sections of Myanmar civil society towards human rights and authoritarianism.

10. Advocacy and influence

We encouraged the 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 African and Asia. We also persuaded the IDSC and UKRI to host an

international conference in the 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 on-going inquiries and calls for evidence on Parliament's website
- Keep the evidence short (usually no more than 3,000 words but sometimes they ask for less) and put 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 pithy quotable statements (so you are more likely to be quoted in reports), and make recommendations that the government can act on
- Committees will often accept submissions late (if the date has passed but the inquiry is still open, then ask the committee staff whether they are still accepting evidence)
- If you are then asked to give oral evidence, study all the written and oral evidence. 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 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 with SOAS and others within the GRNPP, EMReF advocated autonomy in 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 relation 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. Setaweet championed innovative forms of support for women 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, our partners 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."*

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. RIPE 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 dexterously to emergence and entanglements in Myanmar society and politics in ways that magnify the project's potential achievements in relation to SDG16; SOAS's role is to actively listen, learn, and support as needed, all sadly interrupted by the coup in February 2021.

11. 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 nothing beats 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 significantly reduce our carbon footprint.

Table 4. 10 GRNPP climate rules

1. No (or minimal) international conferences
2. Video-conferencing and meeting as much as possible (though importantly we recognise that not everyone has the technology)
3. Going paperless as/when possible
4. We avoid plastic products where possible
5. Actively looking for ways to recycle
6. Minimising car and taxi use
7. Cutting out domestic flights (buses and trains are more interesting!)

8. Fewer long-haul flights – travelling less allows us to stay for longer and gives us more time working with our partners
9. And 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 https://climatecare.org
10. We 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.

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.

12. Collaborating within a network

The successes within this project so far arise out of the commitment and enthusiasm of an outstanding 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. But a 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 a 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 far 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. Any international coalition that aims to communicate regularly has to take account of weak internet connection as well as diverse languages and find strategies for dealing with this if they do not wish to exclude 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. It will improve the likelihood of attracting members, the incentives for strong ethics and high productivity, and contributing to sustainable benefits.

An 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). Grant makers should also include strong commitments to/requirements for the accessible/affordable publication and dissemination of outputs within Ethiopia - and not just at federal level."*

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 Said 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 huge, complex, global 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 relationship between people and parliament because of this work. The total exercise was learning so that I can better do similar projects in the future because of lesson from that project. As a citizen and as member of the professional citizen the project opened for me opportunities in engage in building of democracy."*

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 project 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 it 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 experience. 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.*

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 p4p@soas.ac.uk and that we do not accept generic reference letters? YES/NO
- Have you included:
    - Application form YES/NO
    - Fully itemised budget YES/NO
    - CVs for all applicants YES/NO
    - 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
- 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 p4p@soas.ac.uk

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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

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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** (maximum 50 words):

5. **Referees' details** (name, postal address, email address). One reference in support of the application should be emailed to p4p@soas.ac.uk (reference templates are available on our website):
6. **Please provide a summary of the project** (250 words maximum):
7. **List all co-applicants, partners and participants and explain what they will do?** (500 words maximum):
8. **Describe your aims and objectives (please include what is the potential of the research to contribute to the long-term deepening of democracy?)** (1000 words maximum):
9. **What are the research questions and methodologies you will be using in your project?** (1000 words maximum)
10. **We ask you to include at least one arts and humanities disciplines and/or creative industries in the research project? How will you do this?** (500 words maximum):
11. **Tell us about the ethics, risks and safety in your research project and how you will address potential challenges** (1500 words maximum):
12. **Provide a timeline of activities for the duration of the project** List the different phases and the significant milestones of your research (500 words maximum):
13. **List the intended academic and non-academic outputs that will result from this project and how you will amplify your influence and impact?** (750 words maximum)
14. **Budget summary.** Please explain your budget in summary including other sources of funding for this initiative if relevant (maximum 1000 words):

Signature of Main Applicant:
Signature from representative of host organisation:

Data Protection

Consent for SOAS to process personal data: SOAS is required by law to comply with the Data Protection Act, 1998 (DPA). From 25 May 2018, the act will be superseded by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). SOAS will ensure that it complies with this Act to ensure the confidentiality of any personal data it holds, in whatever medium. For more information please see: https://www.soas.ac.uk/infocomp/