



Growth, Vision, Reflection & Listening



Review and Reflections on SEAD Fellowship 2018-2021

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HELVETAS VIETNAM
LAOS
MYANMAR



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Introduction

SEAD is a programme co-created by Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council that creates space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective leadership. The programme has four main gatherings spread over a one-year period where the SEAD Fellows get together. Each gathering takes place in a different country and has a unique purpose: exchange, create, share and reflect. From its first year of implementation in 2018 to the third year in 2020, SEAD selected 10 Fellows from 10 countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.





A. About the Review

This independent review and reflection is initiated by British Council and Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH) upon entering the third year of SEAD programme, to see how their effort to support arts and cultural practitioners' individual and collective leadership through this programme aligns with its main goal in expanding the arts and culture contribution to the sustainable development in Southeast Asia.

This review and reflection by no means attempts to measure individual or organisational success or the result of the programme, but rather to capture and summarise as much as possible the learnings of the people who had been involved in it, in a hope that these learnings could be incorporated back into any future programme. As the process of this review and reflection went on throughout the year 2021 and a little over the year 2022, there were more and more layers revealed and begging to be discussed and unpacked. While this is good substance for our on-going learning, this document might be limited by its format in capturing the whole complexity of this programme.

As a context, the lens of cultural leadership as an overarching research question was initially used as an angle to frame this review and reflection. There were two key questions to be answered by this review and reflection:

- What can this programme tell us about cultural leadership in Southeast Asia?
- What can we learn/share from this programme when designing programmes or initiatives to support cultural leaders from Southeast Asia in future?

These two questions came out as a result of both Mekong Cultural Hub's and British Council's commitment to nurturing cultural leadership in Southeast Asia. They believe that cultural leadership in Southeast Asia has its own cultural specificity, whose approaches and structures of its creative practitioners can make a valuable and timely contribution to global discourses on creative and cultural leadership, despite their under-recognition both at local and international level. While this commitment persists, its realisation had turned out to be too challenging to pursue by the SEAD programme, which had undergone several iterations throughout its three years of implementation.

Over the course of three years, SEAD had undergone quite major changes in a couple of areas. Firstly, it had been moved to an online platform part way through year two due to the travel restrictions as an effect of COVID-19 pandemic. This travel restriction inevitably impacted the experiential learning element of SEAD as geographical context was missing whilst the online platform was another different kind of space and context to navigate in itself, thus the experiential learning format must be changed as well.

Secondly, as a result of reflecting on SEAD 1 implementation part way through year one, a concern about how the programme was not going far enough in its stated aim to connect the arts and culture with sustainable development was raised. This concern then led to Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council's decision to partner up with Helvetas, an independent organisation for development based in Switzerland whose Biotrade Project in Southeast Asia (Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar) provided a new container for fellows to explore and exercise integrating arts and culture with sustainable development. With this additional partnership, the site of learning shifted from creative collaboration that somewhat appeared to have more emphasis on the cultural aspect of it



in SEAD 1, to creative collaboration with a partner from the development sector, Helvetas, through *biotrade projects* in SEAD 2 and 3.



By moving the *sites* of learning, more complexities and layers had occurred as a result of not only interpersonal and inter-organisational encounters among those who have been involved in it, but also due to the intersectoral (arts, culture and society/development) collaborations. As a result, SEAD has grown off on a tangent, in which the process of individuals from different backgrounds coming together to engage in multi-sector collaborations (arts, culture, development) had become the core of the fellows' learning and unlearning processes and also grown to obscure the cultural leadership overarching theme though it persisted, albeit vaguely, throughout the three years of the programme implementation. For instance, the fellows' leadership capacity such as having a clear vision and ability to bring others to move together towards a certain direction was needed to navigate the whole multi-sectoral interactions and collaborations between arts, culture and development; this is not unique to the cultural leadership capacity.

As a result of those two major changes, SEAD implementation in year two and three had affected the journey and learning of the people who were involved in the programme, including the fellows, facilitators, as well as the organisers. Over the course of the year 2021 and the beginning of 2022, this review gathered the learnings from these people and their input informed that leadership did not appear as a strong element that would describe their whole experiences and learning throughout the years. Hence, their input has eventually informed a necessity to use a new angle to frame this review and reflection, in order to capture the richness and nuance of the collective learnings as much and as effectively as possible. Therefore, new key questions were added:

1. To what extent can programmes like SEAD contribute to sustainable development in Southeast Asia?
2. What are the key lessons for multi-sectoral collaborations (arts and culture sector working with the social & international development sectors) that have been learnt through this programme which could be shared to others seeking to contribute to the sustainable development goals through cross-sectoral partnerships?



The change of angle used in this review reflects the complexity of the SEAD programme that was revealed more and more as new learnings were gathered throughout the review and reflection process. That is also to say, this review and reflection has been a learning journey on its own.

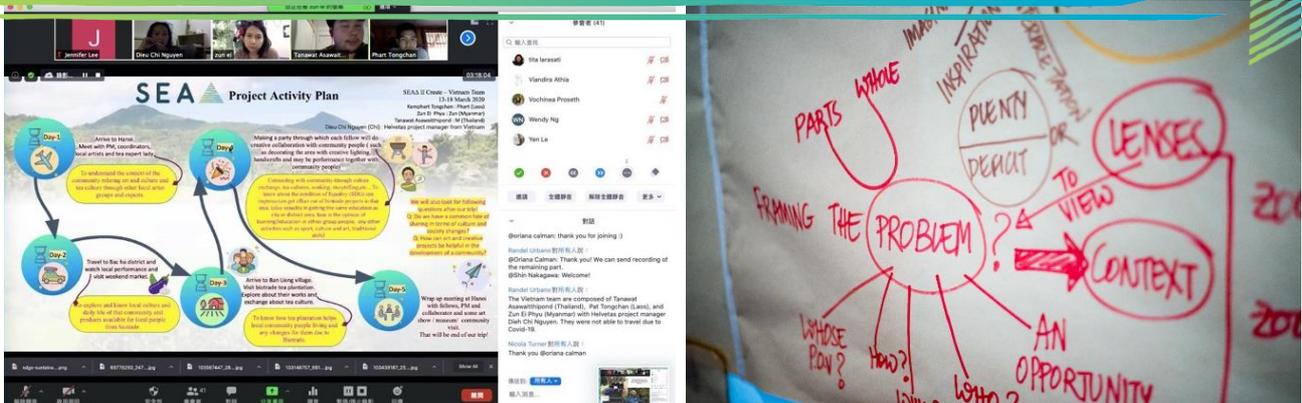
This review and reflection is structured as below, to be able to give a flow of narrative that can tie together both primary and secondary granular data points by using the two key questions as an anchor.

Methodology

This review and reflection process was conducted from the beginning of 2021 to the mid of 2022 largely by using a qualitative approach. The analysis presented throughout this document has been greatly formed based on the 15 (fifteen) interviews with a number of SEAD fellows across the three cohorts, the Creative Facilitators, the Senior Advisors, Mekong Cultural Hubs and Helvetas team members, focusing on their individual, professional and also organisational learnings. It is unfortunate that by the time that this review and reflection began, representatives of the British Council who have been involved in the SEAD programme have left the organisation, thus their input is not explicitly reflected in this document. To a lesser extent, analysis in this document is also drawn from secondary data such as SEAD application packs, Theory of Change, and other published and programme design materials, which has been very helpful to see how the programme has evolved over the years and how it impacted the people in it differently at different circumstances.

Positionality

Prior to the role as external consultant for this review and reflection, the writer was part of the early SEAD designing team. This position has been advantageous for the writer in conducting this review and reflection, as it helped the writer to trace the original starting point of the programme and find the connecting thread in the evolution of the programme throughout its three years of implementation. On the less advantageous side however, there could also be possible blind spots that would hinder the writer to make impartial analysis of the data due to the writer's closer affinity with the programme.





B. The programmatic shift in SEAD

Before answering the two Key Questions, it is important to understand the shift that happened throughout the three years of SEAD implementation to get a better idea how and why SEAD shifted programmatically, thus giving it a context to understand how the two key questions would be answered in the following chapters. Using the Application Packs as main comparison and analysis sources, this chapter elaborates how SEAD has shifted programmatically throughout its three years of implementation and areas that require re-thinking when designing any future programme.

What SEAD is

Throughout SEAD 1, 2, and 3, SEAD presents itself throughout its all three application packs as:

“ a space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective leadership. ”

By way of this explanation, SEAD could be interpreted not as a programme with specifically cultural leadership focus, but rather a programme for cultural practitioners who have possessed a certain degree of individual and collective leadership skills, to reflect on their works in relation to their contribution to sustainable development, which by doing so, their leadership capacity is improved.

If we break down this statement, there are two purposes that SEAD creates its space for:

1. to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development
2. through (to develop) their individual and collective leadership

And depending on the depth that SEAD wants to go, each point could entail:

Point (1) :

- Experiential learning from the context(s)
- Dialogue exchange among the fellows, and between the fellows and Helvetas' programme managers and the community, which then requires explorations and building understanding of :
 - the concept of sustainable development and SDGs
 - the geopolitical and socio-cultural context of Southeast Asia
 - possible ways of arts, culture, and development integration, i.e. understanding what and how socially-engaged arts are
 - own practice and others' practice (whether it is art, culture, and/or development)

Point (2):

- Assessment of the level of leadership capacity that SEAD wants to develop, assuming each fellow has different level of leadership capacity when they first join the programme
- The kind and direction of leadership SEAD wants to cultivate in their fellows that would support multi-sectoral collaboration between arts, culture, and development.



The input gathered from the fellows, organisers, facilitators, and advisors suggested that it is crucial for the future SEAD programme to understand and decide on what SEAD actually is and how deep SEAD wants to go if it decides to work within these two areas and their intersection. A very broad scope of the programme would risk mis-assessing the complexity that the programme needs to carry and navigate in its implementation. In addition, there could also be a mis-match of the expectations both from the fellows and the organisers if the scope is not made clear, narrowed, and sharpened.

The advisors suggested several questions worth to ponder in deciding the scope, depth and direction of any future SEAD programme:

- Is it a programme about Cultural Leadership (i.e. leading your own artistic/cultural practice/organisation with a social bend)?
- Is it a programme about leadership for arts and cultural practitioners who are working in the socially-engaged arts?
- Is it a programme about Community Arts?
- Is it a programme about the Arts and Culture multi-sectoral collaboration with the Development sector?

Understanding and deciding the intersection between Arts, Culture and Development with Leadership that the future SEAD aims to go, is also crucial as there is a number of permutations on the type of fellows who participated. For instance:

- artists who use sustainable/ecological friendly material in their works, but not necessarily interested in collaborating with other sectors;
- artists or cultural practitioners whose work have a lot of involvement with SDGs, but they are not necessarily interested in becoming a leader for their community;
- artists or cultural practitioners who are a community/political leader who are doing art projects on the side but mainly doing political activism and interested in empowering their community and championing their stories;
- development practitioners who are working with the community, but using the arts and culture as a tool to design the development programme and deliver the messages to the public.

The above examples are just a few examples from many other permutations of different levels of fellows' engagement with arts and culture, with community, with development, and with leadership. When a too-wide range of people whose interests and ideologies are participating in the same programme, it would risk the programme to lose its directions and focus.

Who SEAD is for

What SEAD is, did not change over the course of three years. However with the new partnership with Helvetas in year two, the focus of the programme was changed. In order to attract the right applicants who would suit the current programme focus, the kind of questions SEAD asked each year and the target of applicants stated in the application form changed each year. As a result, every year SEAD gathered up a different kind of cohort.



In this table below, the change of questions in the application form essay can be seen, which includes the persistent and additional questions for each year.

SEAA 1	SEAA 2	SEAA 3
<p>1. Please introduce us yourself, your work and why you want to join this program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Tell us about your current professional practice and some of the challenges and opportunities you're facing.b. Tell us about a project you have been part of that you think made a difference in your community that you feel proud ofc. Why are you interested in this program and what do you want to learn from it? <p>2. Please share an idea for cultural project you would like to implement at a regional platform that is related to the SDGs</p> <p><i>(aims, main activities and your ideas of how to address the main practicalities of budget and resources, main audience for your project will be from outside the arts.)</i></p>	<p>1. Please introduce us yourself, your work and why you want to join this program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Tell us about your current professional practice and some of the challenges and opportunities you're facingb. Why are you interested in the SEAA program and what do you want to learn from it? How will this leaning inform the work that you do or want to do?c. How could you participation in SEAA benefit other in your community? <p>2. Please share an idea for cultural project you would like to implement at a regional platform that is related to the SDGs.</p>	<p>1. Please introduce us yourself, your work and why you want to join this program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Tell us about your current professional practice and some of the challenges and opportunities you're facing.b. Why are you interested in the SEAA program and what do you want to learn from it? How will this learning inform the work that you do or want to do?c. How could your participation in SEAA benefit others in your community?d. What kind of opportunities & challenges do you see from working with people from outside arts and culture sector? <p>2. Please share an idea for cultural project you would like to implement at a regional platform that is related to the SDGs.</p>

There are a couple of questions that could give us information about where the fellows are at:

(1.a. - in SEAA 1,2,3):

“Tell us about your current professional practice and some of the challenges and opportunities you're facing”. However, this question does not indicate anything directly about their leadership. 🗨️



(1.b. - in SEAD 1):

“Tell us about a project you have been part of that you think made a difference in your community that you feel proud of”. However, this question was no longer asked since SEAD 2, and it was replaced by another question that indicates their aspiration to contribute to the community through their practice: “How could your participation in SEAD benefit others in your community”, which reflects the shift in focus in SEAD 2 onwards, since its partnership with Helvetas. ”

From the type of questions in that table, there is no direct question that could be used as a tool to indicate where applicants are on their level of leadership. Those questions rather imply what they aspire to be and what they would do.

SEAD 1 & 2 targeted **all** kinds of creative and cultural practitioners (from artists to administrators, managers and policymakers) who are interested in:

- Connecting their artistic and cultural work to the challenges the SDGs (sustainable development goals) present
- Creating partnerships and collaborations with peers around and with the region
- Enlarging the space for the arts and culture in Southeast Asia
- Building civil society through arts and culture
- Creating new opportunities for others to grow and develop

With additional point in SEAD 3 Application Pack:

- Working with people from outside the arts and culture sector

From the above points, the shift in the questions in the application forms and different target of applicants throughout the three years reflects the different ‘site’ of experiential learning SEAD had for each year. From arts/cultural projects as experiential learning space to engage with the development issues SEAD 1; to Biotrade projects of Helvetas in SEAD 2 & 3, with more emphasis on the multi-sectoral collaboration (working with people from outside the arts and culture sector) in SEAD 3.





SEAA Programme Design Shift

This subchapter will not go into detail and analyse the design and delivery of SEAA year, as it was within the facilitators' areas of skills and authority. Instead, this subchapter will show the shifts in programme design and delivery over the course of three years as a reflection that the programme has grown from what it was initially set out to be.

Programme Design over the years (application pack comparison)

SEAA Exchange		
SEAA 1	SEAA 2	SEAA 3
SEAA 1 Exploring the role of arts in society in Southeast Asia. Personal reflection and development.		
<p>Everybody comes to the session with an idea for a project they want to develop. At the end of a 5-day session the 10 fellows select 3 projects to take forward and divide into 3 groups to prepare for SEAA Create. During the 5 days, fellows will benefit from master classes delivered by inspiring, provocative, authentic speakers and sessions such as presentation skills, influencing, partnership working, entrepreneurial thinking and peer mentoring.</p>	<p>Over 5 days, Fellows will benefit from talks delivered by inspiring, provocative, authentic contributors and sessions such as presentation skills, influencing, partnership working, entrepreneurial thinking and peer mentoring. Towards the end of the session, Fellows break into 3 small groups, each one working with one of the Helvetas Project managers, to plan for how they will use the opportunity of SEAA Create.</p>	

SEAA Create		
SEAA 1	SEAA 2	SEAA 3
Practical project management experience and regional collaboration	Practical action and regional collaboration	
<p>During SEAA Create, each small group meets up in a country of their choice, to prepare the project they want to present during SEAA Share. This will also be a time when the small groups can exchange knowledge and experience, and learn about the context of arts in connection to the SDG's in the country they are visiting. Each group will be given a budget to manage for their trip and their project.</p>	<p>During SEAA Create, each small group meets up in a Helvetas project country, to learn more and perhaps even test some action through arts and culture that links to the community's work on biotrade. This will also be a time when the small groups can exchange knowledge and experience, and learn about the context of arts in connection to the SDG's in the country they are visiting. Each group will be given a budget to manage for their trip and their project (and their follow up for SEAA SHARE - in SEAA 3)</p>	

SEAA Share

SEAA 1	SEAA 2	SEAA 3
<p>Connecting with other sectors to explore regional issues. Presenting to a regional and international audience.</p>	<p>Connecting with other sectors to explore regional issues.</p>	
<p>SEAA Share takes place alongside a platform being organised in a sector outside of the arts connected to the SDGs. Each small group presents their project at the platform. It could be anything from an exhibition, to a panel discussion or artistic intervention. The participants will be expected to draw in an audience from outside of the arts, and develop space for the arts in other agendas. All participants will attend.</p>	<p>At SEAA SHARE, the 3 small groups will report back about their activities during Create. We encourage reports to be creative, for example an exhibition, a workshop or artistic intervention. Fellows will share to an audience of sustainable development specialists, and arts and culture contacts over a three day facilitated period.</p>	

SEAA Reflect

SEAA 1	SEAA 2	SEAA 3
<p>Personal reflection and development. Where do you want to go next?</p>		
<p>The 10 fellows come together a final time for SEAA Reflect. During this closing event there will be facilitated reflection and sharing, with sessions run by the fellows, facilitators and speakers. The group will reflect on their learning and develop future plans for individual development and collaborations. (Helvetas project managers will also attend giving insights into how arts and culture practitioners engage with development issues. - SEAA 2 & 3)</p>		

From the above table, we can see how a significant shift happened when SEAA 1 transitioned to SEAA 2, due to the new partnership with Helvetas was established in SEAA 2 and continued in SEAA 3. Although the designs of SEAA 2 & 3 look similar, the delivery of SEAA 2 & 3 were affected by COVID-19 pandemic differently. In SEAA 2, fellows still had a chance to meet in person (offline) during the Exchange and Create (visit to the Biotrade project sites) before the COVID-19 pandemic took full effect, and later moved to the online platform for Share and Reflect. This means, the fellows had a chance to build the relationships among them and with the facilitators before transitioning to an online platform. In SEAA 3, as the pandemic had taken a full effect, the whole programme was fully moved to an online platform. These external changes required facilitators to redesign and change the delivery mode quite significantly in Create as it involved international travels. New activities were added to ensure the fellows get a sense of experiential learning even if the elements of travel and meeting the people on-the-ground were non-existent.



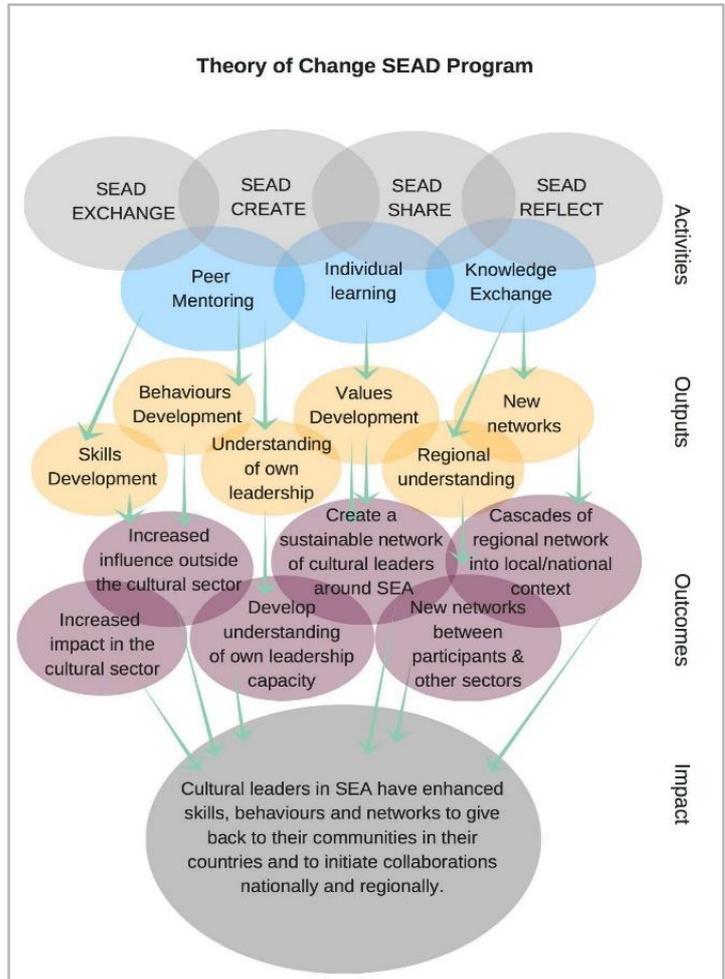
Revisiting the Theory of Change

The Theory of Change persisted throughout the years. It informed the facilitators in designing and delivering the SEAD programme accordingly each year.

However, as the internal and external situation changed and the learning from the previous year's programme was incorporated to the next one, the programme design and delivery also changed.

From the Theory of Change, the output that SEAD aimed to achieve through its four Stages of Activities (Exchange, Create, Share, Reflect), can be categorised into five main areas:

1. Skills and Behaviours Development
2. Leadership Development
3. Values Development
4. Regional understanding
5. New Network Development



This Theory of Change diagram illustrates what has been the 'skeleton' of the SEAD programme. It is important to understand how the programme has evolved vis-a-vis its Theory of Change, to see if the current Theory of Change with diverse and wide scope of output is still relevant and feasible to be applied in the future programme, to minimise the risk of mis-assessing the complexity that this programme needs to carry and navigate in its implementation.





C. Key Questions

This review and reflection aims to capture the nuanced and complex learnings of people who have been involved in the SEAD programme. Now that we have a new set of questions as a way to frame this review and reflection, all the data gathered from interviews, observations, and desk research are going to be structured and analysed in this chapter towards answering these key questions below

1. To what extent can programmes like SEAD contribute to sustainable development in Southeast Asia?
2. What are the key lessons for multi-sectoral collaborations (arts and culture sector working with the social & international development sectors) that have been learned through this programme which could be shared to others seeking to contribute to the sustainable development goals through cross-sectoral partnerships?

Question 1: SEAD - Arts, Culture and Sustainable Development

Question:

“ To what extent can programmes like SEAD contribute to sustainable development in SEA? ”

This sub-chapter attempts to answer this question by two-ways of looking:

- 1) Outside in, looking at SEAD from an objective perspective.
- 2) Inside out, looking at SEAD from the subjectivity of the people involved in it.

Through the combination of these two ways of looking, hopefully a comprehensive view to what extent a programme like SEAD contributes to the sustainable development in SEA can be explained.

- **SEAD as a Programme**

Below, different helicopter perspectives of SEAD as a programme are gathered with emphasis on the areas that either struck the most or keep revealing themselves as something prevalent throughout the programme.

From Facilitators' point of view

The facilitators were committed to *experiential learning* as the way SEAD operated throughout the years and that element persisted. It came to be the way of learning because it was designed to allow co-creation, collective working and collaboration, and to give fellows opportunities to develop confidence, resourcefulness, entrepreneurialism and other skills, as well as to grow their networks and understanding of Southeast Asia and to increase mutual learning and seed collaborations between arts and other sectors.



Though this *experiential* element did not change, there was no one template or formula that could be used to deliver SEAD because changes were constantly happening on the ground, pushing the programme design and delivery to constantly respond and adapt to them. First, it was the COVID-19 pandemic travel restriction, that in the second half of year two and fully in year three, SEAD had to move to an online platform. It was very challenging for the facilitators to keep the *experiential* element intact, as *experiential learning* was meant to be done through travel and that element was gone since SEAD is moved to an online platform. Therefore, each cohort was not experiencing SEAD the same way. Second, although new partnership with Helvetas had been added since entering SEAD 2, where fellows still had a chance to meet in person and some of them travel to the Helvetas' Biotrade sites, their role was to be seen throughout the programme implementation, i.e. how it would affect the primary theme, context or thread that put everyone together, but also what the new place and context offer to the learning. This thinking became even harder to comprehend since SEAD was moved to an online platform.

Furthermore, since SEAD 2, compensation was made to replace the *actual* experience, including the 1-1 peer mentoring component. It was the process for fellows to articulate where they stand, where they want to grow, what the gaps they find, and match them with the mentors that would suit their needs and profiles. Shared space with the fellows was also created as much as possible through *jamboard*. So the intention did not change, but the delivery did. Interactivity was an important component.

Each year, SEAD brought together 10 fellows from across Southeast Asia, Taiwan and the UK to learn from the process and shared activities where each activity was a build, gradually executed leading up to a whole journey of the programme.

EXCHANGE. Setting up the the common ground, a number of areas of concern made commonly understood for the fellows in the beginning of every SEAD:

- Mapping the geographical and cultural origins of each of the fellows. Observing and reflecting on the current changes in their region and across the globe, spotting if there are gaps occurred, etc.
- Working around *words*. Since fellows came from various linguistic backgrounds and there was no common language, sharing vocabularies and building common vocabularies, revisiting certain words and concepts to see what they mean to different people and how they could evolve as the fellows' practices evolve.
- Stimulating senses or non-verbal ways of communicating to help making the internal thinking visible to everyone.





CREATE. Creative collaboration was designed to be a container that enables fellows to incorporate SDGs by connecting their creative ideas with development context (Biotrade context since year two) and to exercise their *leadership* or even *cultural leadership* capacity. The emphasis of this kind of creative collaboration was not on its 'project' form, but rather on the process within that collaboration where the experiential learning happened, including the process to redefine the notion of *leadership* and *cultural leadership* that are specific to Southeast Asia context, since their current definitions are mainly informed by Euro-centric perspectives. Within that process also, the facilitators see the core value of a programme like SEA Δ lies. It is when the fellows can shape each other's thoughts through their art forms and/or cultural understanding, even if they are not necessarily working together in a group. It would



be a success of the SEA Δ programme if the collaborations could happen at a much larger level, where fellows could help and inform each other, shape each other in seeing the world and caring about the world. Therefore, it is important for the fellows to set a common ground as a starting point of their collective growth during and after the programme.

SHARE. Fellows were encouraged to be more articulate in presenting what they have done, what stories they have chosen, what voices they are representing or not, as well as the kind of SDGs that could be covered directly and indirectly, to regional or global audiences.

REFLECT. Various methodologies of reflecting were introduced to the fellows: from stories to anecdotes, from photos to documentation of different sorts. The reflections could be of their own values, network, future plans, where do they see themselves, how do they want to build their network, etc.

There was one value that the facilitators aspired to carry throughout SEA Δ facilitation - *inclusivity*. It is about consistently aspiring to understand where the other person is coming from, as we live in a world with multiple centres of knowledge and ways of seeing that one concept can be interpreted differently in a particular culture. For instance, being able to include somebody because English is not their first language, acknowledging different preferences of way of learning, being aware of the privilege and power (i.e. whom to include, who gets to decide whom to include), etc. SEA Δ is a place of mutual learning for all the people who were involved in it, including for the facilitators.



SEAD delivery contains so many layers and complexity. Fellows were taking a journey together and going through so many conversations and dialogues. So many layers to unpack that it took time for the fellows to reach a deeper level of mutual understanding, as context must be taken into account, and it might have been outside the scope of the SEAD programme. Perhaps it is possible to reach in a long-term, but not in a short-term. It is a hard thing to get right because fellows came to the programme to get something out of it, but they might not get it within the format into which it was delivered.

Since SEAD was delivered differently each year, the challenges were also different. For instance in SEAD 1, the fellows did not have a similar starting point because the motivations were not checked. Everybody came not only with their own expectations, but also misplaced expectations. They did not know what exactly the kind of programme SEAD was.

From Mekong Cultural Hub point of view

As co-creator and organiser, Mekong Cultural Hub realised that SEAD, despite only having ten fellows each year, is a bigger and more complex programme than other Mekong Cultural Hub programmes, because of the multiple layers of collaboration and ownership of different aspects of the programme design and delivery. In a typical MCH programme, either MCH has the authority to respond to changes fully - or that authority belongs to the agreed lead partner. Despite a lot of learning, the multiple partnerships Mekong Cultural Hub has with other organisations, advisors, facilitators, made the decision making process more complicated and not straightforward. As a result, a lot of learnings and reflections were gathered throughout the years, but they could not be incorporated effectively to make programme improvements as responsively as Mekong Cultural Hub would like to have.

From Advisors' point of view

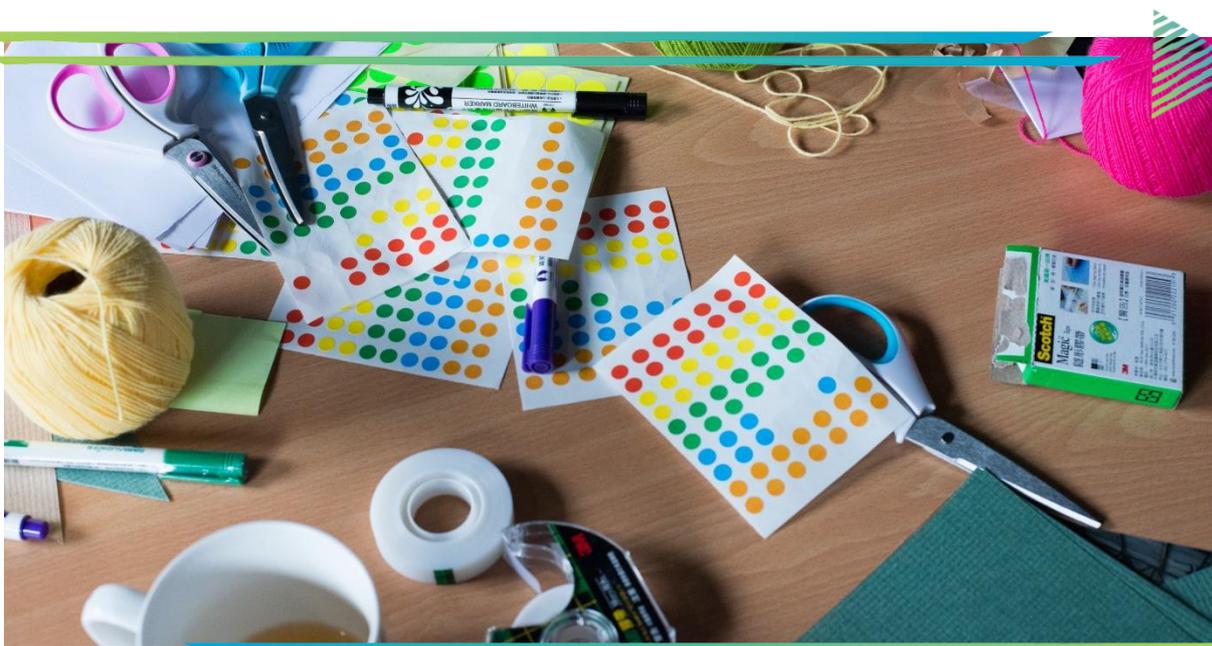
SEAD as a programme is a journey of realisation in itself. There are several areas of reflection that SEAD had brought up to their attention and worth looking deeper.

First, is the political agenda happening in the background. SEAD with its multiple partnerships in a bigger scheme might politically have had an impact in SEAD implementation, which is an interesting dynamic worth to understand. The intersecting colonial, post-colonial and geo-political dynamics of the partners involved in implementing and in funding the programme, all of whom are from outside Southeast Asia, can have influenced the programme from conception to execution. This may have impacted the Fellows' experiences and perceptions of SEAD, whether consciously or unconsciously.

This partnership configuration is interesting to observe since each organisation with their own agenda invested in the SEAD programme required them to negotiate. Whilst some organisations were already negotiating different agenda and goals, this kind of conflict and intersection had eventually trickled down to the participants themselves, manifested both in positive and negative ways. Advisors noticed there was unspoken conflict that had occurred among the fellows as one of the examples of the disenchantment on how SEAD was run with confusion on its actual purpose of the creative projects, goals and vision.



Second, is the realisation of how much capacity artists and cultural practitioners in general actually have in dealing with complex social and sustainable development issues. Integrating arts and culture in a bigger social realm requires a much deeper knowledge, understanding, and investigation of one's own arts and cultural practices before then being deconstructed in order to better navigate and integrate them in a social or community context. This criticality part is what a programme like SEAD is deemed to be lacking because it was not given enough space to be exercised. Furthermore, a programme can only provide and facilitate a space for its participants to gather and learn from each other and the results of that learning cannot always be projected, since the capacity of each person is different despite being introduced to the same learning stimulant. So now the question is, what would indicate the depth of learning that has been reached by the artists and cultural practitioners who are working with social or sustainable development issues, so that we know they have what it takes to navigate multi-sectoral complexities.



One of the suggestions to push SEAD programme towards a deeper level of criticality, if it decides to do so in the future, is for artists and cultural practitioners to spend more time in the beginning as preliminary of the programme to have more dialogues about, for instance: their positions and agendas, the power structures that affect their own thinking, and to unpack the commonly understood notions whose definitions are primarily informed by Euro-centric perspectives, before they are going to the community to do the projects. It would also be a good idea if the project is being done in each respective community by bringing those dialogues they have in the beginning into practice. Otherwise, if regional collaboration is preferred, it is important to get those preliminary dialogues to reach a common ground, common goals, or some point of negotiation that could be used as a starting point for all the participants before they really engage themselves in a project in the community. SEAD could also organise these dialogues, by having the thought provoking speakers who can trigger these dialogues to focus on areas whose importance are shared across the Southeast Asia countries and/or who also can bridge conversations between the artists and cultural practitioners with people from development sector or activists towards a more critical and reflective dialogue.



However, as much as a programme like SEAD attempts to bridge the intersectoral dialogues, the common understanding between them might not be fully achieved. From the perspective of academics and organisers we may aspire for this kind of intersectoral dialogue to happen, but not all artists and cultural practitioners want to engage in this kind of dialogue, as they have their own concerns and priorities. There are potentially a few of them who are big and deep thinkers, have social inclination and the ability to think at systemic level. These are the kind of fellows that SEAD should have more in the future programme if it decides to go on such path. Otherwise, if SEAD decides to go on the leadership path, it must be made clear to what kind of leadership it aspires to hone and how it wants to hone it, i.e. leadership for community, for arts/culture institution, or something else.

- **The journey of the people involved throughout SEAD**

In every application pack, SEAD stated what it offers for its fellows:

The programme is an opportunity to develop yourself, to develop and work with others, and to make an impact on society:

- 1) Skills and personal development: presentation skills, advocacy & influencing skills, entrepreneurial thinking, individual personal development plan and dialogue and development from mentors & inspiring speakers from different sectors
- 2) Partnership development: new professional and personal networks through collaborative working, regional travel and peer mentoring
- 3) Knowledge and values: Exposure to the diverse histories, social, economic and cultural context of Southeast Asia's through travel to four Asian countries during the one-year programme and a deeper understanding of the unique role that arts & culture can play in the Southeast Asia's sustainable development



As much as these three points above apply to fellows, they also apply to other people who were involved in it - from Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council as co-organisers, Helvetas, facilitators to advisors. Everything that had happened throughout three years of SEAD implementation affected the people who were involved in it at so many layers, especially on their knowledge and values shifts. By getting into these different subjectivities, hopefully we could get a better sense of how much space SEAD could actually provide for people in it to grow and move towards contributing more to sustainable development in Southeast Asia.



Understanding of the notion of leadership and its elements

Leadership - one of the notions that is used to describe what SEAD is, has always been there throughout its three years of implementation:

“ a space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective *leadership*. ”



However, the term *leadership* has often been talked about from the Euro-centric perspective. SEAD wanted to enrich this perspective by being committed to nurturing Southeast Asia cultural specificity on leadership out of the awareness that the approaches and structures of creative practitioners in Southeast Asia are different from those of Western approach, and are valuable to the global discourses on creative and cultural leadership. This is where it is important to first unpack and decolonise the Western concept of *leadership* itself, if we would like to understand its particularities in a region with postcolonial context such as Southeast Asia.

As we live in a world with multiple knowledge centres, any notion can mean differently in different contexts due to different associations of a certain notion in every culture, especially in the context of decolonisation. In SEAD, any notion, particularly *leadership*, got even more difficult to decolonise as it contained a mix of fellows who came from across Southeast Asia countries, plus Taiwan and the UK, for whom the only language to bind them together was English. It is still undetermined whether this mix of people have created points of difference in terms of *leadership*.

While it might be difficult to find one definition of *leadership* that would work across different cultural backgrounds that the fellows were coming from, there are some elements that are commonly attached to *leadership* across different cultures, such as:

- *Growth*: the ability to make deliberate decisions for oneself towards the direction of change and be responsible for its all consequences. For example, deciding to make a career change.
- *Vision*: having a clear direction in moving forward.
- *Reflection*: being able to see and question your own actions and share it with the people you are working or leading.
- *Listening*: the ability to hold different perspectives and take them into account in the decision making process.



The elements above are just some of many other elements of leadership that are suggested to be made clear as a set of qualities that we expect from the fellows to develop in the SEAD programme, if it decides to keep the leadership as part of its main purpose in the future. Without purposely setting some indicators of what leadership is or aspired to be within SEAD, the leadership part would risk being overwhelmed by other things along the way as it is the quality that mainly could be observed individually.

“ Just because I throw you in a joint project with a few other Asians, it doesn't make you a leader. Actually, it makes you frustrated. ”

- Janet Pillai, SEAD Advisor

Another notion that was also part of conversation around *leadership* in SEAD is *cultural leadership*. The use of the term *cultural leadership* has been problematic since designing the SEAD programme, due to its own colonial baggage. However, it was still used by the facilitators as an overarching theme throughout the SEAD journey despite many other intertwined factors.

For instance, the change of meaning in the geographical notion of Southeast Asia that is attached to either *leadership* or *culture* since SEAD was moved to an online platform. Another thing is, there is no unified definition of *cultural leadership* in Southeast Asia that could be agreed by all the fellows. They came from across different ranges of cultural and professional backgrounds not only from Southeast Asia countries, but also from Taiwan and the UK. There is no particular pattern that could be observed across the fellows who have joined SEAD, thus making it harder for them to come up with a unified understanding of *cultural leadership* that could appeal and work for all. Suggestion from the facilitators is to use '*changemaker*' instead of *cultural leadership*. It is deemed more suitable to represent the common element in SEAD across different contexts with its unifying quality, which is an eagerness to make change at any scale - big or small, although it can also be problematic in some Southeast Asian contexts.

Perhaps, instead of attempting to find the geographical (Southeast Asia) specificity of the term *leadership* or *cultural leadership*, we could attempt to find another kind of specificity that is derived from the inter-sectoral interactions that SEAD creates between arts, culture and development. The path that SEAD has forged to encourage more meaningful and contributive relationships between these sectors requires a whole different level of leadership capacity, in order to navigate the complexities along the way. For instance, being able to question or even deconstruct one's own ideology and practice could become an important skill for arts and cultural practitioners to have if they want to be fully engaged in the community, as they are prone to be too focused on their own works and how they present themselves. The same way as the ability to think bigger at systemic level and deeper to question every notion or paradigm before they engage themselves in the community, as the nature of multi-sectoral collaborations is full of complexity that silo-thinking and utilitarian ways of collaborating between sectors are no longer relevant.



Fellows' Individual Leadership

Though there is no unified definition of *leadership* or *cultural leadership* in Southeast Asia that could be agreed by all the fellows, some ideas around it were gathered during the interviews with SEAD fellows and almost everyone has different ideas about what *leadership* is. However, the input gathered below could give us insights for the future SEAD programme.

- Leadership is working from own heart towards others' heart.

“People realised when they worked with me, they really liked it. I think I have a good personality. I can maintain relationships for very long. I do what I say, and it really comes out from my heart. People gave a lot of good feedback (of the festival) and they wanted it to continue. That has been a big motivation for me to keep going. It is good to know that the community feels that the festival is important for them, so it is not only about what I think is important.”

– SEAD 1 fellow

- Leadership is being assured and confident in own capacity and value.

“Before, I would be more aggressive, I would try to promote myself and ask people “do you want to work together?”... I would try to propose. But in the past few years, I don't promote myself anymore and rather wait for the proper moment to come. Amazingly, in the past few years, I've had more stable work than before. Maybe because some people appreciate what I do, and they feel confident engaging me to work with them. So they just reach out for me. People that I've worked with would continually invite me to work with them. That means they trust me. Also I would like to be invited to more projects that are connected with critical social practice. People always ask me to do more and think deeper with my work.”

– SEAD 1 fellow

“How do we redirect our energy to a certain form of leadership is always coming back to, not to say an independent role, but more of your awareness. You are human, you have your own vocation (calling), so how can you fulfil it?”

– SEAD 1 fellow

- Leadership is the capacity to collaborate.

“I don't perceive myself as a leader, but I would love to collaborate. I am more comfortable to see myself as a collaborator, not a leader. How can we shift the idea of being a leader or being a hero to be a collaborator to build a network? That's actually what drives me. (The common idea would be), to be a leader is about putting oneself in the front, so it's either you are being led or you are a leader. But for me it's a question of how we can actually not perceive ourselves as a leader first, but more a collaborator.”

– SEAD 1 fellow



- Leadership is the capacity to subcontract things, will, and capabilities that you are not fully having or capable of doing to other people towards collective leadership.

“ I always love collaborative work and working collaboratively. It's like a feast, where everyone throws ideas on the table. For instance, my team member is good at using jargon, and being the face of the group, but when it comes to the artistic thing, it's my part [...] I know where to put myself in a group, I don't need to invest a lot of my energy towards an area that other team member is more expert of. I know where to position myself. ”

– SEAD 3 fellow

“ I got a lot of confusion in the beginning, and I thought I was the only one, but apparently everyone in my group was confused too. The interesting part is when we tried to find our way out together. I feel that everyone has got a leadership capacity already, that really helps. ”

– SEAD 3 fellow

From various answers above, there are some common threads about **leadership** that can be picked up:

1. *Embodiment of one's love and aspiration that overflows to others*: the capacity to create something on the outside is only the reflection and extension of what is on the inside of oneself.
2. *Grounded confidence*: assured of both own capacity and limitation.
3. *Capacity to navigate one's own energy and others in being of service to others*: being able to hold others accountable as much as oneself to move together towards goals that are not only in service to one selves but also for humanity/society.

SEAD in Skill, Personal and Partnership Development for the Fellows

SEAD is designed to allow co-creation, collective working and collaboration, and to give fellows opportunities to develop confidence, resourcefulness, entrepreneurialism and other skills. Skills development is one of the expected outputs of the SEAD programme. As envisioned by its Theory of Change, it is through skills development that the increase of fellows' impact in the cultural sector and influence outside of the culture could be realised. These skills include: presentation skills, advocacy & influencing skills, entrepreneurial thinking, and partnership working.

Reflecting on their experience in delivering the SEAD programme throughout the years, the facilitators suggested revisiting these skills again, particularly in *partnership working*. It is because this skill is at the core of multi-sectoral collaborations of arts, culture and development. It is worth questioning what *partnership working* really means when fellows from different countries participate together in a programme that involves partners from the development sector, as perception of each other affects the way they work together.

In this chapter, we will reflect on what fellows have gained during their participation in the SEAD programme, and see if they align with what SEAD has envisioned for their development.



Fellows' Individual Gain

The SEAD programme changed its focus and ways of delivery each year. As a result, each year it attracted a different kind of cohort that resulted in different dynamics among the fellows. Each year in their applications, fellows stated their expectations, what they wanted to learn out of SEAD. While there are common areas of expectations that apply across cohorts, there are also some other areas that are specific to some cohorts, depending on the shift in SEAD programme design and delivery every year. Below, these expectations are compared to what they actually gained through the SEAD programme to see if there are gaps and insight for improvement in the future programme.

1. Skills Development

Across all cohorts, fellows expressed their expectations of SEAD to develop their leadership skills as well as other practical skills such as presentation skills, advocacy & influencing skills, and entrepreneurial thinking. Fellows of SEAD 1 directed their need for these skills towards themselves, meaning they would like to develop these skills to create more impact from their own practices/professions. Whilst for fellows in SEAD 2 and 3, they too expected to develop leadership skills and other skills, but it was not only directed to their own practices/professions but also to navigate collaborations with other people with different backgrounds as they expected to work with Helvetas programme managers and also the community. These skills include problem-solving, interpersonal and teamwork skills, articulating and expressing opinions/perspectives in addressing important societal/developmental issues, developing own thinking, researching, and managing multi-sectoral partnerships.

In their interviews, SEAD 1 fellows did not express which skills in particular they had a chance to develop through the programme, but they rather indicated that in general **SEAD has widened their horizons**, as they were exposed to different ideas of other fellows, feedbacks, and encouragement to step outside their comfort zone (both in practice and context) by learning, sharing, and collaborating with each others and also the local people. Thus, inspired them to improve their own practices.

In contrast, skills development was not something that was expressed strongly by SEAD 2 fellows. Instead they gained a lot in other areas, such as meaningful and solid friendship and reflection of their own practices. Perhaps this is because in the middle of the programme, SEAD 2 had to unexpectedly move to the online platform as affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This change affected how they perceived the whole programme. However, fellows felt that their collaborations with people outside of the arts and culture sector such as Helvetas had helped them to look for the best alternative ways. It was not only about **being flexible** but also about **thinking of more positive and productive alternative ways** to make things happen during the programme.

“*First, we only postponed our Vietnam trip, and then we planned another thing, plan B. Then plan B was not possible, we moved to plan C. Before, I would be really disappointed after plan B and C, but through this programme, I am kept motivated. Because of these fellows and the kind of people who support us, we can make any plan, even plan Z.*”

– SEAD 2 fellow



In SEAD 3, while COVID-19 pandemic continued impacting the design and ways of delivery, which was delivered totally online, it was already expected. Hence, the fellows were more prepared for what was to come. From their interviews, SEAD 3 fellows indicated that they **learned to be more adaptable and tolerant in dealing with less-ideal situations**. They learned to get used to new online tools of working, such as using Jamboard, Miro, and so on. This situation also taught them to not force things too much as their plans could change. In a full-online platform, fellows were aware that they did not have much time to deliver their messages or conveying their message precisely, hence they got to develop skills to **be more articulate** in presenting their ideas or works in such a limited time, and also pushed them **to work harder, to concentrate more and focus their energy** on the things that really matter.

While it was a huge challenge for fellows to navigate the projects online, to communicate and coordinate not only with their team members but also with Helvetas' project managers, they successfully managed the situation and are even proud of what they have achieved. Through such difficult situations, fellows developed the skills **to have a lot of trust in others** they had never met in person, to **build relationships, to listen to other people, and to see their different strengths** and use them to put together a new project. This whole process is what fellows feel really valuable that came out from the SEAD programme.

Being able to come out successfully navigating these challenges has given them **confidence to try new and different things** that they have never done before with the people they may or may not have the chance to personally meet. Despite the challenging situations, they had to improvise and quickly adapt to the new online working tools and go through all that no matter how difficult it was. They saw it as an opportunity for artists to think creatively.

“ We had to figure out ourselves on what to do next to finalise the output for the project. Doing the project is very valuable because it requires our skills and professionalism to deal with the situation. ”

– SEAD 2 fellow

“ I had to work with my team member remotely and also our remote videographer and remote interlocutor, that's our contact person, through Helvetas. Everything is remote and you need to have a lot of trust in others that I had never met personally. We started to build this relationship together with this project.[...]I enjoyed the process even though it's kind of turbulent and full of challenges in all different kinds of meanings. But in the end, I enjoyed the process and was proud of the original outcome that we came up with. It definitely gave me some kind of confidence that I can do something like that, since I had never done a film before, not my expertise. ”

– SEAD 3 fellow

The above inputs are what fellows have shared during the interviews. While these inputs are valuable in relation to the unique situation and dynamic each cohort experienced, these might not be sufficient to describe the whole gamut of their skills development throughout their journey in the SEAD programme.



2. Network Development

The opportunity for going on an experiential journey together with other Southeast Asia arts and cultural practitioners is one of the things that attracted fellows to join SEAD. Fellows across cohorts expressed their enthusiasm on this matter in their application forms. Fellows of SEAD 1 expected that the people they meet in SEAD would expand their professional network, while fellows of SEAD 2 and 3 envisioned that the new networks would lead to mutual feelings of ASEAN community which would be an asset to encourage creative solutions for the common problems they shared across the region.

In their interviews, most of the SEAD 1 fellows expressed that they feel they benefited from networking with each other. As they went through the experience together for a year, their understanding of each other got better at both personal or professional levels. Through this network as well, fellows can know what is happening in each other's country directly from their respective fellows. It is easier to update each other's situations because they are friends already. Communication with other fellows and the mentors that continues after the programme finished is deemed as a **reliable and continuous support**.

“When I need something like guidance, connecting me to another project, support to do my work, now I know to whom I can go to get ideas about the project and guidance on contact persons. The fact that I know I can contact them anytime is also important. There is more possibility to work together even after the programme ends. It's good to keep working and connecting with people in the group.”

– SEAD 1 fellow

SEAD 2 fellows also expressed their gratitude for the networking they got from the programme. However, due to the way the SEAD 2 programme was delivered, it was moved from in-person meeting to an online platform at the last part of the programme due to COVID-19 pandemic, the regular interactions and meetings via Zoom in the programme somehow served as a support system in going through difficult times. This results in their regular networking to grow into **lasting friendships**. Some of the fellows even continued to **collaborate in a project** after the programme ended, like SEA*5, an alliance created by five alumni of SEAD 2. MCH and British Council supported the group with a follow-up project grant in 2021 to further their collaboration.

The collaboration resulted from their friendship has been really grounding, inspiring and supportive for the fellows to keep continuing their works. It has also helped the fellows in **becoming more resilient** in doing community-based works. They feel a **sense of camaraderie** to honour the traditions in the communities they work with, their perspectives, languages, as well as their actions. Hence, though a fellow might be doing individual action in their respective countries but it feels collaborative at the same time.

COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect SEAD delivery in year three - it continued to be delivered online. The same feeling towards networking in SEAD 2 fellows also shared by fellows of SEAD 3. By being together in going through challenging times, the fellows felt they gained energy and inspiration from each other. The journey that they went through together in SEAD has been **vital in providing fellows with emotional support, comfort in each other, anchor and shared values**.



“ In the beginning of the SEAD programme, we had to join CREATE. I felt like it has been a long time since COVID-19, we need inspiration, especially creative energy. The fellows are already creative, so I really missed that energy. During that hard time, we still got that energy. That’s the good thing about SEAD. ”

– SEAD 3 fellow

“ It is really what I got from SEAD – that people that I worked with in this programme, they have a very good heart, they all try their best, under different certain circumstances and challenges. To do our best and to contribute to our common goal. ”

– SEAD 3 fellow

3. Reflection of own Practice

SEAD presents itself as a space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective leadership. This means, reflection is at the heart of everything that SEAD did. All the learnings, whether they are positive or negative, are tools for growth. Experiential learning that SEAD provided acted as a space for fellows to reflect on their own practices.

Prior to joining SEAD, fellows across cohorts expressed their interest in deepening and reflecting on their works in relation to others and bigger visions. They believed that arts and culture have the potential to do more for the betterment of the society/community.

In all the interviews with SEAD 1,2,3 fellows, most fellows felt that SEAD has brought them realisation of how their works/practices contribute to a larger world. They were able to find the relevance between their own works in local and global contexts. They also realised that if they would like make a significant contribution to the society, collaboration with other sectors is inevitable and necessary even though it is very challenging to do, as they need to re-think and re-imagine ways of negotiating themselves and their practices to make an impact while dealing with the complexities that this multi-sector collaborations bring.

“ One of the things that I always have to rethink and reimagine, along the way is the idea of how you can negotiate yourself to make an impact. In engaging people to work with you, you always have to negotiate. For example, the ethics of using money from problematic sources for the work that we do. How can we negotiate these complexities? Do we actually lose our purity? Or can we expand our way of doing things? ”

– SEAD 1 fellow

Furthermore, collaboration with other fellows on a project during a programme also gave realisation for some fellows **in ways of seeing their own practices, their capacities, as well as their limitations and strengths.**



“ [Though] some of my experience in SEAD was very uncomfortable, it reminds me to really slow down. After I met and worked with the other fellows, not only I realised my limit, I also realised my strength. After SEAD, I really recognise that for my personality and capacity, I am good at making my local practice more deeply. So maybe I don't have to be in a rush to show/present my works to other people in other contexts. So now, I really shift my focus to my local practice. Maybe I don't reach out to people in other countries because it's not my thing. ”

– SEAD 1 fellow

On the other hand, there are also some of the fellows who used SEAD as a **platform to pause and relearn about themselves**, before deciding which personal and professional directions to go next, and also to contemplate and question their own motivation to keep or even start doing arts and cultural practice in the Southeast Asia region.

“ I tried to use SEAD as a platform for me to re-learn. Because everyone is in the middle of their career. So it's about time to ask yourself whether you want to stay here or you want to explore something else. There's also a part of me that thinks that it's a very interesting point to get back to my inner-self and then see what happens in my own community. Because I usually have a lot of practice with the local community in my field, but for regional or international networks, I'm still very in the beginning. That's the personal part for me. It helps me grow and see which stream I will swim. ”

– SEAD 2 fellow

“ Before joining SEAD, I quitted my job. It's been a year now. I think it's interesting to see how I put myself in those new circumstances. Suddenly I do lectures, sometimes I do production management, sometimes I go back to screening and project management. It's like a mixture of intellectual and practical works. I realise, maybe in the future, I really need to find the balance between those two. If I can find a daily job that could balance my artistic practice, it would be great. Before SEAD, the artistic part was just a 'fun' part to keep me balanced. But the daily job is the daily job. But at the same time I really like management work. The SEAD programme made me realise that it's not hard to work creatively and management-ly because I've done both during the programme. ”

– SEAD 3 fellow

Knowledge and Values Shift

Throughout three years of its implementation, SEAD has undergone many iterations which made it a journey of realisation in itself. SEAD started with an idea and then as that idea was put into practice, a lot of unexpected results were created. This does not mean that SEAD as a programme did not manage to accomplish what it aimed to do in the first place, but it just appeared that the road to get to the destination is more complex than it had imagined. This also means, every encounter is a valuable learning opportunity to reflect on and progress. In this chapter, the journey of realisation of fellows, facilitators, advisors, Mekong Cultural Hub and also Helvetas through reflections of their knowledge and values shift is shared.



Shifts in Fellows

For a year, fellows went through the SEAD journey together with people from diverse histories, social, economic and cultural contexts, both within and outside of the arts and culture sector. This made every interaction an opportunity to learn something new, whether it is about themselves, their own practices, their perspectives, their ways of doing, and so on. Here are some of their reflections of their learning journey.

“Hyperlocal is the new global”. SEAD has chosen the Southeast Asia region as its area of work and concern. Fellows from across Southeast Asia countries were invited with fellows from Taiwan and the UK whose works linked with the Southeast Asia region, with the expectation that their interactions would lead to new thinking and solutions with Southeast Asia specificities. However, in the last decade, we have witnessed a massive acceleration of the world’s online connectivity, in which local issues can be observed by anyone across the globe. No



matter how local the societal/developmental issue is, we can still see its interconnectivity with the global: geo-politics, capitalism, or global social, cultural and environmental challenges. What fellows are working in their local communities in their respective countries, or perhaps in collaboration with other Southeast Asia countries or Taiwan and the UK, will always have a global root of issues and implications. This connectivity could have positive and negative impacts. It is positive in a sense that it has encouraged many fellows to see more value in the works they do at any scale, whether it is locally or regionally. It opened up more possibilities of how arts and culture can contribute more in sustainable development through understanding our humanity that is shared across the globe. However, it could also potentially have a negative impact, in a sense that operating from a broad global perspective might hinder the exploration of perspectives and ways of working that are specific to the Southeast Asia region.

Having shared values among fellows is essential. Each year, SEAD has attracted a different kind of cohort. The mix of fellows in SEAD 1 is different from that of SEAD 2 and 3. However, observation of this review revealed that the mix of fellows in SEAD 2 and 3 are more or less similar. Perhaps the partnership with Helvetas that was established since the second year helped to shape a clearer sense of what programme SEAD is and what direction it is going, that the kind of fellows who were interested to apply apparently shared the same values. In their interviews, fellows of SEAD 2 and 3 expressed their gratitude to each other for the emotional support they received and the sense of camaraderie, which have been a great help to create collective actions during difficult times (COVID-19 pandemic) and also the Myanmar coup. Having shared the same values also helped the SEAD 2 and 3 fellows to feel seen, understood, and supported by each other. These feelings glued them together and helped them to keep committing to the programme despite going through a very challenging time to even survive, let alone work on projects together.



“It is one of the beautiful things in SEAD, to have people who can understand me. That's good energy. So that's why I decided to not withdraw. At that difficult time, I needed a community who could support me, especially emotional support. I got that support from this community. That made me understand, it's not about the project, it's about these people. I cannot focus on the project anymore. I just be there and be a part of it. These people are really important to me.”

– SEAD 3 fellow

Unfortunately, some of SEAD 1 fellows did not share this same feeling. Some of them came from too different backgrounds, ways of working and understanding of arts, culture and development that it was challenging for them to position themselves in group works during the programme. Though their experiences were not positive, they learned something from them and used the learning to get to know themselves better.

Process over Product. The experiential learning aspect of SEAD is at the core of its design. To ensure the fellows get the sense of experiential learning that would benefit them, the programme needs to be carefully crafted in its way of delivery. While this is positive, some fellows in SEAD 1 felt the programme was way too facilitated, too focused on the tasks and goals that it gave only little room for organic processes to happen. The fellows of SEAD 2 and 3 however, felt differently. They felt comfortable to keep participating in the programme, knowing that SEAD did not put emphasis on the product but the process. This shift might have been affected by the combination of the less-ideal pandemic situation, incorporation of the input and learning from the previous programme to the next programme, and also the unfolding complexity in the reality of SEAD implementation and realisation of the co-organisers' (Mekong Cultural Hub, British Council, facilitators) own capacity in carrying the programme.

Shifts in Facilitators

One of the things that has been valuable in the SEAD journey is that the learning process is not exclusively experienced by the fellows, but also by other people who have been involved in it, including the facilitators. Facilitating SEAD is a learning process in and of itself. Here are some areas of learning that Facilitators shared.

Professional and Personal Investment. The facilitators were very invested in the SEAD programme as people development is their professional passion. Many moving parts made the programme intense for the facilitators from the beginning and even more so since the COVID-19 pandemic started. They had to design not only one but four different programmes to adapt to new challenges: SEAD 1; twice at SEAD 2, had to re-design the programme when the pandemic hit; and SEAD 3). As a result, they needed to devote much more time to this programme than they anticipated, yet also learned from this process. More layers and complexities were discovered as the programme went on. For instance, when Sudebi Thakurata, one of the facilitators, had to navigate her Indian nationality despite none of the fellows being one and to go on the journey together with another facilitator, Nicola Turner, who is from the UK. All of these factors have created lots of layers and complexities in the programme, allowing her to personally grow throughout the process by constantly learning and unlearning at the same time.



Both facilitators are grateful that they managed to work together seamlessly and count on each other through difficult times in SEAD. They think that facilitation, design, and delivery are pivotal for this programme; hence, it is essential to have resonance with each other. This resonance has led them to grow their personal relationship in addition to their professional collaboration. They feel that they genuinely helped each other grow and continuously

discover new facets of each other along the way; thus, they have become better in each other's company. Among many values and visions they shared, the most important ones are about inclusivity and attention to detail at different levels. For them, the value of SEAD has gone beyond the sum of its parts. Facilitation experiences in the programme have been compelling and meaningful for them since there have been a lot of changes in people. The fact that they could keep holding on to each other from the beginning has helped them forming a strong bond.

Fellows' individual learning is more prominent. Being in constant interactions with different kinds of people who are different at geographical levels and working styles, paces, and ways to respond is something that the facilitators found both exciting and challenging at the same time. On the one hand, they had to provide individual learning moments for each fellow, and on the other hand, they had to bring these individual learnings to the collective level. However, the learning at the personal level is more prominent than at the collective level.

“These individuals might come together, there are spaces where they have to touch-base and work with each other, but it's the individual growth that is more remarkable.”

– SEAD Facilitator

For the facilitators the power of the work that has happened among the SEAD is not so much in the creative collaboration part, but rather in the process of coming together to engage in collaboration and the individuals' journey in the process. From facilitators' observation, though there was a big component of SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) in SEAD, the implementation only scratched the surface of this framework, as it did with the arts and culture.

“It's not really about SDGs, it's also really not about the arts, both are there but it's something beyond it.”

– SEAD Facilitator

SEAD facilitation challenges. Experiential learning is the most critical component in SEAD. Thus, facilitators worked to design the facilitation process from the original brief to shape the delivery in each place based on the given Theory of Change, structure and the big picture idea of what the programme might be.



The biggest external challenges of delivering the SEAD programme was the travel restriction due to the COVID-19 pandemic from the halfway of second year and all the way to the third year. Geographical context/place where people are coming and learning is gone in a certain way. In this transition process, the geographical context/place has become less important in providing a wider context. Having to constantly deal with the ever changing number of ingredients, people, and time to create 'good dishes' at the end of the day, the facilitators illustrated their work in facilitating SEAD to be similar to that the chefs in *Master Chef* show.



“Certain things are given, constraints are also given, time is given. So from those given things, how would you make a dish that makes a difference? That is what they are constantly doing.[...]Facilitation and the design of it is really important, but without considering the ever changing factors, looking at facilitation and delivery in isolation wouldn't do justice to it, because it's really not the 'what', but the 'why'. Every choice that we could and could not make, was based on something that is given or taken. Understanding those is really important to understand how things are shaped. 🌊”

– SEAD Facilitator

Factors that contributed to the SEAD complexity. SEAD is complex as it stretches so many different countries that the facilitators had to do many different things to make it work. They were trying to do sophisticated things in SEAD, but they did not always manage to do so. As a result, its sophistication had been compromised. They believed that the understanding would have been deeper if they could travel and actually be in the place. Below are some of the factors contributing to the complexity of SEAD facilitation based on the facilitators' observations.

- The awareness of colonial history, mix of nationalities and cultural backgrounds

SEAD facilitators came from two different countries: Sudebi Thakurata from India and Nicola Turner from the UK. This combination added a layer that is worth reflecting. The fact that neither of them came from Southeast Asia was something that they had to constantly consider, as their countries of origin added something to (advantage) and took away something (disadvantage) from the dynamic between them and also between them with the fellows who were majority coming from the countries in Southeast Asia region.

For instance, the awareness of the UK as a colonial power in certain places in Southeast Asia made Nicola pause her thoughts a lot. While for Sudebi, SEAD was more like a journey of cultural discovery. As an Indian who had a British educational system upbringing, mainly worked with



organisations from the US and European countries, and never travelled to any Southeast Asia country before the SEAD programme, Sudebi had been curious about what makes up the Southeast Asia identity if there is anything specific about it that differentiates it from other regional identities, i.e. African or European identities. She gave an example of how the colonial education system in India, with the English language as a medium, has made her understand Nicola better than she understood the fellows who came from Southeast Asia countries. As she got involved deeper in SEAD, she started to see more and more connections between Southeast Asia and India, such as their narratives, traditions, and belief systems and how the Asian 'identity' or understanding of Southeast Asia and India are bound together. Furthermore, working with Nicola made her understand more about the differences between India and contemporary British culture, which she was not aware of before. She felt that she had taken the similarities between India with the UK and dissimilarities with Southeast Asia for granted. This is the kind of reflection and learning from the facilitators that was made possible by them having different cultural identities from the majority of the fellows.

- Delivering experiential aspect through online platform

For the facilitators, transitioning SEAD delivery to the online platform was another added challenge to navigate in the already-complex programme. Interacting with people on an online platform such as Zoom call is never the same as interacting offline, especially if recording is involved. From their perspectives, online interaction cannot be compared with offline interaction, as the core of SEAD is to travel and create experiential learning. They required more time to re-design the programme to transfer a sense of experiential learning as much as possible from offline to online platforms. Reflecting on what they had gone through, the facilitators found it hard to claim if what they did in SEAD 1 was right or wrong because at that time, SEAD did not have an implementation partner. Similarly, in SEAD 2 and 3, if COVID-19 pandemic did not happen, things would have evolved differently.

With all these external factors, facilitators felt that what kept the programme going boils down to trust, and trust cannot be built in one day. They expressed their gratitude for the chance to spend time together in person, as for them it is absolutely key to physically meet up at some point in building a relationship. Meeting someone in person allows us to understand the complexity of the spoken language, a word can have different meanings for different people and a bigger chance of being lost in interpretation when the programme goes online.

The roles of Facilitators in building shared values and understanding. As shared in the previous subchapter, having shared values and understanding was helpful for SEAD 2 and 3 fellows to form a sense of camaraderie to go through learning journeys together toward collective actions. The facilitators contributed to the process of shared values and understanding formation by prompting some questions to ignite conversations among fellows. However, they could only share within their capacity and what fellows wanted out of them, as it was the fellows' journey, not facilitators'.

Due to the ever-changing external factors that affected the kind of dialogues they had with fellows each year, the facilitators felt wary of claiming whether or not they had a shared understanding with the fellows since the kind of dialogues had changed from the first to the last SEAD programme, though they attempted to do so. The change in dialogues happened because first, the



introduction of Helvetas, and second, when COVID-19 happened, some teams were able to travel and some were not, and then later on, the programme went online. The communication was more intense in the second year because they had a chance to meet with the fellows physically. Hence they knew the fellows better than in the third year. Another change is the new addition of 2:1 mentoring between facilitators and fellows since SEAD 2, which was eye-opening.

The kind of dialogues that the facilitators had with the fellows were varied, and it is hard to pinpoint which kind of dialogues helped to make shared understanding happen. For instance, some fellows liked to chat with the facilitators; thus, they took a sounding board role, while others would like to have a direction for their career changes, talk about personal things, etc. In this 2:1 dialogue, facilitators tried as much as possible to bring inclusion and question themselves:

'have we included everyone?', 'have we tried to understand their context?'. It was essential to have a contextual understanding of everybody while keeping the group of fellows as a collective in mind.

Extracting the learnings to the organisations. Every layer of complexity in SEAD delivery is an opportunity for valuable collective learning and it must be able to be incorporated back into the organisations (Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council) as we move forward. Below are some of the suggestions from the facilitators to better incorporate our learning back to the organisations.

- Methodology to document individual learnings and reflections and extract collective learning in an iterative way

An embedded methodology to extract our collective learning back to the organisations is needed since most of the learning goes to individuals in the organisations and some of them have left. Very often in this kind of programme, we are so focused on getting things done and could not carve a dedicated and embedded space to capture everyone's learning as they are going through the process/journey. Therefore, these individual learnings and reflections need to be documented in an iterative way. Gathering the learning only at the end of the programme would be reductive and insufficient in capturing the intangible growth of each individual.

- Need the tool to capture the narrative and intangible shift

In a programme like SEAD, main learnings are intangible and hard to quantify. For the facilitators, five parameters used in measuring the change in the fellows (from the Theory of Change) and the survey paper did not capture the narrative and the intangible shift within the fellows. This shift can actually be captured through close observation on the ground during the sessions, though there is no absolute narrative as everyone would have their own interpretation of what they are going through. Facilitators illustrated how in the REFLECT session of SEAD 1, they asked the fellows to draw a Pentagonal shape to map their networks and have discussions around it. During the discussions, exchange of perspectives happened subtly, and disharmony or tension that had been there among them could emerge and be felt, though they could not figure out what caused that tension. Individual stories and experiences are the most powerful things that our facilitators have witnessed over the years of SEAD, and there has not been enough resources to capture those stories and moments that lead to narratives. Therefore, it is crucial to find the modalities to



capture the intangible shift within the fellows for a more effective way to track the learning journey and progress, that eventually would help to better evaluate the programme.

Shifts in Advisors

Advisors' involvement had been a crucial part of SEAD from the beginning of its creation to its three-year implementation. Their different backgrounds had given them different lenses in viewing and experiencing SEAD, thus different learning. In this review, two of the advisors, Janet Pillai and Marco Kusumawijaya shared some reflections from their involvement in SEAD.

Janet Pillai

- Dynamic between the advisors

Being in conversations with the other advisors about artists in their respective countries has broadened Janet's understanding of the historical contexts of the shift toward the socially-engaged arts in the region. With the other two advisors standing on the opposite spectrum: Marco being more of an urbanist coming from an urban development world, and Luong, a performance artist coming from an art world, she positioned herself in the middle of the spectrum. She confirmed that this combination is good, as it expanded her horizon on what is currently happening in the region, how to approach the kind of leadership that bridges the Art and Life (not only development) and how to give more opportunities to potential people who are working in this area.

- Role of the advisors

At the organisational level, she learned that it is worth considering having a different mix of people in the selection committee, as different art forms affect different generations differently. Having someone who can bridge the older generation (the current advisors' generation) with the younger generation (fellows) could be useful in bridging the conversations and understanding between different generations. In addition, it could also be useful to have people who are more connected to the social/development issues, such as arts and human rights, arts and migration, refugee, underprivileged, to encourage people who are interested and work in these particular issues to join the programme.

In a current SEAD design, advisors did not have direct contact with the fellows. They only looked at the fellows' bios, portfolios, and the final outcome of the dialogue; thus, they did not really know what was happening in between at all. Fellows were selected based on the assessment made by the advisors as a selection committee with their own specific backgrounds and viewpoints, but once the fellows participated in the programme, the vibe was different as the activities were facilitated from another different perspective. Janet saw a lack of continuity, a disconnection between intention, approach, and final output that needs to be addressed for the future programme. She suggested having the programme be more streamlined to keep it coherent and continuous from the start until the end.



“ Sometimes I see a selection committee should be neutral, which means once you select the participants, you should be out of the story. But I think that kind of neutrality doesn't work, because you need a through line, throughout the programme. It is important for the curators to remain neutral to the project itself, but I think you still need people who form that through line. You need something to tie it together. You cannot select and then keep quiet for the rest of the programme, because we don't even pass on the knowledge of who we selected, why we selected, to the coordinating team. Then the coordinating team is doing whatever they are doing without knowing why we selected the particular participants. I think that's due to the way it was moduled. What I learn from it is how to suspend my own views in the selection process as part of the curatorial team. We need to provoke it but we need to suspend our personal views. ”

- Janet Pillai, SEAD Advisor

Marco Kusumawijaya

The recent global climate and political crisis have shown us a pretty bleak prediction of the future that easily made us, Marco with no exception, pessimistic even to start doing anything to prevent or at least delay it from happening. His involvement in SEAD and interaction with the fellows, among many factors, have also contributed to this pessimistic point of view. He realised how limited the artists' capacity is in dealing with complex societal or developmental issues. He is also questioning to what extent realistically artists can be contributing and be part of solutions to, for instance: the injustice issues in Myanmar or water resources in Battambang. This contemplation gave him a sense of urgency to do the best we can within our limited lifetime, and that is the crack where artists could optimally contribute.

To use this contemplation in our scale of work as arts and cultural practitioners, Marco argues that arts and culture could only do so much to 'fix' the world's problems. What we, arts and cultural practitioners could do instead, is to create more value and meaning in the life of the people in the world by: 1) demanding more justice to make the lives of the people more meaningful in this already unequal world; 2) bring more happiness to people's lives, through the works that we do.

Shifts in Mekong Cultural Hub (Mekong Cultural Hub)

There has been an abundance of learning that Mekong Cultural Hub has got in three years of organising the SEAD programme. They admitted that there was always something to learn from every element of this programme, regardless of it being positive or negative. However, some lessons came time and time again throughout Mekong Cultural Hub's journey in SEAD that they need to pay attention to:

The importance of being a learner. Being an organiser of the SEAD programme, Mekong Cultural Hub put themselves on an equal footing with the fellows as a learner themselves. Throughout the years of SEAD implementation, they observed that there has been areas that they are knowledgeable of, but there are also areas where they still need to learn from others. It has been constructive to not put themselves in the position of knowing as things in SEAD constantly evolved. Thus, Mekong Cultural Hub believes it is imperative to develop the capacity to stay in the discomfort to keep learning from the situation.



The importance of understanding the context. Understanding context means understanding that there is always subjectivity to any objective situation. Understanding it helped Mekong Cultural Hub to see more nuances in any given situation. For instance, having the awareness that everyone's *timing* is different. *The timing* here can be interpreted as a time-zone where everyone physically is in with their own life and work schedules and as personal timing where each person emotionally and mentally are at a given moment. Examples of personal timing, such as how quickly you can get into something or someone, how much you can feel comfortable opening up to and trusting someone, and how much time you need to get along with new people, are some of the things that contributed to challenges that Mekong Cultural Hub faced along the way.

Most of the activities in SEAD, such as a workshop, were designed to be done collectively. Mekong Cultural Hub felt it helps to be aware of the individual context where not everyone was showing up at their a hundred per cent. Although it is the individual responsibility to show up in the workshop, the different capacities of each person to show up did have an impact on the collective activity. For Mekong Cultural Hub, understanding it does not mean being responsible for each person's condition, but rather having a basic empathy and awareness that this will happen and not expecting everyone will be in their optimal condition even though they try. With this understanding came a realisation that all matters, at different levels and times, in different generations and stages of SEAD with different fellows, facilitators, partners, and sometimes even colleagues.

The importance of space and language.

- **Space.** Over time, it has become more critical for Mekong Cultural Hub to clarify what space, both physical and abstract, SEAD would like to provide for the fellows. The kind of space created, either by online or offline delivery, could only become apparent after the activity was done - though it was not completely clear but at least shows its complexity. Mekong Cultural Hub did not expect the complexity of the space until SEAD was implemented with all its challenges. The learning, realisation, and improvement can only be seen and done retrospectively. Mekong Cultural Hub is grateful for a big ambition they had at the beginning of the programme, even though it waned towards the end due to how complex the programme turned out. Still, it does not obscure that what SEAD has started on is worth continuing by other regions' organisations.
- **Language.** Language is the beginning of understanding and misunderstanding, and they became an important issue to address in the programme. Different people could speak the same word in the same language and interpret it differently. Many instances during SEAD implementation exhibited the confusion of how people in a conversation were not reaching a common understanding of something. In that situation, it begged questions of 1) understanding of what something is; 2) a question about understanding and being able to understand the complexity, thus discussion moved from whether the thing is complex and hard to understand to whether people are not intelligent enough to understand.



This exhibit illustrates how there are layers to everything. Understanding and thinking that people understand is kind of the highlight for Mekong Cultural Hub. It is not only about the reality that sometimes people do not understand things and there have been different interpretations of something, but also whether the different interpretations are given a proper and safe space to be discussed. Mekong Cultural Hub believes that it should not become an issue if people were given a space to discuss openly. However, it would require a certain level of understanding of each other before that discussion can happen in the first place.

“ Sometimes people are not comfortable saying that they don't understand. People are not comfortable to accept that what they are saying isn't easy for others to understand. People are not comfortable to share how they feel when it's obvious that they haven't understood, because sometimes it could be embarrassing if you don't understand or make a mistake. ”

- Mekong Cultural Hub

Only recently, Mekong Cultural Hub established a set of guidelines, “The Ways of Working,” for anyone or any organisation who is participating or involved in Mekong Cultural Hub’s programmes. However, SEAD started before Mekong Cultural Hub was fully established. Thus, these guidelines can be implemented recently and hopefully continue to be implemented in future partnerships.

The need to improve Mekong Cultural Hub's own capacity to navigate complexity. As SEAD turned out to be more complex than expected initially, a lot of learning happened, and Mekong Cultural Hub sees this as an opportunity to grow. However, it felt uncomfortable and frustrating at times. Reflecting on this, Mekong Cultural Hub feels the need to improve its capacity by using some tools and skills that can support them in navigating the complexity better and moving forward.

Bridging the gap in expectations. In a programme like SEAD, both the fellows and the programme organiser (in this case, Mekong Cultural Hub) inevitably would have expectations of each other. Fellows come to the programme with the expectation to get some travel and do some projects and benefit from them at many different levels, such as skills improvement, network, etc. And vice versa, the programme organiser expects the fellows to be fully committed and engaged in the activities and discussions that require their physical and mental and emotional presence. In this case, the challenge that Mekong Cultural Hub faced is that many of the fellows were not engaged as deeply as they wanted them to be in the programme because they found SEAD was too heavy since a lot of thinking and intentions were already put into the programme design and delivery. Finding effective ways to bridge this gap is necessary for a programme such as SEAD to give both parties optimum benefits and support in reaching common goals and visions. There was an instance of Mekong Cultural Hub bridging this gap by providing constructive feedback to the fellows. However, Mekong Cultural Hub has observed throughout these past three years that it was infrequent that these feedbacks were built back to the programme, as each person learns at a different pace. As an organiser, Mekong Cultural Hub could only encourage the fellows and leave them some space, hoping that they will learn at some point.



• **Key Learnings**

To answer the first Key Question of this review and reflection: **“To what extent can programmes like SEAD contribute to sustainable development in SEA?”**, previous chapters have elaborated the learnings that happened in SEAD are viewed from two perspectives: 1) Outside in, looking at SEAD from an objective perspective and 2) Inside out, looking at SEAD from the subjectivity of the people involved in it. The extracted key learnings from both perspectives and the aspirational actions to take for the future SEAD programme are combined in this table below to give a sense of where we are and the aspiration we have.

Area of Focus	Key Learnings/Reflection From SEAD 1,2,3	Aspirational Actions For the future SEAD
I. Intersection of Arts, Culture, Development, and Leadership	<p>Very broad and too complex. Currently SEAD works in a too-broad scope of Arts, Culture, Development and Leadership intersection, which could risk mis-assessment of its complexity and the organisers’ capacity to carry and navigate it.</p>	<p>Narrowed down to be more focused and effective. Decide on which areas of intersection that SEAD actually wants and is able to focus on, as well as how deep SEAD wants to go if it decides to work within the areas of intersection of choice. Narrowing, deepening and sharpening this programme not only could help the organiser(s) to measure the level of programme complexity and match their capacity to carry the programme, but also minimise mismatch expectations between the organiser(s) and the fellows.</p>
Level of Depth	<p>Lack of depth and criticality in looking at the arts, culture, development, and leadership intersection. There has been realisation by the Advisors of how much the actual capacity of artists and cultural practitioners have in dealing with complex social and sustainable development issues. Integrating arts and culture in a bigger social realm requires a much deeper knowledge, understanding, and investigation of own arts and cultural practices before then being deconstructed in order to better navigate and integrate them in a social or community context. This criticality part is what a programme like SEAD is deemed to be lacking because it was not given enough space to be explored and exercised.</p>	<p>Deeper level of criticality towards the arts, culture, development, and leadership intersection both in concept and practice. One of the ways is by unpacking belief systems in the relevance to Arts, Culture, and Development, as a preliminary process before jumping in to doing the actual collaborative work in the community. In addition, if Southeast Asia regional collaboration specificity is kept in the future programme, it is important for fellows to get preliminary dialogues to reach a common ground, common goals, or some point of negotiation that could be used as a starting point for all the participants before they really engage themselves in a project in the community.</p>



Area of Focus

Key Learnings/Reflection From SEAD 1,2,3

Aspirational Actions For the future SEAD

II. Leadership

Vague, not straightforward.

The notions of leadership and cultural leadership with Southeast Asia specificity in SEAD were already vague to begin with and they were not managed to be redefined throughout the programme.

Throughout this review process, fellows' Individual understanding of Leadership had been captured and common threads on leadership are drawn as follow:

- Embodiment of one's love and aspiration that overflows to others: the capacity to create something on the outside is only the reflection and extension of what is on the inside of oneself.
- Grounded confidence: assured of both own capacity and limitation.
- Capacity to navigate one's own energy and others in being of service to others: being able to hold others accountable as much as oneself to move together towards goals that are not only in service to one selves but also for humanity/society.

If the leadership element is kept, make it more visible, and delivered and exercised as its own separate module with the leadership capacity framework of choice.

It must be made clear to what kind of leadership SEAD aspires to hone and how it wants to hone it according to the focus of intersection of choice, i.e. leadership for community, for arts/ culture institution, or something else, and a set of leadership qualities that we expect from the fellows to develop in the SEAD programme is established. Without purposely setting some indicators of what leadership is or aspired to be within SEAD, the leadership part would risk being overwhelmed by other things along the way as it is the quality that could mainly be observed individually. Common threads of fellows' perspective on leadership that had been captured throughout this review process could be used to inform the kind of leadership element for the future programme.

Alternative point of view: SEAD could attempt to find a kind of specificity other than geographical that is derived from the inter-sectoral interactions that it creates between arts, culture and development. The path that SEAD has forged to encourage more meaningful and contributive relationships between these sectors requires a whole different level of leadership capacity in order to navigate the complexities along the way. For instance, being able to question or even deconstruct one's own ideology and practice could become an important skill for arts and cultural practitioners to have if they want to be fully engaged in the community, as they are prone to be too focused on their own works and how they present themselves. The same way as the ability to think bigger at systemic level and deeper to question every notion or paradigm before they engage themselves in the community, as the nature of multi-sectoral collaborations is full of complexity that the silo-thinking and utilitarian ways of collaborating between sectors are no longer relevant.





Area of Focus

Key Learnings/Reflection From SEAD 1,2,3

Aspirational Actions For the future SEAD

III. Experiential Learning

The experiential learning element was challenged and compromised due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If the experiential learning element is kept, travel and being physically in the context are non-negotiable aspects of the programme.

IV. Indicator of the Fellows' Learning Progress

The set of indicators to how much of the fellows' learning is a reflection of their contribution to the societal issues/sustainable development are not set yet.

It was a challenge to create as a programme can only provide and facilitate a space for its participants to gather and learn from each other and the results of that learning cannot always be projected, since the capacity of each person is different despite being introduced to the same learning stimulant.

SEAD was designed to allow co-creation, collective working and collaboration, and to give fellows opportunities to develop confidence, resourcefulness, entrepreneurialism and other skills. Based on this vision, measuring the fellows' growth that aligned with what SEAD was designed for can be categorised into 3 groups:

1. Skills development (Co-creation, Pitching, Strategic Thinking, Advocacy, Leading others, Influencing those: with own sector, within own sector, outside own region).
2. Network development (Networking, Peer mentoring).
3. Reflection of own Practice (Vision Formation, Thinking Entrepreneurially, Incorporating the SDG in own work).

While this set of indicators had been useful as a starting point, it is less relevant to be used in the context of arts and cultural' contribution to the societal issues/sustainable development, as it still measure the growth in a 'silo' way/fellows-centred, meaning measuring from only one aspect of progress.

What we mean by 'contribution of arts and culture to the sustainability/sustainable development' is clearly defined and shared with all the fellows, partners, and contributors of SEAD to reach common understanding.

Relevant and integrated sets of indicators both short and long term to gauge the breadth and depth of the fellows' learning in the context of arts and culture' contribution to the societal issues/sustainable development are established.





Area of Focus	Key Learnings/Reflection From SEAΔ 1,2,3	Aspirational Actions For the future SEAΔ
V. Learning Mechanism within the Organisation(s)	<p>Decision making process and mechanism to improve-as-we-go was too complicated and not straightforward.</p> <p>SEAΔ started with an idea and then as that idea was put into practice, a lot of unexpected results were created. This does not mean that SEAΔ as a programme did not manage to accomplish what it aimed to do in the first place, but it just appeared that the road to get to the destination is more complex than it had imagined. This also means, every encounter is a valuable learning opportunity to reflect on and progress. As the programme was running, there had been shifts in knowledge and values of the fellows, facilitators, advisors, and also Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council as the co-organisers. These shifts had not managed to fully inform and optimise the programme's improvement as it's running.</p>	<p>Decision making processes and mechanisms to improve-as-we-go are created and designed to ensure effective and efficient learning within the organisation(s).</p>

From the above table, it can be concluded that SEAΔ has started the thinking and exploration towards the effort to enlarge the arts and culture contribution to sustainable development in the Southeast Asia region. In its 3 years of its implementation to do so, SEAΔ has faced significant internal and external challenges in its journey to reach its goals. Despite these challenges, new and valuable learnings have emerged and revealed the real complexity of not only the reality of running a programme like SEAΔ, but also at a larger scale, the complexity of how arts and culture can actually contribute to sustainable development. Suffice to say, a programme like SEAΔ has contributed to sustainable development in the Southeast Asia region quite significantly by **daring to explore a new depth of understanding of the complex intersection of arts, culture, and development.** If shared with other organisations, this exploration of new depth of understanding could inspire other organisations who are working on the same lane to really **look at their programmes in relation to their effort to integrate arts and culture with development with critical mindset and openness to learn new things that might not be necessarily expected.**



Question 2: Multi-sectoral Collaborations Process and Lessons Learnt

Question:

“What are the key lessons for multi-sectoral collaborations (arts and culture sector working with the social + international development sectors) that have been learnt through this programme which could be shared to others seeking to contribute to the sustainable development goals through cross-sectoral partnerships?”

Before answering this question, there are several aspects worth reflecting on. By giving prompts to the fellows, advisors, as well as the organising partners: Mekong Cultural Hub, British Council, and Helvetas, this review attempted to explore these aspects that hopefully would help to provide a framework to answer this question more contextually. These aspects are: 1) The notion of *development*, and 2) Arts, Culture, and Development Positioning.

Exploring these aspects within the multi-sectoral collaborations are necessary to find shared understanding. In such encounters, complexity is inevitable. Hence, cross-disciplinary imagination and creativity are required to navigate any situation we might not initially expect. In a situation where multiple disciplines are involved, multiple variables will naturally emerge as a consequence. We cannot not know everything at the beginning, thus we must be agile to iteratively find and incorporate input as we go. For a fruitful multi-sectoral collaboration, perhaps we could direct more of our energy towards asking the right questions than knowing the correct answer, and starting the journey from our shared imagination rather than what is known and realising it together.





- **Understanding multi-sectoral collaboration: Arts, Culture, Development**

The notion of 'Development'

“SEAD is a space for cultural practitioners to reflect on how their work in arts and culture can contribute to **sustainable development** within Southeast Asia through their individual and collective leadership.”

By serving as a space for cultural practitioners to contribute to sustainable development within Southeast Asia through, SEAD has become part of a global effort to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which all United Nations Member States adopted in 2015. With 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, this agenda provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.¹ Unlike its predecessor, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which only targeted the developing countries in the context of “donors to recipients,” – SDGs target and apply uniformly to all the nations to take actions, whether it is rich, middle income, or poor. The SDGs acknowledge that significant societal issues in the world are interconnected. Thus it no longer suffices for us to tackle only specific aspects of the issues without understanding their repercussions on the others.

This is all exciting and gives a hopeful picture of the future for us. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was born from a long trajectory of *development* as a concept brought by the West. For decades, *development* has been an industry in itself. It started in the 1950's² with the involvement of international organisations, government departments, big international charities and social movements, who were all working to fight against the causes of poverty and inequality. The development industry has reinvented its strategy pretty much once every ten years since it was founded, from focusing on supporting states to supporting markets, and it's shifted in line with global politics. With the SDGs as the latest iteration of framework to approach *development*, its effectiveness is yet to be proven. However, the public focus on sustainability has been a recent transformation in the way the *development industry* presents itself.

By acknowledging *development* as a concept and how its approaches have been evolving since its first initiation, it gives us a starting point to understand how SEAD's missions to enlarge the space of arts and culture in sustainable development can actually be situated. To start off, different perspectives of *development* were gathered from the SEAD 1, 2, 3 fellows to see how this concept is relevant to their practices and to the arts and culture sector in general. Their various inputs can be largely categorised into two distinct perspectives:

1. **At scale: Progression.** This means betterment of critical aspects of our lives: humanity, society (social development), built environment, as well as climate and natural environment, that if combined with the evolution of humans' consciousness and behaviours will result in better impact for all the sentient beings, the planet and the next generations to come. Social development towards equality and education for all that leads to the development of the whole of humanity might be the closest of what arts and culture can contribute. Art is already an

¹ History of SDGs, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

² Evolution of International Development Policy, Ohno, 2013



inseparable part of the development of humanity as it speaks and inspires better ideas to do things more creatively. For instance, an art form such as a song can be a tool to educate people about climate change; or film can provide a medium for people to express themselves better to achieve more freedom and peace in a community.

2. **At Depth: Engagement, honour, humanity.** This means development at the human or community level, which might be outside of the SDGs framework and what the political leaders and politicians envision about development. It is about putting the core value of development into people's engagement, honour, and humanity. Artists and cultural practitioners are potentially of service in translating these ideas and reflecting on what is missing in the lives of the local people who simply try to survive daily lives and may not necessarily view development from the SDGs framework.

Depending on the direction SEAD is heading, it is important to determine the concept of *development* that it envisions to go towards, which includes on what scale and depth is the *sustainable development* that SEAD wants to focus on. Having a clear idea of what it is, would help not only to direct SEAD energy to be more effective, but also attract the right fellows who are part of the journey.

Arts, Culture, and Development Positioning

SEAD works in the intersection of arts, culture, and sustainable development. Throughout the years of its implementation and the process of this review, it has become more apparent that the attempt to understand arts and culture in relevance to development might not result in straightforward answers. As a result, there has been quite an uncertainty in navigating the programme effectively.

There are aspects that need to be unpacked before we dive into the entanglement between these sectors, if we look at them as *sectors*. From a sectoral perspective, arts and culture as sectors are not clearly represented in the SDGs, since there is no clause in the SDGs that speaks specifically about them. In addition, as elaborated in the previous subchapter, *development* as an industry/sector also contributes to limiting our imagination on what arts, culture, and development can create together. Nevertheless, this is not the only way to look at this relationship, as there are other perspectives that we could use as vantage points.

Relating beyond the utilitarian way. The relationship between arts, culture and development might not necessarily be interdependent, but they could inform each other symbiotically. The facilitators envision that if this relationship is established, people working in the arts and culture field would no longer look at sustainable development as merely another theme to tell their stories of or perform about particular community development issues, or in other words, in a practical or a *utilitarian* way. Vice versa, people working in the sustainable development field would stop seeing arts and culture as merely communication materials to tell their stories. It is deemed unhelpful to dichotomize one of them as more creative than the other, as it will only result in a lack of depth and interconnection between the arts, culture, and development. In contrast, arts and culture should be integrated into the development process.



Helvetas also share a similar view. They see the potential of arts and culture to be transformational for sustainable development. System thinking could help map the relationship between these sectors, thus optimising its potential so that the fellows can bring back their learnings to their respective countries or become social activists. Cross-cutting of arts and culture with development can already be seen in areas such as:

- Addressing social injustice (i.e. gender inequality, hate speech).
- Enabling people in the community to articulate themselves better through creative expressions.
- Helping to build local people/CSOs' capacity to challenge their situations and be resilient, courageous and tenacious.
- Sharing the sense of solidarity that we are not alone in our struggles.

Using SDG 17 as an overarching theme. SDGs are applicable as a framework or lens to approach development. However, it is important to also question the SDGs themselves as a framework and have more profound dialogues about each SDG goal. There is no specific clause in SDGs that speaks about arts and culture, which makes positioning arts and culture vis-a-vis sustainable development rather tricky. Alternatively, as suggested by the facilitators, we could use SDG 17 (*Partnership for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*), which works at a systemic level to be the core of the programme design, rather than individually taking each goal in SDGs to justify the activities in SEAD programme literally. They also suggested giving fellows SDGs understanding in a systematic way, such as how they are interconnected with other elements within a bigger picture. Thus, it is critical for fellows to be able to frame the issues before jumping directly to provide solutions, because it would give them more room to understand the context, people and perspectives.

As suggested in SDG 17, *global partnership* is the means for the successful implementation of the SDGs. However, to establish meaningful partnership, collaboration between people of multi-disciplines is required. The capacity to collaborate is one of the hard competencies and top skills we need if we want to work towards a less silo future. Fair collaboration can only be achieved if every voice can hold the same importance. But this is not the current situation we are seeing in the state of the world today. There are still dominating voices and in many cases, the loss of freedom of speech. The facilitators see this as a challenge that arts and culture can address to shift this imbalance. A meaningful collaboration lies in the kind of dialogues that the people are having: what kind of questions are raised, what representation each individual brings, what point of view each individual has; these are areas that artists and cultural practitioners could help to surface and highlight because they give a lot of information of the shifts that happen among the individuals, that hopefully can have a ripple effect at the larger levels (organisation, community, regional, etc.).



Some of the fellows' perspectives that align with this idea:

- Art is an inseparable part of a society. Its value is comparable to law or science. Arts and artists can really help people to help themselves and connect with each other in a more profound way, by connecting them with their senses and emotions.
- Art is a medium to understand issues that are hard to discuss, such as trauma in one community. From the lens of art, trauma can be understood in a more empathetic way. For instance: a film that brings new knowledge and emotional values for its audience can break out rumours, give more clarity, more narratives, hence could help people to feel secure about themselves and not treat others as a threat. Film can bring knowledge and emotional values for its audience.
- Art is valuable in connecting people who do not necessarily share the same language or knowledge. Art provides creative and flexible ways in approaching the community for a development project while also building mutual trust.

Seeing the bigger picture. There is an abundance of examples of artists' and cultural practitioners' works that respond to societal issues or are socially-engaged arts. However, if we look closer, we might find only a few of these works that can connect their responses to the specific issues to the bigger picture. This means really investigating the issues at a deeper level and finding their interconnectedness with other issues on a bigger scale.

For instance, a dancer concerned about the lack of space in their neighbourhood responds to it by performing by the canal. This is a creative response that might not necessarily have been born out of a further investigation of development policy in the area, which potentially contributed to the space shortage in the first place. Although the dance by the canal might also have a campaign element, such as organising the local community to take over the space, it might not necessarily address its development and policy aspects. Such a case might be attributed to: first, the artist is not an academic and not interested in exploring the development and policy or even the anthropology of the local community; second, the artist comes from a Western dance training, thus emphasising the approach to the issue on what the artist has to perform rather than what the artist can artistically work together with the community.

One of the advisors argues that artists need to deconstruct their paradigm to have their work premised on something before they even go to the community. However, many Southeast Asian artists are Western-trained, and this could possibly impede their effort to deconstruct their Western-informed paradigm to formulate a more Southeast Asian understanding of connecting art with society/life.

Then the question is, what can arts and culture realistically contribute to address societal issues? This is a question that needs further exploration. One of the advisors sees the potential for arts and culture to create more value and meaning in the life of the people in the world by: 1) demanding more justice to make the lives of the people more meaningful in this already unequal world; 2) bring more happiness to people's lives, through the works that we do; 3) going radical and all the way to contribute to policy changes. All of these options require deeper and more complex thinking, beyond just a utilitarian way of relating, such as: using art as a social campaign, or to promote certain community products.



Some of the fellows' perspectives that align with this idea:

- Arts and culture can reflect what actually is missing in the community through knowledge sharing, that eventually also builds the community capacity in dealing with certain issues. Furthermore, there are more layers than just 'sharing' knowledge with the communities, as sharing requires artists/cultural practitioners to look and change their mentality to not force their knowledge onto someone else's and to understand that other persons are different from them.
- Art's contribution to society is being informative by bringing something out in an artistic way to impact people, so they could understand what is going on about specific issues.

The elaboration above has shown that there is no clear-cut answer on how arts and culture *should* be positioned in relevance to sustainable development. Multiple vantage points could be used. It is now a matter of choosing which positioning would be most effective and feasible for SEAD to run. Whatever it would be, it must be narrowed, clearly defined, and shared with all the partners and fellows, so that the collective energy could be directed to the same point. Hence, resulted in a more tangible impact.



- **The process of working collaboratively: Arts, Culture, Development**

Collaboration is at the core of everything that SEAD does. From its initiation to its implementation, it has always involved people and organisations from diverse sectoral backgrounds: arts, culture, and development. But if we reflect on it further, *collaboration* might be one of the most overused yet overlooked terms. It is commonly used to label anything that involves people working together towards a shared goal. However, for a successful *collaboration*, not only are conditions and the right skills required, but the process of collaborating itself also needs to be carefully carried on to ensure it is fair. Conditions such as a shared cause and trust; and skills such as open-mindedness, communication, organisation, long-term thinking, adaptability and debate are some of the crucial skills to develop if we want to do collaboration well. Collaboration is a process, but collaborating well is a skill that is honed over time.

In SEAD, collaboration happened between different people at different layers and scales. Thus, to capture the key lessons learnt from multi-sectoral collaborations, different collaboration journeys from the fellows, Helvetas, facilitators, advisors, and Mekong Cultural Hub were gathered as below.



Fellows

Before joining SEAD, fellows expressed in their applications their curiosity and enthusiasm to learn how the arts and culture can contribute more to society and sustainable development. Questions such as: what are the alternative ways of working across different sectors that could deepen the understanding and expand their perspectives in looking at the whole realm of such arts-culture-development collaboration, and how far arts could ground itself in a society, are some of the things they



were most curious to explore in their collaboration with people from the development sector. However, though exploration of arts and culture's contribution to sustainable development had already become the big overarching theme for the whole SEAD programmes, multi-sectoral collaboration created from the partnership with Helvetas was only started from SEAD 2 onwards. Multi-sectoral collaboration within a framework of a specific development project (Biotrade) with partners from the development sector did not exist in SEAD 1. As a result, it is hard to reflect on the multi-sectoral collaboration in SEAD 1 the same way as it is to the SEAD 2 & 3.

Based on their applications, these are what the fellows of SEAD 2 & 3 expected to do or get from their participation in SEAD that would benefit others in their respective communities, which they then exercised by working collaboratively with Helvetas in its Biotrade projects:

1. Being an agent to share knowledge and expertise to others to contribute in the improvement at the larger scale.

“ I hope by my participation, I can develop better personal and partnership skills to proceed with strategic and solution offering, expanding network, and continuing the knowledge production, distribution, and management. ...true capabilities to help others should be able to be applied and offered into any community. I hope in the future, I am able to not just create art but also to join in and be part of the support system in the arts & culture sector. ”

- SEAD 3 fellow

“ My strong linkages in the community makes me an excellent contingent for this workshop due to the fact that my involvement with the multi-sector community that mainly supports and works in sustainable development issues. ... developing policies that will cater to the needs of the community and heighten civic engagement fuelled as people power. ”

- SEAD 3 fellow



2. Understanding Southeast Asia more to fulfil its potential as a society. Strengthen the Southeast Asia society through own work and setting up examples.

“ This participation will give me a platform to speak my voice louder as a spokesperson. No one can improve the Southeast Asian society as well as us who live in the Southeast Asia society. ”

- SEAD 3 fellow

“ I want to see more Cambodian and Southeast Asian role models that the community will look up to, and I hope I can be that person ”

- SEAD 3 fellow

3. Understanding Southeast Asia more to bridge the connections within the region and with other countries, reducing misconception of Southeast Asia countries.

“ ...to expose Taiwan community to the complexity of Southeast Asia cultural complexities, in an effort to move away from the limited pre-conception of Southeast Asian people merely through the economic lens ”

- SEAD 3 fellow

“ Knowing more about the Biotrade would help more in knowing, maybe even establishing a connection to that (development) world in our own backyard. Honestly, even if the Biotrade angle doesn't work out, the connections we made there, especially with the Mekong Cultural Hub, would help connect more bridges in this region. ”

- SEAD 3 fellow

4. Deepening own understanding of the role of arts in society.

“ I have a plan for my future art practice with socially-engaged art. Definitely what I learn from SEAD can contribute to my future art practice. In a current art society situation in Myanmar, we need to ask the role of the arts. I hope I can contribute some perspective working with artists from Southeast Asia. ”

- SEAD 3 fellow

5. Sharing knowledge as a way to internationalise one's own and others' career.

“ ...to help Lao local professional career in art and culture who have less opportunities to improve themselves into international ways through the workshop or activities or finding sponsor and creating and managing activities in professional way to get high quality result and connecting more partners to get more ideas and chance and get them to see different view of their career. ”

- SEAD 3 fellow



Knowing fellows' expectations of what could be the fruit of multi-sectoral collaboration is useful as a baseline to see the gap with what multi-sectoral collaboration can serve and/or teach for them in reality. In their interviews, SEAD 2 and 3 fellows shared their key learnings from their collaboration process with Helvetas through its Biotrade project.

The importance of not imposing our own knowledge on someone else when working with the community. This realisation came as a result of a better understanding that everyone has a different set of values and knowledge and different ways of seeing. When doing a community project, it is important to establish trust with the people in the community, as we want to connect meaningfully with them and be part of their effort to reach common goals instead of being disconnected outsiders. Many fellows expressed their discomfort of not having deeper knowledge about the community they worked with, as it felt superficial.

The need to build authentic/genuine connection with the community before working with them. Ideally, before working with the community, fellows would require to know the people in the community first to build a genuine connection. One way to achieve this is by living in the community for a certain period so that the context could be well understood and co-produce something authentic together. However, it was not possible to do so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fellows in SEAD 3 especially expressed the lack of authentic connection built during their creative collaborations, which they felt was very unfortunate. Although Helvetas partner has been very accommodating to the fellows in expressing their creative ideas, they admitted that barriers such as distance and language differences were still hard to break through. Reflecting on this case, the future SEAD programme needs to create an environment, ways, and tools that allow such authentic connection between the fellows and the people in the community they are working with. As also affirmed by one of the advisors, that the process, engagement, human interaction, and conviviality are at the heart of socially engaged arts.

The need to bridge an inevitable tension between artists/cultural practitioners with development people in looking and approaching *development*. Collaboration is already a challenge in itself, even more so for people from contrasting expertise backgrounds who collaborate in the area whose form is to be figured together along the way. There are many unknown territories to explore in the intersection of arts, culture, and development. Hence, the tension is inevitable. In SEAD, creative collaboration between the fellows and Helvetas within the framework of the Biotrade project that started in its second year has helped to structure multi-sectoral collaboration. However, this structure also comes with its limitations. One of the limitations of working with development partners within a development project framework is that artists/cultural practitioners could not go all the way in producing something radical or beyond the boundaries of the development organisation's code of conduct.

Artists and cultural practitioners have different perspectives from development professionals (Helvetas) on many notions. These differences must be bridged if they want to develop something that works for them. However, this is not the case for many of the multi-sectoral collaborations.



For instance, fellows expressed concern about who has the final say in the final collaboration product and who the product is aimed for when there are stark ways of seeing the community issues or the notion of development itself. One practical solution might be for artists, cultural practitioners, and development partners to compromise. However, compromising is less ideal than striving for a third way that would be a win-win for both parties. Hopefully, this concern could be addressed in the future SEAD programme by finding ways to navigate the inevitable tensions in collaboration - a *process-focused one*.

Helvetas

Helvetas, with its Regional Biotrade Project in Southeast Asia, assists companies and rural communities in Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar in protecting species by sustainably using the native resources of the Southeast Asia biodiversity hotspot. The fellows worked closely with the lead Project Managers from each country of the Bio Trade project during their creative collaboration: Nguyen Dieu Chi (Chi), Vietnam; Sisavan Phimmasan, Laos; Zaw Min Oo, Myanmar. During this review process, these three programme managers were interviewed to capture the learning from Helvetas's side. Below are the challenges and main lessons learned gathered.

Challenges.

Chi felt there had been quite a challenge in communicating with the fellows due to the age and experience gaps in the development sector. For instance, it was tricky for her to find a common language with the fellows when explaining Biotrade. Contrary to Chi's experience, Sisavan did not encounter significant issues with the fellows. He felt that they could understand each other well enough. He assumed that his educational background in Architecture might contribute to his fluency in the fellows' creative process. Similarly, Zaw's responses to SEAD activities and his engagements with the fellows have been positive. He did not feel he encountered many issues with the fellows or the creative output fellows had created for the community. Perhaps, this perspective might also be attributed to the fact that he is an artist himself, and the ongoing crises in Myanmar have already made his general mood pretty negative, but he wanted to maintain his optimism by keeping a positive outlook on the fellows' works.

Lesson learnt.

- **Communication.** Learning from her challenge in communicating with the fellows, Chi deemed it is important to make the Biotrade terminology easier to be understood by the fellows by using simple and finding the connection between arts, culture and development.
- **Approaching development from a different perspective.** Encounters with the fellows have opened Helvetas programme managers' minds about many different approaches to development and made them more enthusiastic to make more connections or links between arts, culture, and development. Different insights offered by the fellows have helped the programme managers to reflect on their own local contexts, which then inspired them to question their own projects differently (i.e. interactions with young groups and their expectations, generational gap, etc), as well as to be more vulnerable to make more



impactful change in the community. Encounters with the fellows have also enriched their perspectives of how arts and culture can be a creative tool for development (i.e. making websites creatively, using photovoice to raise the issues in a community, etc.). Through creativity, not only development issues could be communicated more widely to people, the concept of Biotrade itself could be challenged as artists and cultural practitioners can see what people in the development sector cannot see. Fellows also gave examples of short and effective messages to the people to overcome their issues and to address the issues emotionally, which is inspiring from the programme managers' point of view. They appreciated how the fellows shared their knowledge and experiences of other cultures to the local people, and performed during the site visit while encouraging people to view their local product from different perspectives.

- **The extent of creative outputs' impact to the community, from the Helvetas' perspectives.** As much as the programme managers gave room for the fellows' creativity in doing things their way, they still feel the need to keep the fellows in check if what they do are still aligned with their sustainable development framework. The programme managers see the value of the fellows' works for the community, as these works could better convey the message about what is happening in the community to the outsider and inspire other people to help the community. However, they are still unsure of the implications these creative outputs might have in the future and what would be the following actions, since the creative collaboration output like video is not watched yet by the community.

The need to optimise the arts and culture potential in sustainable development. These are some of the Helvetas' suggestions to optimise the arts and culture potential in sustainable development:

- Using system thinking in practice and introducing system thinking to artists and cultural practitioners.
- Applying a more programmatic approach, a Road Map that can comprehensively capture the Theory of Change of Arts, Culture, and Development, as well as Strategic Direction of all the partnering organisations (Mekong Cultural Hub, British Council, Helvetas)
- Partnering organisations must sit and design the programme together and have a common direction and goals, in which arts and culture contribute to sustainable development.

Facilitators

Focusing the learning of multi-sectoral collaboration on the process of understanding each other, not the product of the collaboration. As similarly expressed by the fellows, the facilitators also expressed the importance of focusing the learning more on dialogues, discourses, and questions between the arts and cultural practitioners with the development practitioners, than the final product of their collaborations. The facilitators are aware of how the intersection of arts, culture and development (especially when a development organisation is involved) can be a tricky area to navigate, as a development organisation must have a certain way of incorporating the arts and culture into their work, which might be different from the way how the arts and cultural practitioners would like it to be.



One of the facilitators' attempts to encourage more dialogue and discourses into the collaboration process was to bring a critical lens in looking at SDGs and question SDGs themselves in a post-Covid world. One of the practical examples: when the fellows produced some art form or media based on the issues they found in the community they worked with, it may look very good and have an impact due to its aesthetic or storytelling, but at the community or issue level, what impact it has and what the unintended consequences it might have, are the kind of questions and dialogues the facilitators tried to have with the fellows. When the fellows went to a place for three days, the facilitators felt they needed to ask questions about ethics, layers of politics and discuss them with the fellows.

It needs time to transcend collaboration into a more profound exchange. The facilitators see the SEAD programme as a build that is not enough to grasp the shift that happened only within a short period, three years in SEAD case. They suggested seeing the change after ten years, as it is only through questioning what we have been doing that we could refine it enough to get to the heart of the problem to transcend our collaboration into a more profound exchange. Even if the SEAD programme came out perfectly, they think it is still crucial to give more time, breathing space and testing, to understand some absence in our data. Such a pause would provide people with a real-time opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the programme and to understand the next steps they needed to take, which was about understanding what community meant for their particular context of leadership to know how to better participate in making change. They also reflected on how long it would take to understand our impact in our sector (arts and culture), let alone in juxtaposing our own and other sectors (such as development). It will need to be observed at a slow and long-term level. Very often, the *Aha* moments came from not-success stories, our facilitators observed.

Advisors

The importance of going through a negotiation process among the fellows before doing a socially-engaged art project. One of the forms of multi-sectoral collaboration between arts, culture, and development is *socially-engaged art* projects. It is such a broad concept where art and society intersect. When this concept was used in the SEAD programme in its broad definition, it also attracted a wide range of artists and cultural practitioners with a different understanding of *social engagement*. One of the advisors observed the variety of artists and cultural practitioners who have joined SEAD could be categorised into two big groups: first are those who came from very institutionalised Western art trainings, which carry not only colonial, but also industrial (creative industries) baggage; and second, are those who want to emancipate citizens/community/public from that kind of baggage (the baggage of institutional art, a dominant paradigm that comes out of the industrial-capitalist market, or the colonial institution of galleries, festivals, etc.). Since artists and cultural practitioners in Southeast Asia inherited those two streams, the tension between them would be inevitable. The advisor suggested having fellows openly discuss and negotiate this tension towards a common understanding before engaging with the community and doing socially-engaged art projects.



The importance of reaching a common ideological ground among people from different sectors in a multi-sectoral collaboration. From the advisors' observation, one of the challenges of multi-sectoral collaboration could be the lack of common ideological ground among the people from different sectors. To reach it, a good amount of quality time is needed for these people to get to know each other, have dialogues, and negotiate their different ideologies to reach a common ground. Going through this process is deemed more important than the actual product of the collaboration. For instance: in the SEAD programme, we had ten fellows from ten different countries participating each year, Mekong Cultural Hub, British Council, Helvetas, and also the facilitators whose ideology might be different from one another. When each ideology is not shared, it will create a lot of assumptions that might impede open communication, which is a crucial element in collaboration.

The need to optimise the potential of regional exchange beyond the subject of creation. Initially, SEAD was designed to provide experiential learning for fellows by travelling to different countries within Southeast Asia, exposing them to other contexts they are not familiar with. However, travelling became restricted when COVID-19 pandemic hit. One of the advisors hopes that the travelling element could be kept in the future programme. As fellows travel, SEAD could encourage new encounters that inspire their art-making process and provoke new stimuli for fellows to see things differently and more critically, whether it is of their practices or paradigms. This could be done with having people with specific assigned roles, such as curators, to guide the fellows' process.

Mekong Cultural Hub

Reflecting on the partnership with Helvetas to invest more time to learn to properly collaborate.

Reflecting on how the SEAD 1 programme went, Mekong Cultural Hub and British Council realised that the programme was not going far enough to connect arts and culture with development. Compared with the arts and culture elements in the programme, the development (SDGs) element did not come out as strong. It was shown by how the fellows of SEAD 1 were still limited to art projects as a way/container to connect arts and development (SDGs), and they also did not go to the community. Responding to this situation, came the idea to partner with a development organisation that already had existing projects with the community that fellows could be involved in, to exercise the development element of this programme. Thus, a partnership with Helvetas was established in the second year onwards, using their Biotrade project as a container for fellows to exercise the intersection between arts, culture, and development (SDGs).

However, Mekong Cultural Hub expressed that this partnership was not done correctly, partly due to Helvetas joining them in the second year when an existing system was already in place. This means, instead of co-developing a new structure together, Mekong Cultural Hub, British Council and Helvetas tried to fit the partnership into their existing programmes' structures, resulting in a shaky partnership foundation. This kind of organisational arrangement also created vagueness in their working dynamic. They often found themselves unsure who is responsible for what in certain situations.



This experience has taught Mekong Cultural Hub valuable learning to invest enough time to set up a solid partnership with other organisations. With enough time, the partnering organisations could better understand each other and the notions of art, culture, and development intersection, reach common ground and ideology and create different activities. Mekong Cultural Hub has committed to learning more about partnerships and building a solid foundation with partnering organisations before doing something.

The importance of truly learning about partnership/collaboration within the organisation and with other organisation(s) before guiding the fellows to collaborate. Mekong Cultural Hub realised that it is not only the fellows; they also still have a lot to learn from different people from different disciplines, cultures, and contexts within their organisation. Mekong Cultural Hub is also committed to re-design the future SEAD programme more intentionally and strengthen their way of collaborating before guiding the fellows to do it. Being in learning mode is deemed very important for any organisation running a similar programme as SEAD since many unknown areas in the intersection of arts, culture, and development must be explored together with all the people who are involved in the programme, including the partner organisations, facilitators, advisors, and the fellows.

The need of a facilitator to facilitate the learning of collaboration among the organisations. Reflecting on their way of doing throughout the implementation of the SEAD programme, Mekong Cultural Hub realised that *listening* and *learning* are two important things that need to be managed in collaboration. Often they might share their learning with others, but people would tap into that learning differently and are unsure how to move on from it, what to implement, etc. Thus, they believe that SEAD would have benefited from having someone to connect and facilitate the multi-partnerships, to help them to reach decisions, and to acknowledge the lessons learned or something that needs to be done.





- **Key Learnings**

Unpacking the Key Question

To answer the second Key Question of this review and reflection: ***“What are the key lessons for multi-sectoral collaborations (arts and culture sector working with the social + international development sectors) that have been learnt through this programme which could be shared to others seeking to contribute to the sustainable development goals through cross-sectoral partnerships?”***, there are two aspects of this question that need to be unpacked first to provide a more contextual framework in answering it. The first aspect is the **notion of development**, and the second is **arts, culture, and development positioning**. Unpacking these aspects would also help us to direct our energy towards asking the right questions rather than knowing the correct answer, because this question is just the beginning of our bigger journey towards multi-disciplined collaborations that could happen in the intersection of arts, culture and development.

The notion of *development*

It is worth acknowledging that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was born from a long trajectory of *development* as a concept brought by the West. For decades, *development* has been an industry in itself. By acknowledging *development* as a concept and how its approaches have been evolving since its first initiation, it gives us a starting point to understand how SEAD’s missions to enlarge the space of arts and culture in sustainable development can actually be situated. Various input from fellows on their perspectives on development can be largely categorised into two:

- **At scale: Progression.** This means betterment of critical aspects of our lives: humanity, society (social development), city (built environment), as well as climate and natural environment, that if combined with the evolution of humans’ consciousness and behaviours will result in better impact for all the sentient beings, the planet and the next generations to come.
- **At Depth: Engagement, honour, humanity.** This means development at the human or community level, which might be outside of the SDGs framework and what the political leaders and politicians envision about development. It is about putting the core value of development into people's engagement, honour, and humanity.

Depending on the direction SEAD is heading, it is important to **determine the concept of development that it envisions to go towards**, which includes on what scale and depth is the *sustainable development* that SEAD wants to focus on. Having a clear idea of what it is, would help not only to direct SEAD energy to be more effective, but also attract the right fellows who are part of the journey.



Arts, Culture, and Development Positioning

SEAD works in the intersection of arts, culture, and development, and it attempts to enlarge arts and culture contribution to sustainable development. However, the position of arts and culture's relevance to development might not always be clear. As a result, there has been quite an uncertainty in navigating the SEAD programme effectively. There are aspects that need to be unpacked before we dive into the entanglement between these sectors, if we look at them as *sectors*. From a sectoral perspective, arts and culture as sectors are not clearly represented in the SDGs, since there is no clause in the SDGs that speaks specifically about them. In addition, as elaborated in the previous subchapter, *development* as an industry/sector also contributes to our limited imagination on what arts, culture, and development can create together.

There is no clear-cut answer on how arts and culture *should* be positioned in relevance to sustainable development. Multiple vantage points could be used. It is now a matter of choosing **which positioning would be most effective and feasible for SEAD to run**. Whatever it would be, it must be narrowed, clearly defined, and shared with all the partners and fellows, so that the collective energy could be directed to the same point. Hence, resulted in a more tangible impact. Below are some suggestions gathered from the fellows, facilitators, and advisors that could give us various perspectives of what kind of relationships that arts, culture, and sustainable development can create.

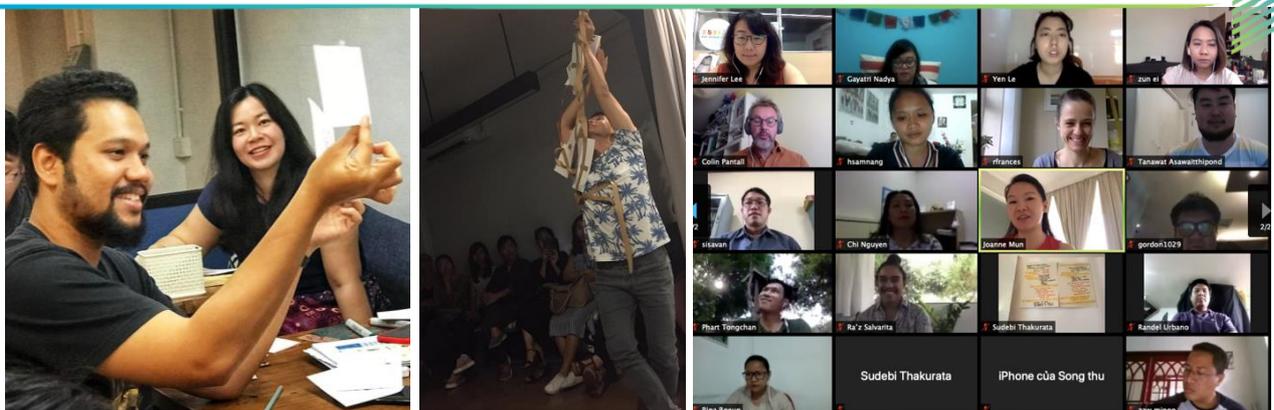
- **Relating beyond the utilitarian way.**

Arts and culture have potential to be transformational for sustainable development. The relationship between arts, culture and development might not necessarily be interdependent, but they could inform each other symbiotically. If this relationship is established, people working in the arts and culture field would no longer look at sustainable development as merely another theme to tell their stories of or perform about particular community development issues, or in other words, in a practical or a *utilitarian way*. Vice versa, people working in the sustainable development field would stop seeing arts and culture as merely communication materials to tell their stories.





- **Using SDG 17 as an overarching theme.** SDGs are applicable as a framework or lens to approach development. However, it is important to also question the SDGs themselves as a framework and having more profound dialogues about each SDG goal. There is no specific clause in SDGs that speaks about arts and culture, that it makes positioning arts and culture vis-a-vis sustainable development is rather tricky. As an alternative, we could use SDG 17 (*Partnership for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development*), which works at a systemic level to be the core of the programme design, rather than individually taking each goal in SDGs to justify the activities in SEAD programme literally. The SDGs are best understood as a system, which is how they are interconnected with other elements within a bigger picture. Some of the fellows' perspectives align with this idea: 1) Art is an inseparable part of a society, by connecting them with their senses and emotions; 2) Art is a medium to understand issues that are hard to discuss, such as trauma in one community. From the lens of art, trauma can be understood in a more empathetic way; 3) Art is valuable in connecting people who do not necessarily share the same language or knowledge.
- **Seeing the bigger picture.** Socially-engaged arts are encouraged to connect the artists' creative responses to both the specific and bigger societal issues. But then the question is, what can arts and culture realistically contribute to address societal issues. Here are some ideas: 1) Demanding more justice to make the lives of the people more meaningful in this already unequal world; 2) Bringing more happiness to people's lives, through the works that we do; 3) Going radical and all the way to contribute to policy changes. Some of the fellows' perspectives that align with this idea:
 - Arts and culture can reflect what actually is missing in the community through knowledge sharing, that eventually also builds the community capacity in dealing with certain issues.
 - Art's contribution to society is being informative by trying to bring something out in an artistic way to impact people, so they could understand what is going on about specific issue.





Key Lessons from the process of working collaboratively: Arts, Culture, Development

Collaboration is a process, but collaborating well is a skill that is honed over time. In a successful collaboration, not only are conditions and the right skills required, but the process of collaborating itself also needs to be carefully carried on to ensure it is fair. Conditions such as a shared cause and trust; and skills such as open-mindedness, communication, organisation, long-term thinking, adaptability and debate are some of the crucial skills to develop if we want to do collaboration well. In SEAD, collaboration happened between different people at different layers and scales. Key lessons learnt from the fellows, Helvetas, facilitators, advisors, and Mekong Cultural Hub in their multi-sectoral collaborations were gathered, and can be categorised into two directions: Inward and Outward. Inward learning means the learning that happened **within** the selves and each organisation, whilst Outward Learning means the co-learning that happened **with** the other selves and other organisations. Seeing the learning process through these two directions would help to create a more solid foundation in multi-disciplines/multi-sectoral collaborations.

Inward Learning	Outward Learning
<p data-bbox="103 698 204 730">Fellows</p> <ul data-bbox="103 770 702 1960" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="103 770 702 1153">• It takes a good amount of time to transcend collaboration into a more profound exchange. Both short and long term shifts must be observed. It is also crucial to give more time, breathing space and testing, to understand some absence in our data. Such a pause would provide people with a real-time opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the programme and to understand the next steps they needed to take.<li data-bbox="103 1191 702 1503">• Need to optimise the potential of regional exchange beyond the subject of creation. <u>New</u> encounters through exchanges and collaborations are expected to not only inspire fellows' art-making process, but also provoke new stimuli for fellows to see things differently and more critically, whether it is of their practices or paradigms.<li data-bbox="103 1541 702 1960">• The importance of going through a negotiation process among the fellows before doing a socially-engaged art project. There could be a wide range of understanding between the artists and cultural practitioners on social engagement who are participating in SEAD. It is important to have them openly discuss and negotiate these differences towards a common understanding before engaging with the community and doing socially-engaged art projects.	<p data-bbox="786 698 1449 768">Fellows with development practitioners (Helvetas' programme managers)</p> <ul data-bbox="786 804 1492 2101" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="786 804 1492 1256">• Need to bridge an inevitable tension between artists/cultural practitioners with <i>development</i> practitioners in looking and approaching the development. Artists and cultural practitioners have different perspectives from development practitioners on many notions, including differences in ways of communicating. These differences must be bridged if they want to develop something that works for them. There is a need to find a third way that would be a win-win for both parties and also ways to navigate the inevitable tensions in multi-disciplines/sectoral collaboration - a process-focused one.<li data-bbox="786 1294 1492 1787">• The extent of creative outputs' impact to the community, from the development practitioners' perspectives. As much as the development practitioners gave room for the fellows' creativity in doing things their way, they still feel the need to keep the fellows in check if what they do are still aligned with their sustainable development framework. Development practitioners see value of the fellows' works for the community, yet are still unsure of the implications these creative outputs might have in the future and what would be the following actions, since the creative collaboration output like video is not watched yet by the community.<li data-bbox="786 1825 1492 2101">• Approaching development from a different perspective. Encounters with the fellows have opened Helvetas programme managers' mind about many different approaches to development and made them more enthusiastic to make more connections or links between arts, culture, and development, and also be reflective of their own development practices.



Inward Learning

Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH)

- **The importance of truly learning about partnership/collaboration within the organisation and with other organisation(s) before guiding the fellows to collaborate.** It is in the best interest of MCH to actively learn from different people from different disciplines, cultures, and contexts within the organisation, in order to design the future SEAD programme more intentionally and strengthen their way of collaborating before guiding the fellows to do it. Being in learning mode is deemed very important not only for MCH, but also any organisation running a similar programme as SEAD, since many unknown areas in the intersection of arts, culture, and development must be explored together with all the people who are involved in the programme.
- **The need of a facilitator to facilitate the learning of collaboration among the organisations.** MCH believes that a programme like SEAD would benefit from having someone to connect and facilitate the multi-partnerships, to help them to reach decisions, and to acknowledge the lessons learned or something that needs to be done. Though this could be the role that Mekong Cultural Hub takes, when there was an absence of someone who was specifically assigned to capture and connect all different learnings, conflict resolutions became challenging to achieve as people would direct their energy to patch the conflict' consequences without truly understanding the underlying issues.



Outward Learning

Fellows with the community

- **The importance of not imposing our own knowledge on someone else when working with the community.** As everyone has a different set of values and knowledge and different ways of seeing. It is important to establish trust with the people in the community, as we want to connect meaningfully with them and be part of their effort to reach common goals instead of being disconnected outsiders.
- **The need to build authentic/genuine connection with the community before working with them.** Before working with the community, fellows would require to know the people in the community first to build a genuine connection. The challenge is, barriers such as distance and language differences were still hard to break through. Reflecting on this case, the future SEAD programme needs to create an environment, ways, and tools that allow such authentic connection between the fellows and the people in the community they are working with.

Between partnering organisation

- **Reflecting on the partnership with Helvetas to invest more time to learn to properly collaborate.** When partnered up with Helvetas in the second year, instead of co-developed a new structure together, Mekong Cultural Hub and Helvetas tried to fit the partnership into their existing programmes' structures, resulting in a shaky partnership foundation. Therefore, it is best to invest enough time to set up a solid partnership with other organisations. With enough time, the partnering organisations could better understand each other and the notions of art, culture, and development intersection, reach common ground and ideology and create different activities.
- **The importance of reaching a common ideological ground among people from different sectors in a multi-sectoral collaboration.** There could be the lack of common ideological ground among the people from different sectors. To reach it, a good amount of quality time is needed for these people to get to know each other, have dialogues, and negotiate their different ideologies to reach a common ground. When each ideology is not shared, it will create a lot of assumptions that might impede open communication, which is a crucial element in collaboration.
- **Focusing the learning of multi-sectoral collaboration on the process of understanding each other, not the product of the collaboration.** The intersection of arts, culture and development can be a tricky area to navigate. And as a development.



D. Recommendations for the future SEAD Programme

Below are recommendations for the future SEAD programme that are informed by our all individual and collective learnings elaborated in the previous chapters.

What The Programme Could Be

Intersection of Arts, Culture, Development, and Leadership

Narrow down the SEAD's area of work to be more focused and effective. Decide on which areas of intersection that SEAD actually wants and is able to focus on, as well as how deep SEAD wants to go if it decides to work within the areas of intersection of choice. Narrowing, deepening and sharpening this programme not only could help the organiser(s) to measure the level of programme complexity and match their capacity to carry the programme, but also minimise mis-match expectations between the organiser(s) and the fellows.

Level of Depth

Deepen the level of criticality towards the arts, culture, development, and leadership intersection both in concept and practice. One of the ways is by unpacking belief systems in the relevance to Arts, Culture, and Development, as a preliminary process before jumping in to doing the actual collaborative work in the community. In addition, if Southeast Asia regional collaboration specificity is kept in the future programme, it is important for fellows to get preliminary dialogues to reach a common ground, common goals, or some point of negotiation that could be used as a starting point for all the participants before they really engage themselves in a project in the community.

Leadership

Make the leadership element more visible (if the leadership element is kept), deliver and exercise it as its own separate module with the leadership capacity framework of choice. It must be made clear to what kind of leadership SEAD aspires to hone and how it wants to hone it according to the focus of intersection of choice, i.e. leadership for community, for arts/culture institution, or something else, and a set of leadership qualities that we expect from the fellows to develop in the SEAD programme is established. Without purposely setting some indicators of what leadership is or aspired to be within SEAD, the leadership part would risk being overwhelmed by other things along the way as it is the quality that could mainly be observed individually. Common threads of fellows' perspective on leadership that had been captured throughout this review process could be used to inform the kind of leadership element for the future programme.

Alternative point of view: SEAD could attempt to find a kind of specificity other than geographical that is derived from the inter-sectoral interactions that it creates between arts, culture and development. The path that SEAD has forged to encourage more meaningful and contributive relationships between these sectors requires a whole different level of leadership capacity in order to navigate the complexities along the way. For instance, being able to question or even deconstruct one's own ideology and practice could become an important



skill for arts and cultural practitioners to have if they want to be fully engaged in the community, as they are prone to be too focused on their own works and how they present themselves. The same way as the ability to think bigger at systemic level and deeper to question every notion or paradigm before they engage themselves in the community, as the nature of multi-sectoral collaborations is full of complexity that the silo-thinking and utilitarian ways of collaborating between sectors are no longer relevant.

Experiential Learning

If the *experiential learning* element is kept, travel and being physically in the context are non-negotiable aspects of the programme.

Optimising the Process

Indicator of the Fellows' Learning Progress

Clearly define and share what SEAD means by '*contribution of arts and culture to the sustainability/sustainable development*' with all the fellows, partners, and contributors of SEAD to reach common understanding

Establish relevant and integrated sets of indicators both short and long term to gauge the breadth and depth of the fellows' learning in the context of arts and culture' contribution to societal issues/sustainable development.

Learning Mechanism within the Organisation(s)

Create and design decision-making processes and mechanisms to *improve-as-we-go* to ensure **effective and efficient learning within the organisation(s)**. In a programme with multiple partnerships such as SEAD, a decision making process to improve things is prone to be more complicated and not straightforward. A clear structure between partners/collaborators is important to create so that each collaborator can be held accountable according to their specific roles, and the learning resulting from such collaborations could be efficiently and effectively incorporated back to the organisations.

Embedded tool to capture the narrative and intangible shift

Create an embedded methodology to document individual learnings and reflections and extract **collective learning in an iterative way**. In a programme like SEAD, main learnings are intangible and hard to quantify. Thus, an embedded methodology to extract our collective learning back to the organisations is needed since most of the learning goes to individuals in the organisations. Gathering the learning only at the end of the programme would be reductive and insufficient in capturing the intangible growth of each individual.



Diversity in the selection committee

Have a different mix of people in the selection committee. This could include having someone who can bridge the older with the younger generation to bridge the conversations and understanding between different generations. In addition, it could also be useful to have people who are more connected to the social/development issues, such as arts and human rights, arts and migration, refugee, underprivileged, to encourage people who are interested and work in these particular issues to join the programme.

Keeping the programme coherent

Have the programme be more streamlined to keep it coherent and continuous from the start until the end. The lack of continuity, disconnection between intention, approach, and final output need to be addressed in the future programme.

Improve co-organisers and collaborators' capacity to navigate complexity. SEAΔ is a multi-partnerships programme that provides a lot of opportunities to grow. Hence, the co-organisers and collaborators need to improve their capacity by using some tools and skills that are supportive in navigating the complexity and moving forward.





Optimising Partnerships/Multi-sectoral Collaboration

Optimise the arts and culture potential in sustainable development

To optimise the arts and culture potential in sustainable development, partnering organisations can:

- Use system thinking in practice and introducing system thinking to artists and cultural practitioners.
- Apply a more programmatic approach, a Road Map that can comprehensively capture the Theory of Change of Arts, Culture, and Development, as well as Strategic Direction of all the partnering organisations.
- Give enough time to sit and design the programme together and have a common direction and goals, in which arts and culture contribute to sustainable development.





Optimise the quality of multi-sectoral collaborations

Fellows with development practitioners (Helvetas' programme managers)

- **Bridge an inevitable tension between artists/cultural practitioners with development practitioners in looking and approaching the *development*.** Artists and cultural practitioners have different perspectives from development practitioners on many notions, including differences in ways of communicating. These differences must be bridged if they want to develop something that works for them. There is a need to find a third way that would be a win-win for both parties and also ways to navigate the inevitable tensions in multi-disciplines/sectoral collaboration - a *process-focused one*.

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- **Have a facilitator to facilitate the learning of collaboration among the organisations.** MCH believes that they would be benefited from having someone to connect and facilitate the multi-partnerships, to help them to reach decisions, and to acknowledge the lessons learned or something that needs to be done. Though this could be the role that Mekong Cultural Hub takes, when there was an absence of someone who was specifically assigned to capture and connect all different learnings, conflict resolutions became challenging to achieve as people would direct their energy to patch the conflict' consequences without truly understanding the underlying issues.

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- **Build authentic/genuine connection with the community before working with them.** Before working with the community, fellows would require to know the people in the community first to build a genuine connection. The challenge is, barriers such as distance and language differences were still hard to break through. Reflecting on this case, the future SEAD programme needs to create an environment, ways, and tools that allow such authentic connection between the fellows and the people in the community they are working with.

Between partnering organisation

- **Invest more time to learn to properly collaborate.** When partnered up with Helvetas in the second year, instead of co-developed a new structure together, Mekong Cultural Hub and Helvetas tried to fit the partnership into their existing programmes' structures, resulting in a shaky partnership foundation. Therefore, it is best to invest enough time to set up a solid partnership with other organisations. With enough time, the partnering organisations could better understand each other and the notions of art, culture, and development intersection, reach common ground and ideology and create different activities



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