



LIVING ARTS  
INTERNATIONAL

Living Arts  
International &  
Anupama Sekhar

# LESSONS FROM CONNECTING SOUTH

The Journey  
of the  
South-South  
Arts Fellowships  
2022-23



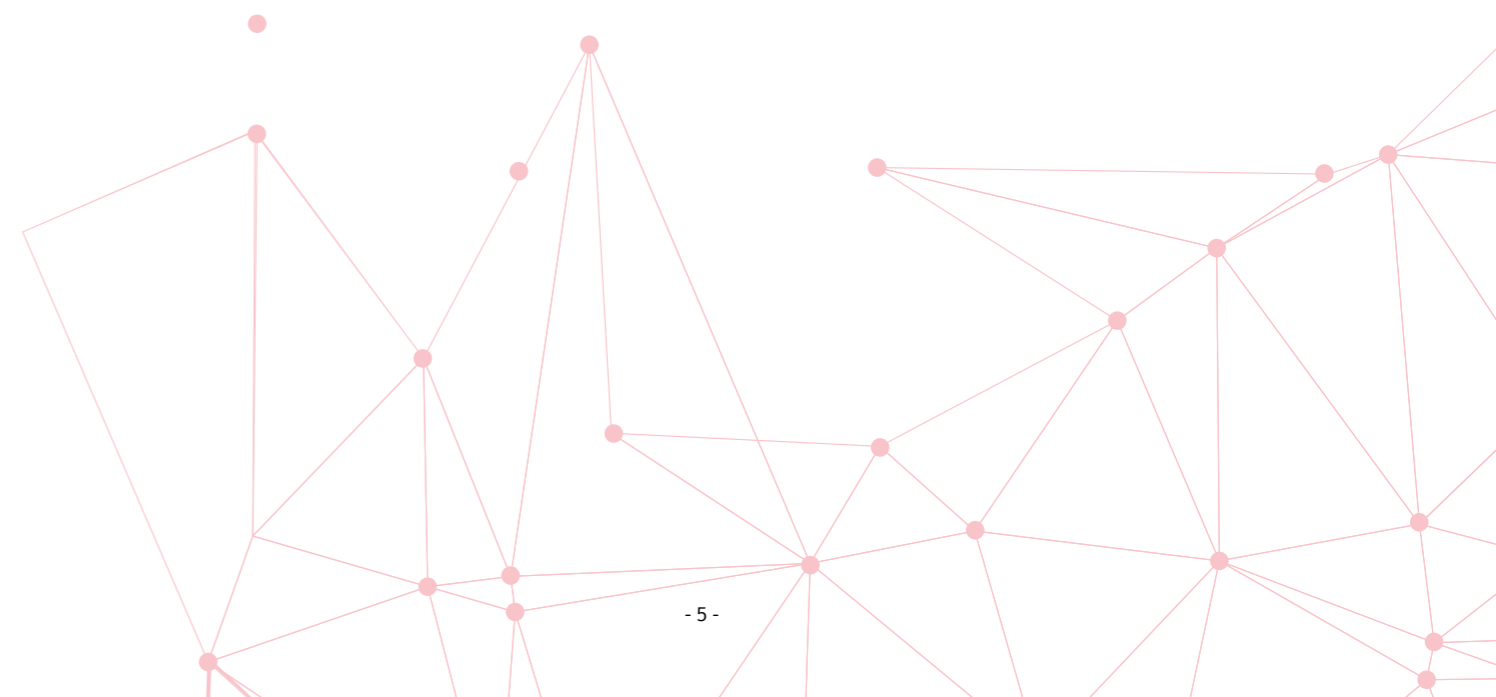
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**Cover:**

*Affinity: The yearning to be connected through transformation*  
Photo by Tanya Dutt

*I took this picture at World Expo Dubai 2020 (Mobility Pavilion), where the world shares cultural, scientific and technological knowledge and advancements for our unified future. A quote nearby this installation inspires: 'One must always maintain one's connection to the past and yet ceaselessly pull away from it', Gaston Bachelard.*



# FOREWORD

**It is time to reassess and reimagine the rules of engagement, both within the Global South and in our interactions with the broader global arts community.**

Living Arts International (LAI) incubates cultural initiatives that contribute to a peaceful, sustainable future, using the living arts as a catalyst for change. LAI began in Cambodia and is shaped by its identity as a grassroots, post-conflict, non-profit organization. At the core of our vision lies the imperative to nurture leadership across the cultural sector from within the Global South. After decades of work in Asia, through Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) and Mekong Cultural Hub (MCH), where we been supporting cultural workers in Cambodia, southeast Asia and beyond, since 1998 and 2018 respectively, the South-South Arts Fellowships (SSAF) is LAI's first program under the banner of Connecting South.

The importance of fostering connections among cultural organizations, networks, and practitioners within the Global South has been emphasized consistently over the last decades. In UNESCO's 2022 Global Report, *Re/Shaping Policies for Creativity – Addressing Culture as a Global Public Good*, this imperative is once again highlighted. UNESCO has called upon its member states to enhance financial support for the purpose of promoting knowledge sharing and networking among cultural operators in Africa, Asia (including west Asia), Oceania, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

It is in response to this long-standing and well-articulated need that we, at LAI, initiated the South-South Arts Fellowships. We believe that the Global South can serve as a pivotal platform for nurturing, sharing, and advancing a collective narrative that unites us and underscores our commonality. Irrespective of how we self-name ourselves, we are a community of cultural practitioners and networks hailing from the South, who share similar economic and social contexts and constitute the majority of the world's population, often referred to as the "majority world," in the words of Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam.

In recent years, we have seen a growing interest in engaging with cultural practitioners from the Global South and in establishing equitable modes of interaction, especially in the context of North-South relationships. In this context, it is indeed time to reassess and reimagine the rules of engagement, both within the Global South and in our interactions with the broader global arts community.

Much like the Global North, which has developed its distinct cultural infrastructure and modes of engagement, we, too, can cultivate our unique approaches to engaging with one another within the Global South, inspired by local practices and traditions. Through our experience with the SSAF, we have once again recognized the pivotal role played by local intermediary cultural organizations in nurturing networks within the Global South. This concept has been articulated previously, as early as 2013 by On the Move.

These intermediaries, working at the grassroots level, act as vital bridges between funders and artists/operators. Their contribution to network building cannot be overstated, given their deep community connections and acute understanding of local needs, priorities, languages, and contexts, even when faced with limited financial resources. The role of such intermediaries in connecting the Global South is of utmost significance. Effective programming, intercultural communication, an in-depth grasp of local context, and strong facilitation skills are just as critical as financial support when it comes to promoting connectivity within the Global South.

We trust that the insights shared in this report will prove valuable to you to continue fostering connections with and within the cultural and creative sectors in the Global South.

**PHLOEUN PRIM,**  
Executive Director LAI



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Living Arts International (LAI) initiated the South-South Arts Fellowships (SSAF) in 2022-2023 to foster extensive networks among cultural workers in Africa, Asia (including west and central Asia), and Oceania. The fellowship program centered on two core values:



**Network building and mutual learning**  
among cultural workers within the Global South



**Locality and continuity**  
that respect specific cultural contexts and foster sustainable growth

The pilot edition of SSAF received 180 applications and offered six fellowships, supporting individuals and groups to develop ongoing projects addressing specific gaps in South-South connectivity:

• **Contemporary Nights** – a curatorial forum comprising of curator, Sarah Abdu Bushra and dancer-choreographer Dawit Seto Gobeze and showcasing post-disciplinary artistic productions in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – explored conversation as an artistic practice culminating in an exhibition that reconsidered the participating artists' relationship with time.

• **Marcellina Dwi Kencana Putri 'Cella'** – from Gudskul, an Indonesian collective study and contemporary art ecosystem and public learning space formed by three art collectives in Jakarta – organized Arisan, a series of virtual gatherings exploring alternative economic models for sustaining arts organizations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

• **Journalist, filmmaker and development practitioner Emmanuel Hove Mhike** worked on establishing a bio-cultural protocol in Mazvihwa, Zimbabwe, empowering his community to become better stewards of their resources by articulating values, procedures and priorities as the basis for engaging with external actors.

• **second practice**, which brings together Fatima Hussain, Ayesha Kamal Khan and Abeerah Zahid, developed The Artist as Translator project connecting creatives from the Global South to initiate a chain of translation of cultural artifacts, while also conducting workshops and mapping translation methods during the fellowship.

• **Diwan of Culture, Design & Innovation (DCDI)** – based in Lebanon x Istanbul and represented by Jana Aridi, Ali AbuAwad and Aya Saiidi – organized panel discussions at international events on decolonializing design practices, aiming to shift the colonial gaze in the design sector and stimulate critical conversations.

• **Tanya Dutt** from India – founder of CultureClan which solves socio-economic issues of remote communities through research and multivalent use of hyperlocal heritage resources – initiated a rural network of artistic inclusivity in South Asia. Closed-door virtual forums brought together professionals from India, Nepal and Pakistan to address the challenges of building inclusive arts communities in remote geographies.

To develop their ongoing initiatives, each fellowship team received an activity grant of \$3,000 USD as well as various forms of support, including stipends, critical feedback from advisors and facilitated group dialogues including peer exchanges and workshops. Fellows were also supported with a joint grant of \$20,000 USD to collaborate on a collective project aimed at cross pollinating African and Asian networks. As their joint project, six fellows undertook a ten-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), centered around the Sharjah Biennale 15, to deepen their understanding of Global South identities and explore local arts practices through visits to key organizations in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The visit, which culminated in a presentation of their initiatives at NYU Abu Dhabi, served as a catalyst for personal reflections, collective arts experiences and peer-to-peer learning.

# RECURRING THEMES AND KEY LEARNINGS

In the course of the extensive dialogues with the fellows over 13 months, three recurring themes emerged, centered on working methods, network building, and collaboration within the diverse cultural and creative sectors across the Global South's varied geographies:



## CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE FUNDING:

The continuous struggle for sustainability within the cultural and creative sectors of the Global South results in a high prevalence of individuals and organizations operating in survival mode due to insufficient funding structures and limited resources.

Discussions emphasized the need for flexible funding models and the importance of local agency, while also underscoring the challenges posed by perpetual crisis management involved in the daily life of many cultural workers in the Global South where weak digital infrastructure, unreliable power supply and ongoing conflicts are unfortunate realities.



## OBJECTIVES OF TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY:

Many fundamental questions arose regarding desired types of connections among peers (such as networking connections, networks, collaborations and communities of practice).

It was argued that peer-to-peer connections should prioritize being process-oriented over always being output driven.

Fellows emphasized the significance of informal peer networks, the value of exchanging existing localized knowledge (rather than producing new outputs), and the need to nurture genuine relationships before pursuing specific joint outputs through collaborative projects.



## THE GLOBAL SOUTH AS AN IMAGINED SPACE:

The construct of the Global South speaks to the dynamics of power within the global system.

For most applicants to the fellowship, the Global South was an imagined space, which served as "a point of connection" with other cultural workers operating in similar contexts. It served as "a nexus of ideas transcending both geographical and ideological boundaries."

The fellows extensively reflected on significance and value of identifying with the Global South in their work as cultural professionals. A central question guiding their exploration was whether to embrace or distance themselves from a Global South identity.

Crucially, the fellows recognized that cultivating new solidarities among cultural workers in the Global South required learning to exist with each other in critical difference.

In terms of programming network-building initiatives to connect the Global South, the pilot edition of the South-South Arts Fellowships yielded four key insights:

**First, peer networks are essential yet underfunded**, as fellows stressed the crucial role of connections but noted insufficient investment in network building, particularly for arts managers.

**Second, there is a significant gap in connecting facilitators** active in fostering transnational cultural relations in the Global South – this area calls for more opportunities and attention from funding and facilitating organizations.

**Third, successful network building demands curatorial, intercultural and administrative expertise**, and should necessarily involve local and regional intermediary cultural organizations.

**Finally, fostering trust among peers demands a nuanced approach**, recognizing critical differences and necessitating intentional efforts to navigate them within diverse communities.

# SOUTH-SOUTH ARTS FELLOWSHIPS (SSAF)

2022-23

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

In 2022, Living Arts International (LAI) launched the pilot edition of the South-South Arts Fellowships (SSAF) to promote wider and deeper networks within the Global South, particularly among cultural workers and groups actively programming and facilitating transnational initiatives and networks in their own region and beyond.

LAI was specifically seeking network builders and facilitators with experience in bringing together and creating opportunities for other creative practitioners and cultural workers in the Global South. The fellowship aimed to offer opportunities for such facilitators to both advance their existing work (locally, regionally or internationally) and meet new peers from other parts of the Global South with whom they could cross pollinate networks through collaborative activities. The fellowship was open to individuals and groups working in arts, culture, and/or heritage in over 100 developing economies in Africa, Asia (including west and central Asia), and Oceania. The fellowship also welcomed applicants working at the intersection of culture and conflict transformation in their societies.

Six fellowships were awarded in June 2022, running for a span of 13 months until July 2023. Fellows were expected to bring with them ideas to further develop their ongoing initiatives: such initiatives were expected to respond to a specific locally felt gap in the fabric of South-South connectivity and be in the early or mid-stages of development. Fellows were provided activity grants (of \$3,000 USD each)

to steer their ongoing projects to their next stage of development. To this end, fellows curated and executed an activity in the first phase of the fellowship.

Beyond their ongoing pursuits, fellows were encouraged and supported to co-curate and co-organize up to three collective activities in the second and final phase of the fellowship. These collaborations were meant to cross-pollinate African and Asian projects and networks. A collaborative activity grant (of \$20,000 USD shared among all six fellowships) was made available for the joint projects.

In addition to the activity grants, the fellowship provided additional forms of support to selected candidates. Fellows received stipends for their time and ideas. Expertise from three advisors shaped individual and collective projects through workshops and personalized sessions. The LAI team organized a series of virtual peer exchanges, first to introduce the fellows to each other's work and contexts, and later to support peer reviews and joint development of project ideas. As the fellowship journey drew to a close, a final workshop brought together fellows, advisors and organizers to share reflections.

## South-South Fellowship at a Glance

**100**  
countries  
included in the open call

**6**  
Fellowships  
awarded

Program ran from  
**June 2022 to  
July 2023**

### Each Fellow received:

**\$3,000**  
USD stipend  
for  
participation

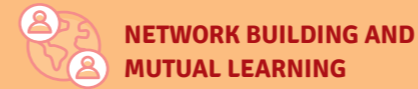
**\$3,000**  
USD activity grant  
to further an existing  
initiative responding to  
gaps in South-South  
connectivity

**3**  
expert advisors  
from the  
Global South

**\$20,000**  
USD grant  
to support collaborative  
activities among  
their group

Facilitated online  
peer exchanges  
and workshops

# CORE VALUES IN THE PROGRAM DESIGN



## NETWORK BUILDING AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Network building among cultural workers in the Global South was a pivotal value guiding the fellowship. The program was developed in response to the limited support available to cultural workers in the Global South to create sustainable intra- and inter-regional professional links where they would be most meaningful to existing gaps and priorities. In doing so, the fellowship recognized the profound impact of connections within and between regions that share similar socio-cultural contexts and challenges. By linking cultural practitioners with interest and experience in facilitating Global South connections, the fellowship aimed to nurture a web of relationships that transcends borders and fosters mutual learning.

It was also our hope that a sense of solidarity would ensue, ensuring that the exchange is not just about projects, but about building peer relationships that can foster sustainable cultural growth in the South. This is why the fellowship was explicit in its support for network building, as against the creation of new artworks, productions, performance, touring, research or publication initiatives. While we did not exclude conferences and panel discussions from the scope of the fellowship, we were more interested in new and alternative ways of network building, especially those that center the arts in their approach. We also encouraged the use of new concepts and formats for hosting and gathering, including those inspired by local cultures and customs.



## LOCALITY AND CONTINUITY

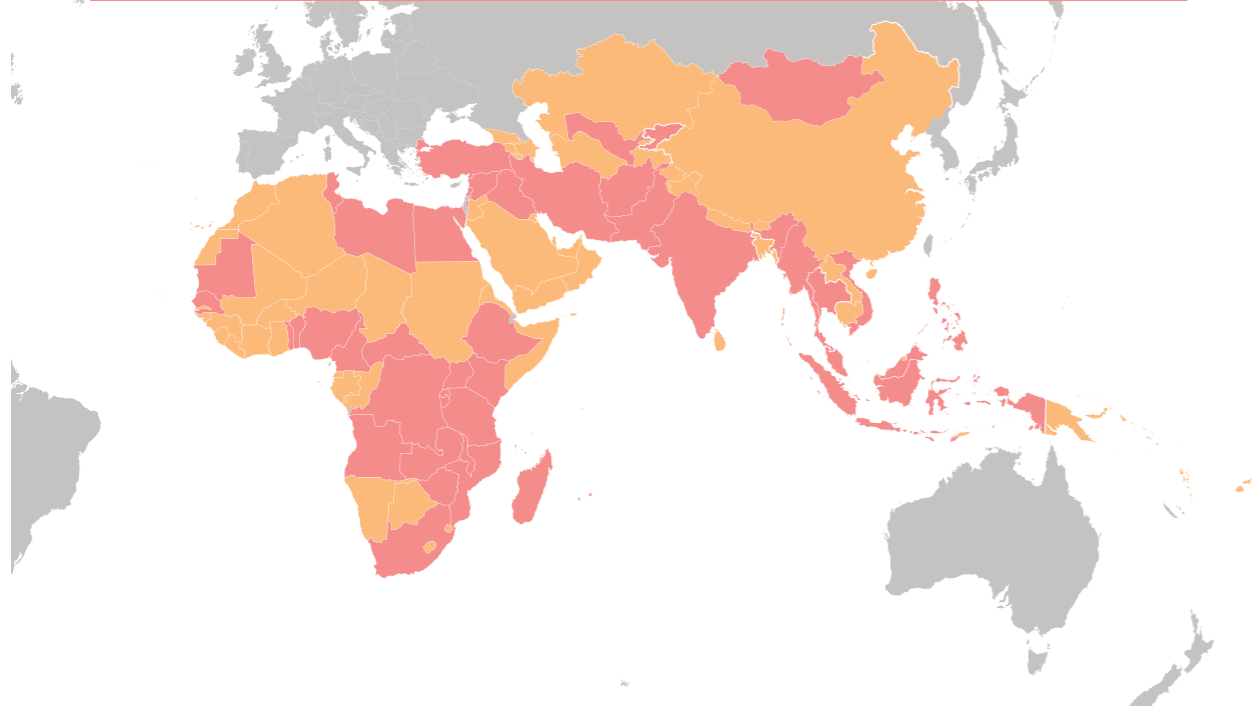
Locality was a core value in our fellowship as it emphasizes the significance of engaging with and respecting the unique characteristics of a specific geographic and cultural context. We also recognized that continuity was crucial for cultural projects in developing countries, as it lays the groundwork for sustainable growth and lasting impact. In these regions, where projects often experience interruptions due to irregular or insufficient funding, fostering continuity ensures endeavors thrive beyond initial efforts. That is why the program encouraged interested candidates to apply with ongoing initiatives that could benefit from support for further development, thereby enhancing their sustainability in the long run. Brand new ideas and projects that would be developed from scratch within the fellowship period were excluded. Ultimately, these values we hoped would ensure that the fellowship contributes to the sustainability and vitality of local cultural ecosystems.

# DEMAND FOR SOUTH-SOUTH CONNECTIVITY

*“It is a privilege to have an opportunity to share my community life, work and ambitions with people of diverse nationalities but facing similar challenges of imposed identity, limited exposure as well as issues of community sovereignty.”*

Emmanuel Mhike, South-South Arts Fellow

We received approximately 180 applications from 47 countries in Asia and Africa.



- Countries and territories from which applications were received
- Countries and territories eligible for the fellowship
- Other countries

The fellowship was open to cultural workers (and groups) from 107 countries and territories in the Global South, spread across Africa, Asia (including west and central Asia) and Oceania (including Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu).<sup>1</sup> Applicants were expected to be citizens of the eligible countries or territories as well as residing and working there. Both conditions had to be met.<sup>2</sup>

We received approximately 180 applications from 47 countries in Asia and Africa. Among these, 60% of the applicants

originated from Africa, while the remaining 40% were from various parts of Asia, including west and central Asia. Notably, half the applicants were under the age of 35. In terms of employment, the majority (70%) worked exclusively in the cultural and creative sector, while the remaining 30% worked mainly in the sector, but also had a second source of employment in another sector. Around 44% of applicants identified as freelancers, while 21% were solely employed by an organization. Nearly a quarter of the applicants wore both hats – they had an organizational role but also freelanced on the side. Eleven applications were

1. Owing to our limited resources, the program was not opened to cultural workers in Latin America and the Caribbean in the pilot phase.  
2. However, consideration was given to applicants from eligible countries or territories who were currently based in the Global North owing to recent circumstances beyond their control affecting their countries/territories of origin.

shortlisted and ultimately, the fellowship was granted to six individuals or groups, with two awardees selected from Africa and four from Asia (including west Asia).

The importance of establishing connections with peers in the Global South was articulated in most applications received. For many applicants, forging links with peers through the fellowship held potential not only for inter-cultural learning and knowledge exchange, but also to effectively close existing skills gaps. Many cultural workers

operating in situations of continuous conflict viewed the fellowship as a means to break the isolation they often felt. They sought inspiration from solutions to similar challenges and were eager to build a community of practice to collectively problem solve with others from similar contexts. A subset of participants, discouraged by the entrenched Eurocentrism in prevailing discourse and narratives, were keen on South-South connections to promote alternative perspectives that would give agency to lived experiences and localized knowledge.



# THE FELLOWSHIP ECOSYSTEM

## THE FELLOWS



**ANUPAMA SEKHAR**  
(India/UAE)

*“Even in 2022, having regular and structured access to peers in the Global South remains a privilege for numerous cultural workers. I got involved in co-creating the South-South Arts Fellowships as a first step towards changing this unfortunate status quo.”*

CURATOR



**CONTEMPORARY NIGHTS**  
from Ethiopia  
Sarah Abdu Bushra and  
Dawit Seto Gobeze

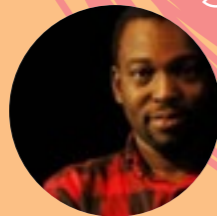


**EMMANUEL HOVE MHIKE**  
from Zimbabwe



**DIWAN OF CULTURE, DESIGN & INNOVATION (DCDI)**  
from Lebanon x Istanbul  
Ali AbuAwad, Jana Aridi and Aya Saiidi

COORDINATOR



**FRANCOIS BOUDA**  
(Burkina Faso)

*“In my mind, there is no doubt that such a powerful initiative like the South-South Arts Fellowships must be expanded to reach a broader community of cultural stakeholders eager to contribute to the cause of cultural cooperation within and across the Global South.”*



**TANYA DUTT**  
from India



**MARCELLINA DWI KENCANA PUTRI 'CELLA'**  
from Indonesia



**SECOND PRACTICE**  
from Pakistan  
Fatima Hussain, Ayesha Kamal Khan  
and Abeerah Zahid

ADVISORS



**KHADIJA EL BENNAOUI**  
(Morocco/UAE)

*“I joined the South-South Arts Fellowship because I strongly believe that it is these kinds of initiatives we need to set the foundations of networks of collaborations within the Global South. The prospect of seeing this endeavor unfold before my eyes is what drives my engagement in the arts and culture sector.”*



**DEIRDRE PRINS-SOLANI**  
(South Africa)

*“Dialogues and conversation between creatives of the South are bound to catalyze and nurture ways of being in the world, and seeing the world which are transformative and deeply healing.”*



**POOJA SOOD**  
(India)

*“Throughout my career, I have been committed to the idea of building South-South solidarities, not least because such few opportunities exist to enable us to do so. The South-South Arts Fellowships program has the potential of bringing together dedicated people and innovative processes to build networks within and between regions which is as necessary as it is powerful.”*

**LAI Leadership team**  
(Cambodia/UK)

**Program and finance teams**  
(Cambodia)

**Board members**  
(International)



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# FELLOWS' INITIATIVES TO CONNECT THE SOUTH

*“This program gave me the confidence to rebuild, plan and reiterate the individual activity that I proposed to the Advisors and the team from SSAF. This flexibility and openness in this fellowship is something I’m really grateful for and it became a lesson for me as a program manager, to value the process and that change is undeniable.”*

As part of the program, each Fellow was supported with a \$3,000 USD grant and at least two sessions with an advisor, to implement a hybrid or virtual activity to further develop their ongoing initiatives related to South-South connectivity. Highlights of these activities are shared on the following pages.

## FELLOWSHIP COLLECTIVE: Contemporary Nights (Ethiopia)



**Contemporary Nights** is a curatorial forum directing, showcasing, and documenting post-disciplinary artistic productions. The collective brings together Sarah Abdu Bushra, curator of visual and performing arts exhibitions and Dawit Seto Gobeze, contemporary dancer and choreographer.



### CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE: Conversation as artistic practice - Understanding art beyond its materiality

Between October and November 2022, Contemporary Nights curated an edition of its longstanding GOJO artists companionship, bringing together Ethiopian artists from various disciplines as well as maker communities in a series of five in-person meetings and studio sessions in Addis Ababa. The project focused on the art of dialogue, viewing conversation as a nucleus to sustain and protect collective works against tremors,

*“The growing relationships among artist companions was most exciting to witness”*

tensions and turbulence. The companionship was also an exercise in directing the primary concern towards each other’s wellbeing. *“Articulating value in gathering consistently and continually without necessarily working towards an end goal was a key challenge,”* explains Sarah.

The conversations culminated in *The Way We Work: An Exhibition in Progress* at the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa, presenting a visual reconsideration of the group’s relationship with time. *“The growing relationships among artist companions was most exciting to witness,”* recalls Sarah.



1 Contemporary Nights’ GOJO artists companionship initiative in Addis Ababa focused on the art of dialogue

2 *The Way We Work: An Exhibition in Progress* at the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design, Addis Ababa, presented a visual reconsideration of the participating group’s relationship with time



**INDIVIDUAL FELLOW:  
Emmanuel Hove Mhike (Zimbabwe)**



**Emmanuel** is a journalist, filmmaker and development practitioner, whose work revolves around supporting grassroots development initiatives at the margins. At Muonde Trust (an organization that seeks to nurture locally driven creativity and innovations), Emmanuel is responsible for initiating and coordinating community-based development seminars, workshops, research as well as arts and culture festivals.

livelihood. Here, Emmanuel supported efforts to establish a Bio-Cultural Protocol (BCP) to articulate community-determined values, procedures and priorities as the basis for engaging with external actors such as governments, companies, academics and NGOs. At its heart, the act of developing and adopting a BCP seeks to empower resourceful but marginalized communities in articulating stewardship of their resources, affirming responsibilities and asserting their rights.

**CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE:  
Strengthening community sovereignty -  
Establishing the Mazvihwa Bio-Cultural  
Protocol**

Located in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe, Mazvihwa is a rural area known for its picturesque landscapes, traditional way of life, and agricultural activities that play a central role in the community's

To develop the BCP, Emmanuel's community engaged in a facilitated process mapping threats to the community, their collective vision as well as concerns for and about the future. *"I am excited about the interest in and growth of my BCP network initiative, which besides getting massive support from the entire local community is also attracting the interest of many arts and development practitioners across Africa, Asia and even Europe."*

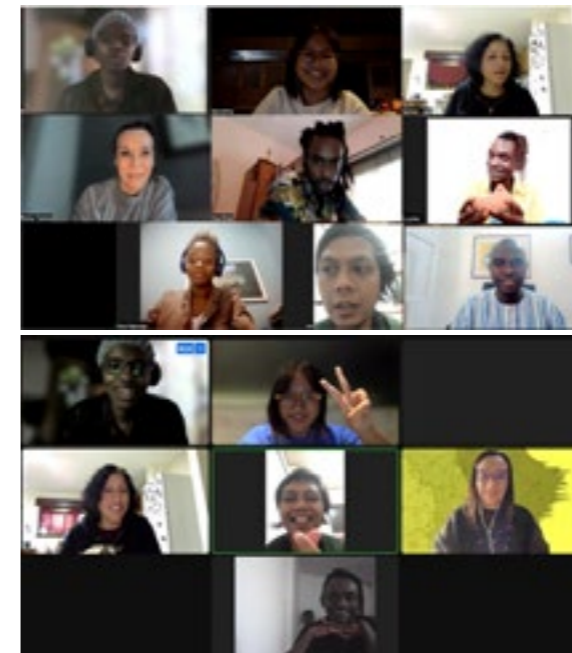


1 Emmanuel visits a cultural history and artifacts exhibition with traditional leaders and elders  
©Emmanuel Hove Mhike



2 The Mazvihwa community gathers to discuss the development of the bio-cultural protocol  
©Emmanuel Hove Mhike

**INDIVIDUAL FELLOW:  
Marcellina Dwi Kencana Putri 'Cella' (Indonesia)**



The Arisan virtual conversations gathered peers from Asia, Africa, and Latin America for discussions on alternative economic models for the arts  
© Marcellina Dwi Kencana Putri

**Cella** is General Manager at Gudskul, a collective study and contemporary art ecosystem and public learning space formed by three art collectives in Jakarta: ruangrupa, Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara (GHH). She is based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

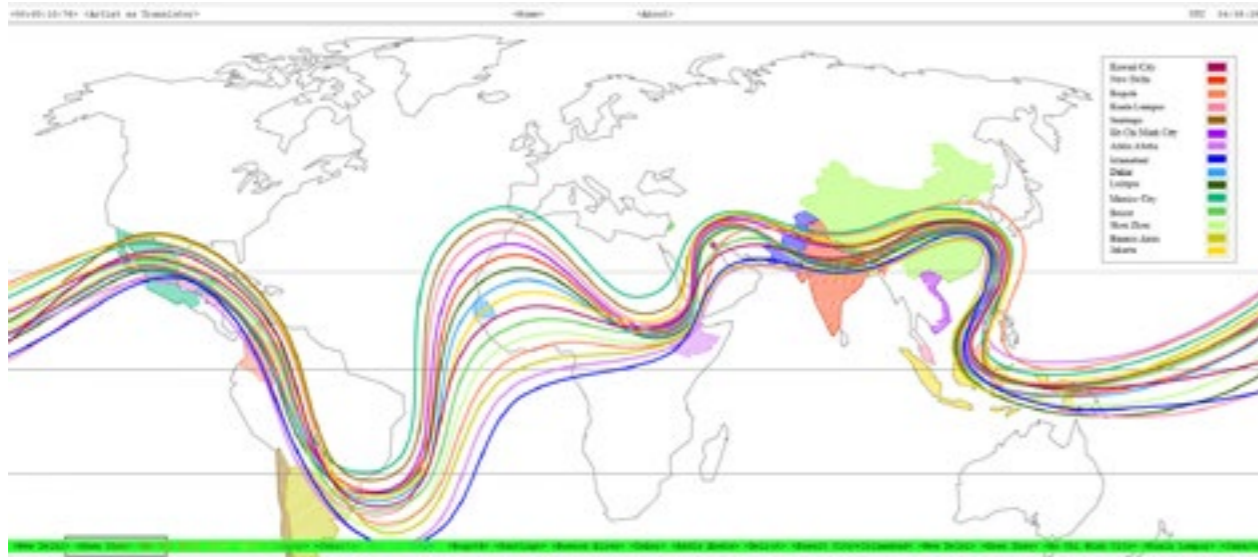
**CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE:  
The get-together tradition of Arisan -  
Exploring alternative economic models**

Cella organized *Arisan*, a series of informal online social gatherings inspired by the Indonesian circular economy system and bringing together arts communities from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In Indonesia, *Arisan* gather as a small-sized community with a purpose of togetherness and are mostly centered around rotating savings to be used for a variety of different occasions and goals. Instead of saving money, Cella invited peers to join conversations and to collectively decide what they want

*Shared stories and journeys  
created a rich knowledge  
exchange*

to collect. Closed-door virtual conversations - organized every two weeks between October and December 2022 - focused on sharing and reflecting about alternative economic models for arts organizations to sustain themselves. Certain organizations were exploring NFTs, while others were leveraging local arts festivals as fundraising avenues. Striking a balance between international and local funding sources emerged as a prevalent challenge for many. The shared stories and journeys created a rich knowledge exchange, enhancing collaboration and camaraderie among participants. *"I was most excited by bringing so many old friends together and introducing each participant to new friendships,"* concludes Cella.

**FELLOWSHIP COLLECTIVE:  
second practice (Pakistan)**



Global South geographies connected through the project mapped on [artistastranslator.com](http://artistastranslator.com)

**second practice** is a collaborative research practice that interrogates knowledge production and dissemination within postcolonial geographies. Fatima Hussain, Ayesha Kamal Khan and Abeerah Zahid have been working together in various capacities for a decade, and formally came together as second practice in 2018 as an extension to their individual practices.

their location that they deem difficult to translate. The initiator archives this with as much description and information as possible to facilitate the next artist-translator in the chain to respond to the initial submission and look for its translation as accurately as possible in their proximity. The chain continues with each artist taking on the role of both initiator and translator. The website [artistastranslator.com](http://artistastranslator.com) showcases the translations done thus far by 15 collaborators from across the Global South, as well as the conversations that have occurred as part of the project. During the fellowship they also conducted workshops with creatives and Pakistani school students to explore and map methods of translations. *"I was particularly excited to work with children, map translation methods and locate local materials and methods during the workshops,"* note second practice.

**CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE:  
Knowing the unknown across multiple geographies - The artist as translator**

*The Artist as Translator* is an ongoing project that invites creative practitioners to initiate a chain of translation by sharing with other collaborators an object, image, text or sound that is so entrenched in

**FELLOWSHIP COLLECTIVE:  
Diwan of Culture, Design & Innovation (DCDI), Istanbul X Lebanon**



**Diwan of Culture, Design & Innovation (DCDI)** is a multidisciplinary creative hub set up in Beirut, Lebanon in 2022 to respond to the current needs and challenges of local creatives. For the fellowship, DCDI was represented by its co-founders Jana Aridi and Ali AbuAwad and its Operations Coordinator, Aya Saiidi.

**CONNECTIVITY INITIATIVE:  
Shifting the colonial gaze -  
Decolonializing design practices**

DCDI organized two panel discussions in October 2022 on decolonializing design practices, one at Dutch Design Week in Eindhoven, Netherlands and another at *SilSal - A Sustainable Design Exhibition* in Beirut, Lebanon. *Shifting the Colonial Gaze: Discussion of Permanence in Design Practices*, explored the decolonialization of design in post-colonial contexts. Moderated by curator Saskia van Stein, the panel brought together artist Siba Sahabi, curator Rawad Baaklini and DCDI's Jana Aridi. *Sustainability and Cultural Colonialism: Remnant Design*, brought together designer Philippa Dahrouj, architect Sara Rita Kattan and architect Karim Nader for a conversation moderated by visual communication expert, Hanan Bou Akl.

For DCDI, such discussions on the impact of colonialism on design practice and knowledge systems are crucial to the development of the sector in the region. *"The point was to start a conversation, and we did,"* says DCDI co-founder Ali AbuAwad. *"For the future, we will need to look into ways of moving from discussing the topic to creating agents of change."*



DCDI explored decolonialization of design practices through panel discussions in Eindhoven and Beirut





Cella presents her work on building a knowledge-sharing community of practice for artists and cultural workers

fakkan Art Centre and Irthi Contemporary Crafts Council in Sharjah. These visits provided the fellows with valuable insights into both state-supported and private initiatives within the arts, catering to Emirati and international artists. Further, the hospitality they received reaffirmed the value of non-monetary resources in widening and deepening cultural exchanges within the Global South.

The visit, which was structured around the Sharjah Biennial 15, also acted as a catalyst for reflections on the evolving role of diametric identifiers such as Global South in today's globalized world. This was a pertinent conversation to have in Sharjah as the Biennial - organized by the Sharjah Art Foundation - has always positioned itself as a platform for transnational conversations within a "postcolonial constellation of the Global South", as stated by Foundation's Director, Hoor Al Qasimi in the Curatorial Statement for this edition. Conceived by the late Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor and curated by Al Qasimi, the Biennial brought together works by more than 150 artists and collectives

from over 70 countries in 16 venues across Sharjah from 7 February to 11 June 2023. "Through the experience of viewing the artworks at the Sharjah Biennial as a group, I enjoyed learning about historical and cultural events specific to each fellows' nation, including deep-rooted political and socio-economic struggles. This intervention has had a lasting impact on my outlook," admits Tanya Dutt, the fellow from India.

The visit culminated in a presentation hosted by NYU Abu Dhabi, marking the fellows' inaugural joint showcase as a cohort. The fellows shared their projects, as well as common ground and divergences with an audience comprising faculty members.

This UAE visit evolved into a collective journey of discovery for the fellows, underlining the value of face-to-face encounters, received hospitalities, shared arts experiences and co-existing in critical difference, all crucial in fostering safe spaces for peer-to-peer learning.



The fellows visit the The Africa Institute, an interdisciplinary academic research institute in Sharjah

© Hadi Zounji, OCD Productions

## REFLECTIONS ON CONNECTING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Through numerous peer exchanges and workshops spanning 13 months, we engaged in extensive dialogues with the fellows, which revealed both their shared insights as well as diverse perspectives on working, network building, and collaborating within the cultural and creative sectors across the varied geographies of the Global South. Among the recurrent themes, three significant issues emerged – the challenges of sustainable funding, objectives informing transnational collaborations and contestations around Global South identities – that we explore further in this section of the report.

# SURVIVING IN SURVIVAL MODE

## Sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors in the Global South

Across the the cultural and creative sectors in the Global South, the issue of operating in survival mode remains pervasive. In our many conversations with the fellows, it became increasingly evident that the notion of sustainability encompasses multifaceted challenges, particularly in contexts where public support for arts and culture is conspicuous by its absence.

The need of the hour is for existing funding models that demonstrate flexibility, responsiveness, and long-term scope. This is because it remains very common for projects initiated with enthusiasm in the Global South to frequently encounter setbacks due to irregular or inadequate funding. Further, the inherent limitations of project-based funding approaches hinder the growth and stability of local arts organizations. Small-scale initiatives rooted in localized needs and contexts within the South face an additional and unique funding dilemma. These endeavors are not designed for scalability or internationalization, which are frequent prerequisites for various funding opportunities. As a result, there is a scarcity of funds accessible to sup-

port hyperlocal initiatives. The use of local vocabularies, materials, and practices within projects also needs encouragement, rather than assuming universality in artistic concepts.

In the area of network building, we discovered that funding for cross-disciplinary exchanges remains limited, both transnationally and domestically. Similarly, resources allocated for network development among arts managers lag behind those for artists and curators. Given the interest in knowledge exchange within the Global South, we also noted the importance of open archives and dedicated funding for documenting lessons learnt from past projects. As

expressed by our fellow Tanya, “*There is a crisis of documentation in the Global South.*”

Acknowledging the historical reliance of the cultural and creative sectors in the Global South on funding from the Global North, we scrutinized the dilemma that sometimes arises in retaining local agency when accepting external funding. While the value of external support cannot be underestimated (particularly in contexts where public funding for arts and culture is limited or absent), we heard concerns about local actors potentially experiencing a loss of agency in terms of their ability to steer the trajectory of their projects. However, the risk of losing access to funding opportunities could cause local actors to hold back on raising concerns or asserting agency in their projects.

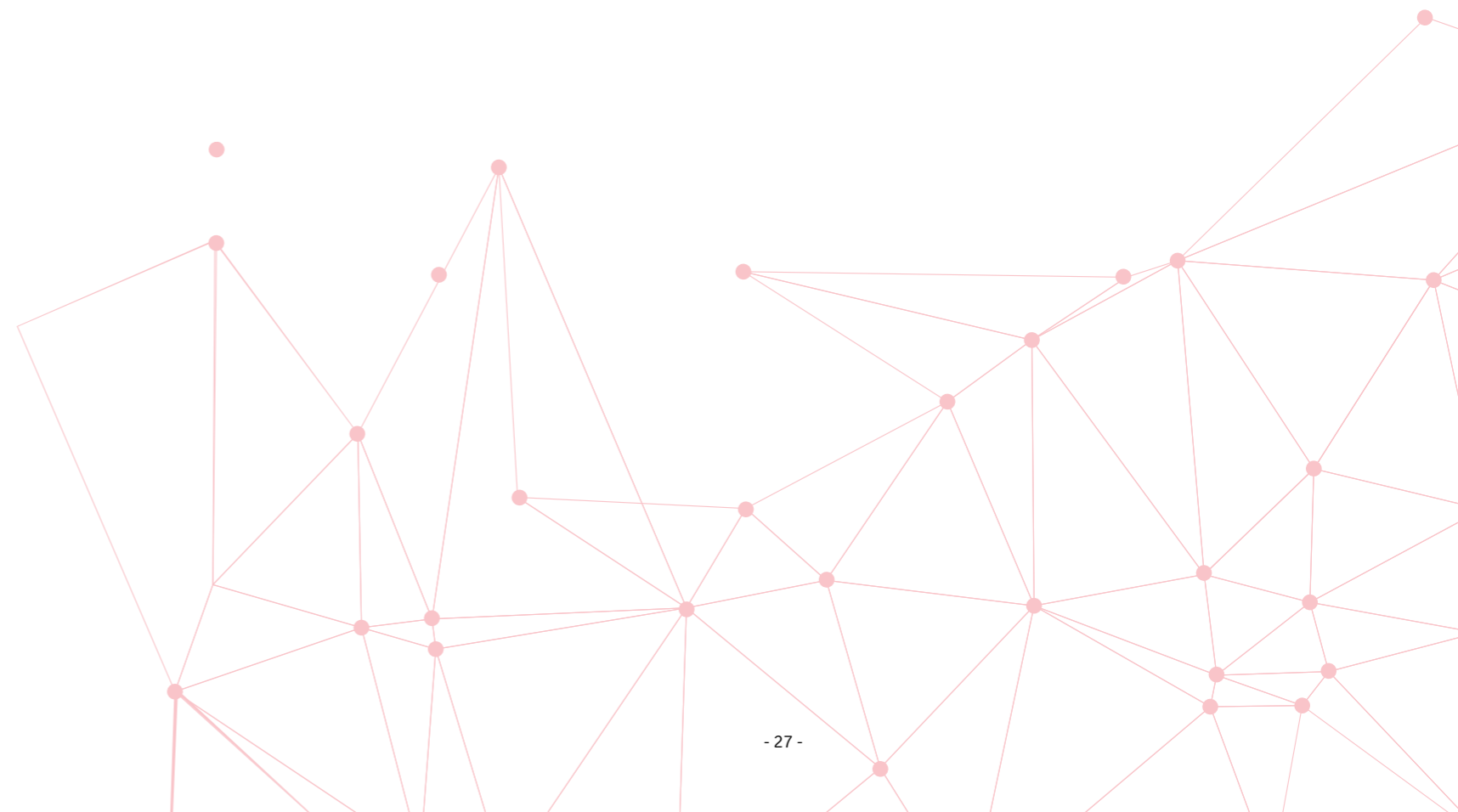
While we were unable to answer the question of whether securing adequate funding for cultural work in the Global South from sources within the same region was feasible, the pivotal role of independent funding (where it exists) was strongly underlined. These non-governmental structures, no matter their size, often offer much-needed stability to local arts ecosystems by adeptly navigating policy

changes and political shifts. Such resilience in local funding and facilitating organizations remains critical to the sustainability of the sector.

*There is a crisis of documentation in the Global South.*

Not only cultural workers but even organizations appear to operate in survival mode in many parts of the Global South. In addition, the daily reality of living and working in these contexts frequently involves navigating through crises. Even basic necessities like reliable power supply and stable internet can be elusive for many. This perpetual environment of uncertainty and instability has normalized working from a space of anxiety for many. Constant crisis management drains resources, focus, and optimism, complicating efforts to address underlying systemic challenges. Yet, this remains an often-overlooked aspect in funding and networking initiatives to support the sector in the Global South.

South-to-South connectivity is a great opportunity for creatives from lesser known contexts and cultures to be visible and connected: artwork by Ethiopian artist Ermias Adefris featured in the Bruh Club Arts Mailing List newsletter, which showcases and connects the Ethiopian creative industry.



# REHEARSING HOSPITALITIES

## Connectivity and collaboration in the Global South

During the fellowship, two pivotal questions consistently emerged: what specific connections are we seeking and with whom? Should the pursuit of collaborative outputs be an indispensable goal in cultural exchange?



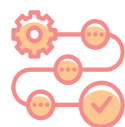
### What specific connections are we seeking and with whom?

The importance of sharing and circulating existing localized knowledge (rather than producing new knowledge) was established as a significant objective of South-South connectivity. Those working locally (as against internationally) may want to come together simply to exchange ideas, without necessarily wanting to collaborate, scale up their projects or internationalize them.

*Those working locally may want to come together simply to exchange ideas, without necessarily wanting to collaborate, scale up their projects or internationalize them.*

Peer networks are critical and often act as informal support systems, given that many organizations and cultural workers operate in survival mode. In this context, prioritizing wellbeing and fostering a culture of care within peer communities was stressed, as was dedicated time for reflection and sharing beyond the context of the funded projects being managed. In the moving words of our fellow Dawit Seto, the aspiration was to have the opportunity, even if occasionally, to work “*slowly, intently, outside of urgencies*”.

Crucially, connections were sought not only with peers from other countries but also with those working in various regions within one’s own country or territory. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of connecting with peers who work in artistic disciplines different from one’s own field of expertise. These aspects hold particular significance because networking within one’s own country or territory and across different sectors may not always receive sufficient resources or support.



### Cultural exchange as process, not output-driven

We agreed that collaborations should always be good accidents rather than forced encounters. However, we also recognized that, in practice, collaborations frequently emerge as a prerequisite linked to funding opportunities. In this context, we deliberated on the importance of actively exploring alternative approaches to collaborations and co-working within connectivity projects. Collaborations do not necessarily have to be solely focused on producing specific outputs; they can also be process-oriented and centered around shared experiences and learning.

among cultural workers in the Global South. The importance of investing in face-to-face interactions to nurture meaningful relationships at a more relaxed and unhurried pace were underlined. In the early stages of engagement and relationship building, the process of getting to know each other should prioritize the journey itself over any joint output. It is also critical to allow for time to recognize, experience and understand diverse approaches to cultural work in different contexts within the Global South.

A phased approach to collaborations was strongly advocated, beginning with informal information exchanges

Allowing enough time and resources to support the early phases of engagement were deemed critical for any formal or informal alliances and networks to emerge eventually. At the same time, it was recognized that formal structures need not necessarily be the end-goal, acknowledging that informal networks can prove more valuable in some cases. Therefore, it becomes important in any South-South connectivity project to first explore what forms of peer relationships are most useful in different settings within the Global South.

*It is critical to allow for time to recognize, experience and understand diverse approaches to cultural work in different contexts within the Global South.*

# AN IMAGINED SPACE

## Interrogating the notion of the Global South

The concept of the Global South – a part of the shorthand of international relations since the 1970s to collectively refer to developing countries – has evolved in meaning over time and is now both accepted and debated in equal measure. In its essence, the construct of the Global South speaks to the distribution of power in the global system, and the asymmetries therein. While certain uses of this concept enhance these power imbalances, others contribute to reducing them.

In 2023, the term - once confined to academia - resurfaced both in political and cultural spheres. The expansion of the BRICS grouping, the G-20 Summit hosted by India and the conflict in West Asia have renewed discussions on the relevance of the label, which is sometimes used for a group of over 130 countries representing almost two-thirds of the world’s population and encompassing economically, politically, and culturally diverse countries across Africa, Asia (including west Asia), Oceania, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This term is also frequently encountered in the art world: the *Sharjah Biennial 15: Thinking Historically in the Present* (7 February to 11 June 2023) marked the coming together of the art world’s Global South and its diaspora, as did the 35<sup>th</sup> edition of the São Paulo Art Biennial (6 September – 10 December 2023) which presented diverse artistic practices from locations outside the hegemonic circuit.

*The Global South is less a place and more “a point of connection, a nexus of ideas transcending both geographical and ideological boundaries”*

South. A significant number of applicants to the fellowship also recognized the significance of South-South connectivity. To them, the Global South is less a place and more “*a point of connection, a nexus of ideas transcending both geographical and ideological boundaries*”. For some applicants, the construct provided an organic framework for creating new solidarities centered around the care and mutual aid needed to navigate the turbulent crises being experienced in many societies. For others, it served as a useful space from which to challenge and critique the perceived dominance of Western knowledge systems, including within art history and the art world. To sum up, for many applicants, the Global South was the imagined space from which to cultivate “*counter-cartographies, opening regions, potentialities, new configurations of memory, imagination, and investigation.*”

Although the program was distinctly designed within the framework of the Global South, LAI engaged in ongoing discussions and debates about this term with the fellows throughout their fellowship journey. Their reflections were primarily guided by the inquiry: should we embrace or distance ourselves from a Global South identity, and what motivations would underlie such a decision? One argument was that the term Global South was a problematic product of the Western gaze and, thus, reductive. The value of diametric identifiers (such as Global North versus Global South) in today’s globalized world was also interrogated, especially considering that certain cultural workers navigate both worlds regularly and with ease. This concept of continuous, fluid shifts—both in physical locations and one’s identity—is a topic of our times. It is, for instance, set to be examined at the Venice Biennale in 2024, curated by Adriano Pedrosa under the theme, *Foreigners Everywhere*.



Biennials in Sharjah and São Paulo celebrate diverse artistic practices from the Global South and locations outside the hegemonic circuit.

The term strongly influenced the conceptualization of the fellowship: LAI designed the fellowship to specifically nurture networks among cultural connectors within the Global South. The fellowship was open to cultural workers and groups from more than 100 developing countries and territories spread across Africa, Asia (including west Asia), and Oceania, who were invited to apply if they were interested in establishing connections with peers in the distinct context of the Global



The Venice Biennale 2024 under the theme, *Foreigners Everywhere* explores a key topic of our times – our continuous, fluid shifts as cultural workers both in physical locations and identity

As explained by curator Adriano Pedrosa, “*The Biennale Arte 2024 will focus on artists who are themselves foreigners, immigrants, expatriates, diasporic, émigrés,*

*exiled, and refugees—especially those who have moved between the Global South and the Global North.*” Another point of contention was whether the term accurately represented the immense diversity within the South. While the contexts the fellows came from shared many similarities, they were also acutely conscious of hierarchies and peripheries within the Global South. This acknowledgment brought to light that assuming solidarity within this context is not always a given. Further, we were reminded that creating such solidarities demands careful cultivation and nurturing. We also agreed that a pivotal step in fostering new solidarities among cultural workers in the Global South involves learning to exist in critical difference with each other.

Although we did not reach any definitive conclusions, a thought-provoking question we posed for self-reflection at the culmination of the Fellowship was this: if we, in the Global South, had the freedom to name ourselves, what would we choose?



Images from Bandung, Indonesia commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bandung Conference of 1955, a pivotal event in the history of Asia-Africa solidarity.

## CONCLUSIONS

# KEY PROGRAMMATIC LEARNINGS

## from the pilot edition of the South-South Arts Fellowships

As we conclude our pilot edition of the South-South Arts Fellowships 2022-2023, Living Arts International (LAI) seeks to share four insights derived from our experience in developing and executing a network-building initiative for connectors in the Global South.

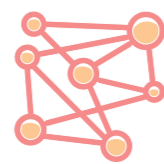
The need for peer networks among cultural workers from similar contexts remains strong, especially among facilitators of transnational connections with the ability to cross-pollinate their respective networks. However, it is imperative to recognize that effective network building demands specialized expertise. Further, the ability to coexist with peers in critical difference is a skill set that is becoming increasingly vital for cultural workers in our ever more fragile and fragmented world.



### Peer networks, an underfunded priority

Throughout the fellowship journey, fellows consistently emphasized the immense importance of establishing connections with peers across Asia and Africa, spanning diverse artistic disciplines and crossing regional borders. Fellows as well as a substantial portion of our applicants recognized these connections as pivotal for enriching their work by fostering new contacts, knowledge, and inspiration.

However, despite acknowledging peers from similar contexts as crucial for building networks of ideas and solidarities, investment in network building remains insufficient, especially for arts managers (in comparison to artists). There is an urgent need for more long-term investment in peer networks, particularly those bridging Africa, Asia (including west and central Asia), Oceania, Latin America, and the Caribbean.



### The importance of connecting cultural facilitators

A significant gap exists within peer networks with regard to facilitators of transnational cultural relations—namely, individuals, organizations, or networks experienced in bringing together and creating opportunities for creative practitioners and cultural workers in the Global South.

These connectors play a vital role in fostering South-South connectivity by enabling the exchange and dissemination of localized knowledge and facilitating cross-pollination between existing networks. However, opportunities for such connectors in the Global South to network, share experiences, and establish communities of practice are presently limited. Programs that connect cultural facilitators merit increased attention from funding and facilitating organizations, particularly in these polarized times



### Network building, a specialized form of expertise

Building successful transnational networks demands a high level of curatorial, intercultural, and administrative expertise. It calls for prioritizing process over output in programming and encouraging continual exploration of collective working methods. Fellows stressed the importance of face-to-face gatherings and unhurried, immersive experiences as pivotal moments in building authentic connections: hosting such networking gatherings necessarily calls for skillful curation.

While the fellowship model of LAI's program successfully empowered fellows to advance their ongoing initiatives, it was less successful in network building, which demands meticulous curation and additional organizational support. Considering the substantial expertise and resources required, it is our learning that local and regional intermediary cultural organizations may be better suited to manage the complexities of network building compared to individual efforts, as articulated by Phloeun Prim, Executive Director, LAI in his Foreword.



### Learning to exist in critical difference with each other

Fostering trust among peers demands a nuanced approach that acknowledges and respects critical differences. Merely sharing a common identity, like the Global South designation in our fellowship, may not automatically guarantee solidarity. It is, therefore, crucial not to assume that solidarity naturally emerges even among peers within the Global South, especially considering existing fault lines in today's landscape.

Successful network building requires intentional efforts to build confidence and establish trust within a diverse peer community, especially when different cultural contexts and geographies are involved. Initiating sessions focused on navigating differences and seeking common ground early in the program becomes imperative. Reflecting on LAI's experience, investing in early support for transnational cohorts to navigate critical differences would be a priority in future.

One of the SSAF fellows, Ali AbuAwad, articulated an ambition of "creating a cultural silk road for the Global South" during the fellowship journey. The launch of the pilot edition of LAI's South-South Arts Fellowships in 2022-2023 hoped to lay a foundation for this envisioned cultural connection. It is our aspiration that our learnings benefit other organizations and networks interested in fostering cultural exchange networks connecting Africa, Asia (including west Asia), Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean.



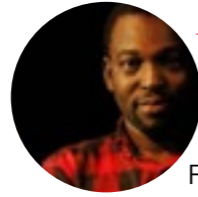
# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## South-South Arts Fellowships 2022-23



**Anupama Sekhar,**  
Fellowship Curator

Anupama Sekhar has been facilitating transnational cultural relations for over 15 years. Currently, she sits on the Board of ArtsEquator and Res Artis – Worldwide Network of Arts Residencies; the Research Advisory Committee of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa), Germany; and the selection committee of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity. Since 2015, she has been a member of UNESCO’s Expert Facility. Previously, she was Director, Culture at the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). Anupama is a trained Bharatnatyam dancer and is based in Dubai, UAE.



**Francois Bouda,**  
Fellowship Coordinator

François Bouda is a cultural manager with more than fifteen years of experience from the culture and development sector. He is the co-founder and associate manager of Sankhof’ Arts Productions, a cultural engineering agency based in Burkina Faso. He has collaborated with international organizations in Europe, Asia and USA and is the author of several studies. In 2022, he was the main expert for the evaluation of Africalia’s five-year cultural program in Burkina Faso (2017-2021). He is based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

## Advisors:



**Khadija El Bennaoui**  
(Morocco/UAE)

Khadija El Bennaoui is a cultural practitioner with over 18 years of experience in the arts and culture sectors. Currently, she is the Head of Performing Arts at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation. In 2005, she launched Art Moves Africa, the first mobility fund devoted to artists and cultural operators traveling within Africa. As an independent consultant, she has collaborated with UNESCO, the European Commission, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, the Ford Foundation, and more. She is based in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

perimental spaces across south Asia resulting in the South Asian Network for the Arts (SANA). Ms Sood has served on several international art juries and participated in various forums on Indian contemporary art, art management and South Asian art. She is based in New Delhi, India.



**Deirdre Prins-Solani**  
(South Africa)

Deirdre Prins-Solani is a closet poet, dabbler in visual arts and avid reader. She has worked in museums, world heritage and professional capacity building in the cultural sector for more than two decades. She is a UNESCO facilitator in intangible cultural heritage (ICH or living heritage) and serves as a committee member of the ICH sub-committee for the Association of Critical Heritage Studies. She has conducted training and policy advisory services across the African continent, the Caribbean and the Asia-Pacific. She is based in Cape Town, South Africa.



**Pooja Sood**  
(India)

Pooja Sood is a founding member and Director of Khoj International Artists’ Association, an autonomous, not-for-profit society committed to experimentation and exchange in the visual arts in India. She has actively built a robust network of ex-

## Lead Supporters



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## About Living Arts International (LAI)

Living Arts International (LAI) is a non-profit organization which believes that the arts are at the heart of a vital society. Our vision is for a peaceful, sustainable future with living arts as a catalyst for change.

At LAI, we are the organization that connects



both of which have been supporting cultural workers in Cambodia, Southeast Asia and beyond, since 1998 and 2018 respectively.

Our pilot and future programs will champion the arts as an agent of transformation, foster global knowledge exchange and empower emerging leaders and arts organizations in the Global South. We aim to initiate policy-driven, transnational cultural actions, inspired by the resilience of arts communities operating in societies experiencing conflict as well as those in a post conflict stage of development.

### The Fellowship team at LAI includes:

- Phloeun Prim, Executive Director*
- Frances Rudgard, Managing Director*
- Manith Kuon, Head of Finance*
- Chanmanina Kong, Senior Finance & Operations Coordinator*
- Venka Purushothaman, Board Member & International Program Advisor*
- Sarah Gardner, Board Member & International Program Advisor*
- Nico Dasani, Board Member & International Program Advisor*



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Anupama Sekhar