

## Arts Malaysia

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# Human-Nature MY Delivery Partners concept note

### Background

*“Indigenous knowledge is the accumulated knowledge, beliefs, and practices of native communities around the world, gained from centuries of living in close proximity to nature. It includes a vast array of knowledge systems, ranging from agricultural practices and medicinal plants to spiritual beliefs and traditional storytelling. This knowledge is not only valuable in its own right but has the potential to offer vital insights into contemporary global challenges.*

*However, despite its value, much of this knowledge is at risk of being lost as indigenous communities face rapid modernization, globalization, and climate change. It is, therefore, crucial to preserve and promote indigenous knowledge to ensure its continued transmission to future generations and its potential application in modern society.”*

– *The Tuyang Initiative, community-led arts company from Miri, Sarawak*

Under our Arts Responds to Global Challenges programme, in Malaysia, we will run “Human Nature”: a 3-year programme of collaborations and partnerships between the UK and Malaysia Civil Society Organisations and arts sectors, to explore Malaysia’s cultural diversity and biodiversity, and develop creative responses to climate adaptation.

Human-Nature aims to foster partnerships between the UK and Malaysian Indigenous representatives, artistic (including tech), scientific and academic communities to address climate adaptation with creative responses and:

- embed arts and creativity in the response to climate adaptation,
- elevate Indigenous voices and wisdom through equitable participation and conversation,
- raise awareness about sustainable consumption models and new advocacy narratives.

The programme's objectives are:

- Enable partnerships between community leaders/representatives, Malaysian arts practitioners, scientists and academia and the UK arts sectors, to increase the capacity of artists and CSOs to embed arts/creative responses in their organisations and advocacy practices.
- Generate and share insights knowledge and best practices: generate though leadership content on Climate response and on equitable participation and conversation for Indigenous and local communities. More equitable participation opportunities are offered to Indigenous and local populations.
- Initiate a network of cross discipline experts and arts practitioners to develop and share insights knowledge and best practices. To enable sustainable for future collaborations and advocacy to benefit the communities and to advocate for sustainable extraction/consumption models and ways of living inspired by indigenous wisdom.

## Context

### Climate adaptation and Biodiversity priorities

Malaysia is a megadiverse country and has been a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) since 1994.

In 1992 the government pledged to preserve 50% of its land mass under forest and tree cover – a pledge it maintains today, albeit with considerable debate about what constitutes “forest”. According to Global Forest Watch, Malaysia has lost 29% of its tree cover since 2001. The country has met its obligations to the CBD by establishing relevant policies, strategies, and action plans – yet in addition to forest loss, it has become ranked as the country with the fourth highest number of threatened species. As in many other sectors, and many other countries (including the UK), there is a yawning gap between policy and practice.

As one of the 17 “megadiverse” country in the world, Malaysia (especially Borneo) is globally important for cultural diversity and biodiversity (with its biodiversity and indigenous communities overwhelmingly concentrated in Sabah and Sarawak, but also in peninsular states like Kelantan, Perak, Pahang, Johor).

However, cultural diversity, cultural rights, biodiversity in Malaysia face several threats and issues. Indigenous people's subsistence, traditional practices, and belief systems are intimately connected to, and depend on, their land and environment. For years, internal and external forces in power have eroded their land and cultural rights. This appropriation and exploitation contribute to climate change, and ultimately, threaten the very existence of the Indigenous identity. Land rights, the recognition and respect of indigenous value systems, are at the core of the issue but

also, potentially, a solution to restore a balance and inspire others. This has led to some indigenous people (especially in Sabah) feeling a sense of disempowerment against issues such as: Land rights & Threats: deforestation, logging, dam building, fires, plantations, extraction, pollution, raw materials, and food security, poaching.

### **Cultural survival and rights are threatened by:**

- Deforestation and Access to natural resources and raw materials - access to raw material is becoming a real risk (for some it is already too late). Yet, these raw materials are key to the community's basic needs, sustenance and cultural practices (rituals, crafts, festivals). **Saving the forest, waters and rivers is at the core of slowing the impacts of climate change and preserving cultural rights.**
- Current Indigenous identity, politics, and modern challenges.
- Colonial legacies and enabling factors.
- External challenges: carbon trading new deals to benefit foreign companies. Sabah deals with Philippines claims on Island, terrorism threats, a large undocumented migrant population.
- Arts and culture used for tourism (including the indigenoussness): tokenism, stereotyping and superficial, economic benefit driven. It does not help communities to thrive. No real capacity building for sustainable and meaningful culture preservation is put in place.

All these factors are threatening the capacity of community to practice, perpetuate and sustain their cultural, artistic, and traditional practices. They are in opposition with the Adat's and threaten its practice and legacy. Climate change is going to exponentially add pressure on indigenous cultural rights and practices. It is only a question of when the indigenous identity be eroded to the point of disappearing.

Yet could indigenous way of life and value system be part of the solution for climate change adaptation. Could it inspire leaders and consumers to think differently and adopt alternative values that would help change our destructive course and fight climate change?

### UK and Malaysia priorities

In recent years, in the fast-changing UK arts sector, the climate and biodiversity emergencies have shot up the agenda. Climate change is youth's most important challenge globally and is a priority in the UK/MY relations: The new UK-Malaysia Climate Partnership calls for "collaboration and co-operation in the area of... Communication, Education and Public Awareness... related to climate change" – and this is an area where there may be significant opportunities for collaboration in the arts: Every UK arts organisation is now addressing the environmental emergency in some way, with many prioritising it with several placing climate and biodiversity at the heart of their work.

The last 2 years have seen the context for the environmental emergency in the UK-Malaysia relationship shift dramatically. In June 2022, the UK and Malaysian governments signed a formal MoU: a new agreement to develop co-operation on climate and biodiversity. This agreement reflects the global importance of Malaysia as a ‘megadiverse’ country, vulnerable to climate change, whose rapid economic development relies heavily on its rich natural resources.

At COP27 (UN Climate Change Conference), the world established a new Loss and Damage fund 5, the premise of which accepts the essential argument of the climate justice movement. Along with other global funds, this opens up opportunities for Malaysia to radically shift its economic model, should it genuinely wish to do so.

COP27 also emphasised the importance of Nature-Based Solutions and Ecosystem-Based Approaches in addressing climate change, and the need for inclusive participation, such as Indigenous Peoples, youth, and women, making nature and people integral to the solutions needed. As WWF-Malaysia commented, “The contributions of Indigenous Peoples especially as stewards of nature and the knowledge they bring were recognised [at COP27]. It was good to have Malaysian Indigenous Peoples at COP 27 this year, and Malaysia would greatly benefit from having indigenous wisdom in managing the challenges of climate change here”.

At COP15 (UN Biodiversity Conference), the world agreed to protect 30% of land and oceans by 2030 (the ‘30 by 30’ pledge), and 22 other targets intended to stem biodiversity loss.

All this means that there is a window of opportunity for climate and biodiversity to become a much higher priority for Malaysia: and for the UK, with its strong links and its new climate partnership, to be a key partner in that transition.

### **Cultural diversity, Indigenous knowledge, and climate adaptation**

The population of East Malaysia is made of 80 indigenous peoples. This reflects the global connection between biodiversity and indigenous groups: while Indigenous Peoples make up just 5 percent of the global population, they safeguard 80 per cent of the world’s remaining biodiversity.

East Malaysia is culturally and politically distinct from Peninsular Malaysia. It sees stronger support for gender equality, diversity, religious freedom, and cultural tolerance: this is reflected in its creative practice and its cultural diversity. In peninsular Malaysia, indigenous people deal with other political, cultural and economic dynamics influences.

*Traditional societies in many cases have built up knowledge over long periods about changes in the environment and have developed elaborated strategies to cope with these changes. However, traditional knowledge systems in mitigation and adaptation have for a long time been neglected in climate change policy formulation and implementation and have only recently been taken up into the climate change discourse. Traditional and indigenous peoples, who have survived over long periods to many kinds of environmental changes, including climate change, may have valuable lessons to offer about successful and unsuccessful adaptations which could be vital in the context of climate change. In Malaysia, indigenous people’s subsistence, traditional practices, and belief systems are intimately connected to, and depend on, their land and environment. For years, internal and external forces in power have eroded their land and cultural rights. This appropriation and exploitation contribute to climate change, and ultimately, threaten the very*

*existence of the Indigenous identity. Land rights, the recognition and respect of indigenous value systems, are at the core of the issue but also, potentially, a solution to restore a balance and inspire others. Source: PACOS, The Adat, Sabah.*

### **Creative response to climate adaptation**

- “Human communities, especially Indigenous Peoples and those more directly reliant on the environment for subsistence, are already negatively impacted by the loss of ecosystem functions, replacement of endemic species and regime shifts across landscapes and seascapes. Indigenous knowledge contains unique information sources about past changes and potential solutions to present issues”. 6th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Land rights and Indigenous wisdom (In Malaysia the traditional code of governance for Indigenous People: The Adat) and voices, suffer from a lack of recognition by government, policy makers and outsiders. So far, all efforts of activists and social society organisations to stop the appropriation and exploitation have had little impact, despite their evident determination and solidarity. The modern law and justice are not on the side of the Indigenous wisdoms, voices and communities’ concerns over conservation of their cultural rights.

Organisations and individuals involved in the fight are now hoping that external attention and interventions can influence opinions and one way to do that is to use Arts, Innovation and Culture as medium of expression, awareness and influence.

There is an opportunity to bring arts and culture at the heart of the response against climate change. As many artists and producers in both the UK and Malaysia have observed, biodiversity and cultural diversity are closely linked, and nowhere is this more evident than in Borneo. Malaysian Indigenous populations have ancestral wisdoms that are both threatened to disappear and key to climate adaptation: artistic and innovative (including Tech), cross disciplinary collaborations are, together with science and technology, part of a holistic response to climate change.

How can Malaysia’s dynamic and engaged arts and civil society communities be the catalyst and collaborate with UK organisations and artists to explore new practices and collaborations around climate adaptation. What are the collaborations pathways and future trends and who are the stakeholders?

### **Plurality of ontologies**

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Different knowledge systems provide insights into factors that enable adaptive capacity and consolidate community resilience and can co-exist. Diverse worldviews, knowledge systems and practises highlight the importance of thinking about ontological pluralism within adaptation. Climate adaptation is principally founded on Western ontologies, but there is a need consider non-Western ontologies and epistemologies.

### Equitable conversation

The role of Indigenous peoples and local communities in effective and equitable conservation <https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/es-2021-12625.pdf>

While facing climate challenges, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are obliged to mobilize and enhance their knowledge of their territories and natural resources to constantly adjust to unprecedented variances, extreme weather events and slow onset effects of climate change. Indigenous Peoples have also become engaged in national and international scientific and policy processes, with the international system having accommodated and recognized the substantial knowledge and experience that they bring with them.

### Malaysian Programme delivery partners

With this context in mind, we want to engage 2 Malaysian delivery partners (CSOs and/or arts organisations), who will help us deliver the UK delegation of arts practitioners, climate activists, scientists, and academics, to Malaysia in March 24, and establish connections and collaborations between UK and Malaysian artists, organisations, experts who work at the intersection of arts and climate response with local indigenous communities. Through their participation in Human Nature and the programme’s activity, the 2 delivery partners will benefit from strengthening their capacity to advocate, by embedding arts and creative responses into climate adaptation into their practice. While we will engage these partners on a project basis for each activity, we hope that the same delivery partners will work with us throughout the 3 years programme on the following activities:

#### Activity 1: Co-curation and co-delivery of a UK delegation to Malaysia

Programme	Project	Project	Role	Timeline
Culture Responds to Global Challenges	1.	Malaysian delivery partners for a UK delegation programming	- Co-curate and co-deliver a UK delegation to Malaysia	Now to March 24 or until the delegation is completed

**Note: This is the project we are procuring for now**

#### Future opportunities – (For reference)

We are planning more activities which the delivery partners could benefit from in future, such as

Activity 2: Creative economy advocacy/policy training

Activity 3: A capacity building exchange with UK organisation(s) to embed arts into the organisation.

Activity 4: Co-curation and co-delivery of a creative commission project

Activity 5: Showcasing and advocacy.

3-years proposed activities and timelines (projects and timelines are subject to change)

Programme	Project	Project	Role	Timeline
Creative Economy	2.	Creative Economy Policy makers training	- Attend the online training and build capacity to advocate for creative economy and better understand its cultural, societal, and economic impacts on communities	2024 onwards
Creative Economy	3.	A capacity building exchange with UK organisation to embed arts into the organisation	- Training and mentorship on arts management skills and community engagement skills (curation, finance, impact, monitoring and evaluation, communications)	2024 onwards
Culture Responds to Global Challenges	4.	Creative commission	- Co-create a creative commission with UK and MY artists and experts	2024 onwards
Culture Responds to Global Challenges	5.	Creative commission showcase events and advocacy	- Participate to showcasing events for the creative commission and the entire programme. - Participate and co-curate the forum.	2025

## Project 1: Objectives

We are looking for 2 Malaysian organisations; CSO or Art, who:

- 1) Want to embed arts and creative response to climate adaptation as a practice in their organisation.
- 2) Will help us deliver our programmes' activities and will provide us with local insights, networks, connections, and support on the ground to:
  - generate and share insights with UK and MY stakeholders on the current issues faced by communities (related to cultural/land rights and climate issues), help us tell the narrative

of the indigenous challenges, opportunities, and contributions with regards to climate adaptation.

- support us in shaping a delegation programme for UK producers, curators, and experts in the fields of artistic commissions, environmental projects, academia (anthropologists, ethnologists, scientists).
- Inform us on shaping a creative commission: in year 2, we will commission a collaboration of UK MY artists to create awareness about climate adaptation creative solutions. This work, together with the other creative projects planned in year 2, will be showcased in MY and the UK to create awareness about indigenous rights and voices.
- Shape dialogues and community engagements opportunities: contribute to developing thought leadership content and encourage dialogues between communities, arts, and policy makers. It will also be presented at a forum in Borneo in year 2.
- Inform stakeholders of future collaboration pathways, beyond our programme duration.
- Inform policy makers in both regions.

The 2 delivery partners will be a building block of our Human Nature programme and will help us:

- Raise awareness of the issue of cultural rights and climate change in both UK and MY
- Inspire more arts and cultural stakeholders to play a role in the fight against global challenges.

## **Desirable partners profile**

For this project we need 2 Malaysian partner organisations who work with or represent communities from Sabah, Sarawak, Selangor, Johor, Kedah, Kelantan and Pahang and who can demonstrate:

- The vision and mission of their organisation is aligned with the aims and objectives of Human Nature (listed above in first section) and with the outcomes we are trying to generate through the programme.
- Legitimacy to represent indigenous community(ies)
- Experience in accessing, representing, and dealing with indigenous communities and the challenges they face: What is the organisation's level of understanding and engagement with challenges and issues faced by indigenous and rural communities. What are the fields of expertise covered by the organisation members and do you have networks and access to the expertise required?
- Professionalism and relevant experience of team members involved in the activity with British Council (CVs and past experiences of projects involving collaborations with externals and local communities).
- Experience in collaborating with external organisations and individuals on projects.
- **A long term and strong ambition to develop their capacity to embed arts and creative responses into their practices and who will commit resources and time to the programme, its activities, and learnings.**
- The extent of their network and previous collaborations with various stakeholders such as Indigenous communities, scientists, anthropologists, researchers, local agencies and authorities, policy makers, NGOs, CSOs and arts communities.
- Their capacity to deliver on monitoring and evaluation and communications plans for the activities.



- Experience in participatory approach for past projects

The 2 partners do not need to have worked together in the past, but it is key that they are willing to work with each other and other stakeholders: **the desire, ability, experience, and capacity to collaborate must be demonstrated.**

## **Deliverables for project 1**

Overall:

- Be a willing participant and contribute to all proposed activities,
- Collaborate with other organisations who are part of the programme.

Specifically:

- 1. Co-develop, co-curate and co-deliver with British Council and Consultant Catriona Maddocks:**
  - 3 online information sessions: Attend online discussions and workshop sessions (number and dates to be discussed with selected partner and British Council) with British Council and consultant Catriona Maddocks to advise British Council on key issues, topics to explore and co-identify opportunities and communities for a UK delegation visit in March 24 to work on.
- 2. To co-organise and co-curate, with British Council and Catriona Maddocks, the delegation's visit and provide delegates and British Council logistic support and access to communities and translation services.**
- 3. Co-curate and participate in an online information session with UK arts organisations, curators, producers, artists, experts in anthropology, science, environment to establish connections and initiate participation of 5 UK delegates to come and visit communities in Malaysia in March 24.**
- 4. Co-develop with British Council and execute a communication plan for the projects and events with their networks.**
- 5. Accompany the delegation to meetings, advise the British Council team with logistics planning and help to provide for translation needs.**
- 6. Participate in reporting and monitoring and evaluation activities.**
- 7. Participate in the events/discussions and presentations of the report's findings with wider audiences.**
- 8. Share the report within their own networks.**

## **Outputs**

1. Participate in preparation sessions with British Council and consultant.

2. Advisory role in curation, and logistical support for the delivery of the UK delegation to Malaysia.
3. Report on activities.

## Timeline

- RFP publication in MY: 6 November 2023
- Proposal submission deadline: 26 November 2023
- Selection and announcement: 30 November 2023
- Contract start date: 15 December 2023
- Final draft M&E report: 8 April 2024
- Contract end date: 30 April 2024
- Sharing event(s): TBC

## Budget and Milestones

**Total per partnership: GBP 3,000 inclusive of taxes and any other costs linked to the project's delivery.**

## Useful links and reports

Borneo and Malaysia offer an unique combination of cultural and bio diversity. [https://scholar.harvard.edu/sites/scholar.harvard.edu/files/csgoh/files/borneopost\\_20230802.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/sites/scholar.harvard.edu/files/csgoh/files/borneopost_20230802.pdf)

As a report by the UN' special Rapporteur Karima Bennouna, sets the premises for the programme and the mapping project in Malaysia: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/207/39/PDF/N2020739.pdf?OpenElement>

Some of the UN's special rapporteur's recommendations for actions here:

*(e) Conduct more analysis and documentation of past, ongoing and expected damage to cultures, cultural heritage and cultural rights from climate change, including about underexplored topics such as intangible heritage;*

*(g) Design appropriate measures for monitoring the impacts of climate change on cultural heritage and adapting to the adverse consequences thereof; and consider adaptations such as comprehensively recording and digitizing culture and cultural heritage and providing adequate funding and technical cooperation;*

*(m) Ensure an integrated approach to climate change, culture and cultural rights by:*

*(i) Involving cultural institutions, their staffs and directors, and cultural rights defenders and experts in discussions of climate policy; and likewise ensuring that environmental experts are engaged in the development of cultural policy;*

*(ii) Building bridges and institutionalizing networks between cultural and environmental officials, bodies and experts;*

*(iii) Ensuring that cultural and environmental policies and laws embody a human rights approach; and that cultural policies incorporate climate change and environmental concerns, while environmental and climate change-related policies address related cultural dimensions;*

*(n) Promote information-sharing among all relevant stakeholders across the fields of environmental protection, culture and human rights;*

*(o) Ensure adequate funding for all programmes and policies at the intersection of climate, culture and human rights;*

*(p) Integrate the arts, artists, culture and cultural rights defenders into climate efforts through sustainable funding and recognition;*

[https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultural\\_relations\\_collection\\_2021\\_emergencies\\_emergences\\_engagement\\_carla\\_figueira\\_and\\_aimee\\_fullman\\_1208.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultural_relations_collection_2021_emergencies_emergences_engagement_carla_figueira_and_aimee_fullman_1208.pdf)

This essay reflects on how cultural relations organisations, like the British Council and its fellow national cultural institutes, can be significant actors in identifying and developing leverage point interventions to change systems to tackle the ecological crisis, contribute to climate action and achieve a sustainable cosmopolitan and inclusive human society through their roles, modes of operation and cultural exchange activities. This investigation develops and applies the thinking developed for the 2020 article, ‘Rethinking Cultural Relations and Exchange in the Critical Zone’, which argued that cultural relations activities and exchange are an underused intervention for the possibilities of positive ecological change (Figueira & Fullman, 2020) and advances the idea that these organisations can have the greatest impact if they themselves follow the practices of learning organisations and adopt a care approach to cultural relations.

Local communities are recognized by the UN system but there is not an equivalent framework for participation or dynamics of self-organization. The 2018 United Nations Declaration on Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas goes some way to strengthening such recognition. The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was designed specifically to include the voices of local communities within the Convention’s processes.

LINKS has long been active in climate change knowledge research, dialogue and advocacy with its scientific, policy, Indigenous Peoples and local community partners. LINKS contributes to the overall [UNESCO strategy on climate change responses](#).

Local and Indigenous knowledge systems contribute to the achievement of [Sustainable Development Goal 13 on climate action](#) by observing changing climates, adapting to impacts and contributing to global mitigation efforts.

UNESCO, together with the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and international authors, produced an up-to-date summary of the connections between Indigenous Peoples, culture, knowledge and climate change, entitled “[Intangible cultural heritage, diverse knowledge systems and climate change](#)”.

Climate Frontlines: A global forum for Indigenous Peoples, small islands and vulnerable communities <https://www.unesco.org/en/links/climate-frontlines?hub=408>