

BUILDING BEYOND

Cycle I 2021-2022

Impact Report



Fonds

creative
industries
fund NL

Group session during the lab week in Dakar in June 2022. Photo by Jean-Baptiste Joire.

Introduction

Building Beyond is an alternative educational space that brings together 12 creative thinkers and doers reimagining questions around urban spaces and communities within the African continent. The participants work together with mentors throughout the year to develop a body of work and receive guidance and an active exchange of ideas and opportunities for collaboration. The programme consists of two Labs (week-long mentoring intensives, one in a city in Africa and one in the Netherlands), monthly online masterclasses, peer-group sessions and one-on-one sessions with mentors. Each participant receives an award of €10.000 to work on the concept for a body of work that is outlined in their application.

Goals of Building Beyond

This mentorship aims to accelerate professional practice and leadership and creatively address societal challenges by:

- Recognising potential leaders in the field of design, architecture and the digital space and bring them together with mentors in a year-long programme aimed at developing a body of work
- Supporting emerging artists, designers, creatives and thinkers whose practice relates to design, public space, architecture, activism, policy, and the digital space to propose new methods for investigating challenges relating to their city, its surroundings and its communities.
- Stimulate experimental out of the box practices that move beyond disciplinary and thematic boundaries that consider community needs and desires while promoting the inclusion of women and other marginalised groups.
- Provide participating artists with a supportive and learning network of solidarity to feed their practice in the long run
- Contributing to discourse around the themes of the programme in a meaningful way
- Stimulating active exchange of ideas and meaningful connections (peer to peer / mentors).
- Network expansion, increasing professional opportunities (peer connections and exchange with the Dutch field).

REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF CITIES

First Cycle

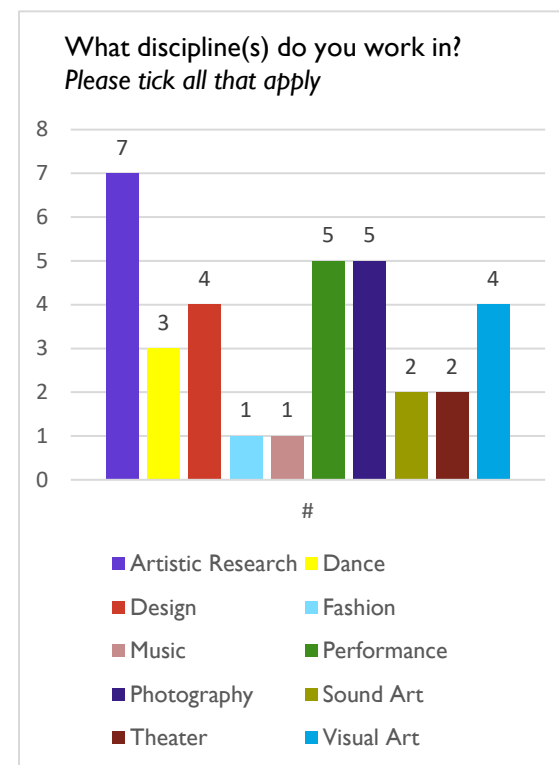
The pilot cycle of the Building Beyond programme took place throughout 2022, with the participants selected through an open call in late 2021.

The final selection of the twelve participating artists was made by the Prince Claus Fund and Creative Industries Fund teams. The final selection includes practitioners with very different interpretations of the theme, from traditionally trained architects looking to experiment with new approaches to urban space to conceptual practitioners looking to work more closely with local communities in their design. The practitioners selected are from and are based in Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda.

The first lab week took place in Dakar in June 2022, visiting the Dakar biennale and Off events. The second lab week took place in Amsterdam in October 2022. Participants joined together in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Eindhoven, visiting Dutch Design week. They also participated in a symposium organised at the Rijksakademie by Ola Hassanain, entitled *Beyonding Urbanity*.

One recipient, Mohammed Sirra, eventually left the programme after repeated non-attendance at online and in-person meet ups, while doubts were raised about his Moroccan citizenship.

The mentors who guided the recipients throughout the process were Ola Hassanain, Sénamé Koffi Agbodjinou, Khensani de Klerk. A fourth mentor, Selly Raby Kane took part in the early stages of the programme before leaving following the first lab week.



Goals of this report

Evaluation of mentorship programmes implemented by the Prince Claus Fund seeks to give insight into four main areas; programme administration, programme concepts, mentorship and networking. This report is the first of three reports on the results and learnings from Building Beyond that will be produced following each cycle of the programme, with the goals of:

1. Keeping our funding partner sufficiently informed of the results of each mentorship cycle
2. Informing any adjustments made to the programming year-to-year.

Since the 2021 cycle of Building Beyond was a pilot year for the programme, learnings from the year will heavily inform future cycles. Some of these learnings have already been implemented in the design of the 2022 cycle of the programme.

As data gathering for this report took place during and immediately following the programme, this report does not give significant insight into the long-term impacts of the programme. An overarching review at the close of the third year of the programme will present longer term insights from across all cycles.

This report assumes a level of knowledge regarding the practices of the Building Beyond participants. For information on the individual practices of participants, please refer to the [Prince Claus Fund website](#).

Methodology

This report draws on the results of two group reflection sessions that took place online at the mid- and end-points of the programme, and on reports submitted by participants following the end of the programme. Additional reflection sessions with the Prince Claus Fund programmes team and the mentors group also took place and are used to supplement this report where needed.

Group reflection sessions covered the shared needs and dynamics within the group, and gave insight into programme administration, mentorship and network. All but one of the participants (92%) participated in at least one session. Insights from the mid-point reflection session in July 2022 helped share the second half of the programme.

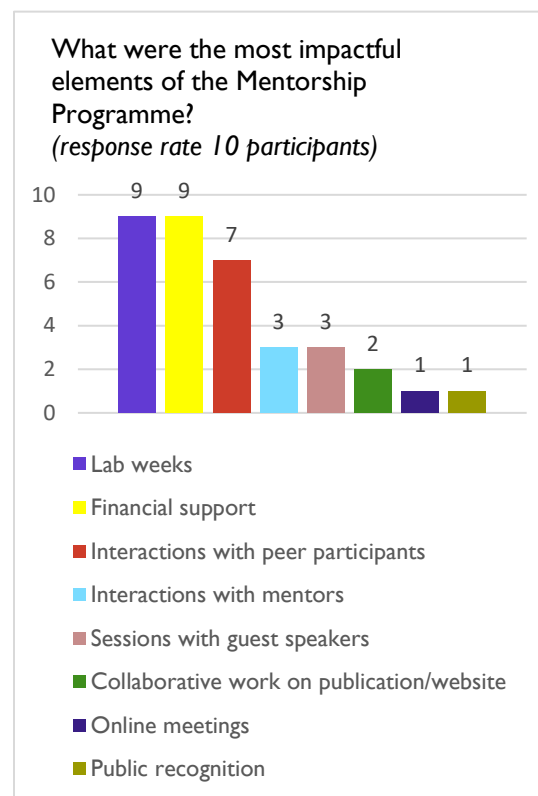
Reports covered more individual personal and professional developments and gave insight into the programme concepts and general impact of the programme. 8 participants (73%) fully completed the report and the remaining 3 (27%) partially completed it. One participant had left the programme by time of reporting and was not asked to complete a report.

All quotations are taken from reports or group reflection sessions, and are reproduced with permission.



Executive Summary

- Both the reporting and the group reflection sessions indicated that the informal network-building aspects of the programme were extremely beneficial. The impact of peer-to-peer learning within the programme was generally felt to be even more significant than that of the mentorship.
- Participants credit the structure and content of the programme with helping them to adopt a more collaborative and community-focussed approach to their work.
- A lack of clarity around the structure and expectations of the mentorship in the first stages of the programme lead to participants feeling some of this time had been lost. However once the expectation for them to contribute to the development of the programme became clear, most participants experienced this as empowering, and felt that the flexibility allowed for a diverse community of practice.
- In keeping with the pilot nature of this year's programme, there were lessons learned around the structure of the lab weeks. Although the content of the lab weeks was well-curated, the majority of participants felt that the weeks had been too intensely scheduled, allowing insufficient time for organic exploration.
- The introduction of one-on-one sessions with mentors following the first lab week allowed for more targeted support and increased the impact of the mentorship component of the programme.
- There is a need for structured research as part of the selection process, which was taken up in 2022.



Programme Administration

Structure

In general, participants experienced a lack of clearly defined structure or goals, and found this frustrating during the first half of the programme. Although the aim had been for participants to co-design the programme together with the mentors and the implementing team, this aim was not communicated clearly enough in the early stages. As a result it took some time before participants felt they were able to interact proactively within the programme.

In the second reflection session and the reporting, participants reported that once communication became clearer, the space to co-curate the programme had been empowering for them. They also found that it made the programme welcoming of a diversity of practice.

If expectations are clearly communicated, a flexible structure responsive to the needs of the participants has the potential to be very impactful.

Online Sessions

The online events¹ were only named by one participant as one of the top three most impactful elements of the programme, and participants in the reflection sessions referred less to the online sessions. Online events in the form of lectures or talks about practice were not experienced as adding significant value, given the availability of similar material online.

The first group reflection indicated a clear need for better advance communication around the content of each online session. This feedback was acted on and a clear curriculum is now being prepared in advance of the new programme.

¹ Online events had an average attendance throughout the programme of around 7-9 people.



“I had expected a much more structured program. And I think as we got into it, it became clear that the structuring was something that I am invited to contribute to... I think there was a lot of agency that was placed in our hands to co-create and set the conditions.” – Mid-point reflection, Russel Hlongwane

Lab Weeks

The lab weeks were felt to be extremely impactful as they gave participants the opportunity to share ideas and inspire one another. All responding participants listed them as one of the three most impactful elements of the programme.

Feedback on the content of both labs was extremely positive. However participants as well as mentors shared a strong desire for the lab weeks to be less fast paced and allow more unstructured time together. In the second reflection session and in reporting, participants shared that the week in the Netherlands was too densely packed and that feedback on this following the first lab week had not been fully taken into account. Although site visits were much appreciated, the moments for working together were felt to add the most value.

“I found the lab week in Amsterdam very rich. It opened up a new way/directions to express my practice” – Report, Ikram Hamdi Mansour

“Physically it was quite a strain on me, because we were using a lot of public transport and walking around a lot. And psychologically exhausting, because it was just really dense.” – Final reflection, Inam Kula



“I hope this is something that also extends to other rounds of Building Beyond, where participants take part in shaping their own programme, communicating their needs and how they could be realized” – Report, Salma Belal

Group photo from the Lab week in Dakar in June 2022. Photo by Jean-Baptiste Joireu.

Programme Concepts

Collaborative turn

Many participants reported a significantly increased level of interest in collaborative and/or community-focused ways of approaching their practices, and attribute this learning to the mentorship programme. There is a higher level of understanding of the need to root practice in collective thinking (together with other artists or with local communities).

Although it remains to be seen whether this learning will lead to longer-term shifts in practice, the shared interest in collaborative practice is a positive development of the programme.

Processes over product

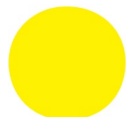
A major takeaway around the conceptualisation of the mentorship programme itself was the extent to which participants valued the focus on creative processes and learning over tangible project outputs. This focus was recognised by participants as something unusual in the wider landscape of funding, and is deeply appreciated.

“I had inspiring discussions with local senior architects and planners about ways to involve communities and different stakeholders in the planning process. I realized the need for a series of discussions to democratize the planning process.”
– Report, anonymous

“The most important steps and the move that I observed this year was the ability to scale my work and its impact in my respective city...I realised that there is in fact an orchestra of voices that I should be calling together to narrate multiple voices of the city” – Report, Russel Hlongwane

The space created by this focus allowed participants have broadened their thinking and understanding of the relations between built space, and communities. The diversity of the group’s backgrounds and practices helped facilitate this, as participants were exposed to different kinds of process.

One of the main takeaways that I am walking away with is the benefit and necessity of collaborating with the general public especially for concepts for which they will be end users.” – Report, anonymous



A photograph showing four people, three women and one man, working together on a large, intricate woven basket made of green strips. They are outdoors in a lush, green environment with trees and a wooden pole in the background. The woman on the left is wearing a dark purple sleeveless top and has her hair in a bun. The man in the center is wearing a light blue and white striped shirt. The woman on the right is wearing a colorful patterned shirt and a dark blue skirt. The basket is large and rounded, with a complex woven pattern. The people are focused on their work, with some using tools like scissors. The background is filled with green foliage and a clear blue sky with some clouds.

“It took different routes to different possibilities. And also now I’m taking different forms from what I started with. So I think it’s, it’s transformative in that sense.”

– Final reflection, Salma Belal

“I’ve also been able to rethink through space as not only a form but also a material of expression where I have been able to go beyond just producing and installing my work within a given space” – Report, Katesi Jacqueline Kalange

Mentorship

Structure of mentor-mentee relationship

There is a need for clear communication from the start of the programme about the structure of the mentor-mentee relationship. A very particular miscommunication that came up a few times was the expectation at the beginning of the programme that everyone would have “their” mentor who was focused on them, and some participants remained unclear how they should interact with the mentors until well into the programme.

Most participants found the introduction of one-on-one sessions after the first lab week made the relationship more focussed and therefore more helpful, as it allowed for the sharing of specific advice and resources tailored to participants’ individual work. The mentors also felt that the one-on-one sessions allowed for more impactful mentorship, compared to the group zoom sessions.

“I think for me, like the best mentor structure would have been to have one mentor from the beginning, that follows me throughout the year, an individual that kind of checks individually...changing from this group sessions to the one to one I was really looking forward and then the one to one was again just like a drop - there was no follow-up.” – Final reflection, Hana Tefrati

“There is that level of follow-up that sort of hasn't been there, or that consistency, especially if you're working with three different mentors who have three different sort of ideas.” - Final reflection, Inam Kula

The increased appreciation for the mentors following the introduction of the one-on-one sessions suggests that a more focused mentor-mentee relationship can increase the mentors’ impact. During the second reflection session several potential structures were suggested by participants, including smaller self-organising subgroups connected to a specific mentor. Similar suggestions for dedicated groups were made by mentors, during the reflection with them.

Content

The reporting and both group conversations indicate that in general, learning from the mentors was less impactful than peer-to peer learning, in part because the content of what was shared by the mentors was perceived as being too general in its scope. The most helpful content shared by mentors was of a practical nature, including sharing books and articles and making connections. As well as a need for specifically tailored content, there is a strong desire for more practical teaching; both technical support on specific creative disciplines and project management help.

“I think it would be interesting for the mentees to have a broader program which isn't only conceptual and academic, but also to help in the technical and structural aspects. For example, managing projects, how can you put it into practice, how can you grow "structurally", or in terms of networking, how to better use your network for the development of your practice. – Mid-point reflection, Youssef El Idrissi

“Most enriching was the conversations, both planned and unplanned among peers. It was a privilege to be around people from very different practices as each one is drawing from a unique reference point.” – Report, Russel Hlongwane



Network

Community

The development of a community out of the peer-to-peer interactions, both online and in person, are consistently perceived as one of the most impactful elements of the programme. The diversity of the group in terms of practice is frequently referred to as a strength of the programme, as it challenged participants to think differently and enabled learning.

Several participants state that their own work has become more multidisciplinary or open to influence as a result of the conversations they had with other participants during the programme, and many describe the group as a resource they can draw on for advice and help in different fields.

There is also a deep appreciation for the bringing together of practitioners from different parts of the continent, who are often separated by mobility difficulties. This pan-African approach was extremely valued by the participants.

In describing the importance of the group to their development, participants frequently mentioned the importance of unstructured time together as a complement to the planned discussions. Allowing conversations to develop created an organically growing network in which participants learned new ways of thinking about their practices and approaches.

“Probably one of the best networking, I'd say that I've done in a very long time. And I have a funny feeling that eventually, we'll start reaping the benefits and rewards, hopefully sometime next year.” – Final reflection, Nifemi Marcus-Bello

“My interaction with the peer participants was invaluable to me! Learning about each other's practices in depth and finding common ground to develop future projects together was inspiring...Now I have a more precise vision of my research and what I want to achieve in the next three years.” – Report, Ikram Hamdi Mansour

Looking forward

In the final reflection session and in reporting, participants mention that they are collaborating with each other on future projects or are looking for ways to do so. While longer term monitoring is needed to see the impact of these collaborations, the desire for further connection following the end of the programme reflects extremely positively on the environment created within the mentorship programme, as well as the selection of participants.



Site visit during lab week in October 2022. Image by Maud Fernhout.

Conclusion

The programme, and the payment received as part of it, had the benefit of allowing participants time to explore the subjects they work on deeply, while the connections that were made within the programme helped participants develop themselves meaningfully.

Participants throughout expressed an understanding of and appreciation for the pilot nature of the programme. While they were concerned that some time had been lost in the early stages, they were also happy to be able to shape the programme and its future and take that responsibility seriously.

Feedback on the work of the implementing staff from the Prince Claus Fund and Creative Industries Fund NL was also extremely positive. The team were professional and efficient while maintaining a strong human connection that made everyone feel welcome. The flexibility and responsiveness of the organising team to the needs of participants created a sense of ownership over the programme that was highly valued, despite the need for stronger communication around this point.

Bringing different disciplines together around this theme created a broad but inclusive group, and the inclusion of participants from all regions of the African continent was deeply appreciated by participants who are often separated by geography and the cost of travel. The results of the pilot year indicate that the focus of the programme and its geographic scope are close to unique among the opportunities available to participants. Although there is a need to learn from the first cycle to improve future cycles of the programme, it has enormous potential to impact and shape the development of practitioners, and to influence thinking around urban space and communities within Africa.

“I believe that the indirect impact of the Award is the time I had to seek opportunities, deepen our research scope, serve the communities we are operating with, and develop the quality of such work.” – Report, anonymous

