

MIND THE CULTURE GAP

“The climate crisis is also a climate of culture,
and thus of the imagination”

Amitav Ghosh

Entertainment and Culture for Climate Action (ECCA)
Steering Committee calls for Government support for a
cultural response to climate



**CLIMATE
SPRING**

FUTERRA
SOLUTIONS
UNION

A note on language

We use the term ‘Global South’ in this report to refer to countries in Africa, Latin American, Caribbean, Asia (excluding Israel, Japan and South Korea) and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand). We acknowledge the inadequacy of this term to reflect the diverse cultures, histories and contexts that this grouping encompasses, but that in the context of this report, it is a helpful demarcation of the reality of the level of investment into programmes of work relevant to this report compared to those countries in the ‘Global North’.

1

Executive summary

Culture plays a key role in our collective response to the climate crisis. Culture is our collective space of meaning-making; it reflects and shapes our values and social norms.

Culture builds the social and political mandate for a transition to a net zero global economy.

Currently progress on climate is stalling without a culture first public engagement approach.

Screen storytelling in particular has unmatched reach and power. It engages audiences in ways that are different from news cycles, science communications or NGO campaigns. Film and TV is where people go for entertainment; it can shift hearts and minds, change norms and values and create political momentum.

The English language market, focused on the Global North - countries with historical responsibility for the greatest share of emissions - has proven the model of development funding to stimulate cultural content and shift the public conversation on climate.

We propose a new government-funded, devolved, and partner-led development fund for Global South climate stories, which is locally led and takes an audience-first approach.

2

Fear without agency drives us into fatalism

- 10 years after the Paris Agreement, we are in the transition to a post-fossil fuel economy
- But the transition is not happening fast enough, and is not yet designed to ensure a just transition, where we are living equitably within safe planetary boundaries
- A key gap to ensuring the transition is sufficiently **rapid** and **just** is the shift in the enabling conditions - **the cultural narratives** - that underpin societal and political action
- 2024 officially surpassed 1.5 degrees and people all over the world feel the effects of climate change; we are in a critical window for turning public concern into effective public engagement or letting it slip further into fatalism



Images from More Flames

3

Social transition

- Addressing climate change at the scale required is a fundamental shift from an extractive, fossil fuel driven economy to a regenerative, renewable economy
- Climate action includes justice as well as a just transition
- This cannot be achieved with top down policy interventions alone, expecting people to accept and implement changes made on their behalf, without inclusion of their voices and realities
- Shifting systems requires shifting mindsets - the dominant values, assumptions and beliefs - and the public discourse
- Collective mindsets and public discourse are the narrative soil in which seeds of policy, law or business take root and either wither or flourish
- Culture has a long term and fundamental influence on upholding dominant narratives or challenging and replacing narratives



Image from There Will Come Soft Rains

4

Government commitment to public engagement

A key part of the Paris Agreement was a recognition of the importance of public engagement.

“Parties shall cooperate in taking measures, as appropriate, to enhance climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information, recognizing the importance of these steps with respect to enhancing actions under this Agreement.”

(Paris Agreement Article 12)

Governments have a clear mandate for public engagement on climate

- Traditional climate communications have focused on facts, warnings and information
- This has successfully raised awareness of the problem but not agency
- Despite public concern for climate remaining high, there is little public understanding of the solutions - behavioural, social or technological
- There is very low understanding of the significant benefits, not just to the planet, but to human health, of a sustainable society
- High fear combined with low agency pushes people into numbness, denial or avoidance, not action
- This means that although there is a strong general consensus over the need to ‘act’ on climate, there is a weak public mandate for the solutions
- This is slowing down progress on the Paris Agreement because policy or business action on climate depends on the public mandate, demand and adoption
- Public engagement now needs to shift to engaging the public in the design of policies and adoption of solutions
- People need to believe that change is possible and what that looks like; that is the story shift that is required across societies and solutions

5

Stories beats stats

Research shows stories work differently to facts:

- Fictional stories “transport” us into a character’s world, triggering emotional engagement and sticking in peoples’ memories for longer than factual communications
- After engaging with a powerful story, we’re more likely to make “story-consistent” choices, these effects can persist, and can be reinforced with more enagement with additional stories
- Multiple studies show fictional narratives consistently outperform factual messages at encouraging pro-environmental actions
- The multiplier effect of stories across many media collectively adds up to our **shared culture**, which shapes and reflects social norms and values
- For example, attitudes to smoking or the role of women in society, have been shaped by popular culture
- For research citations please see: [Climate Spring: How Stories Work](#)



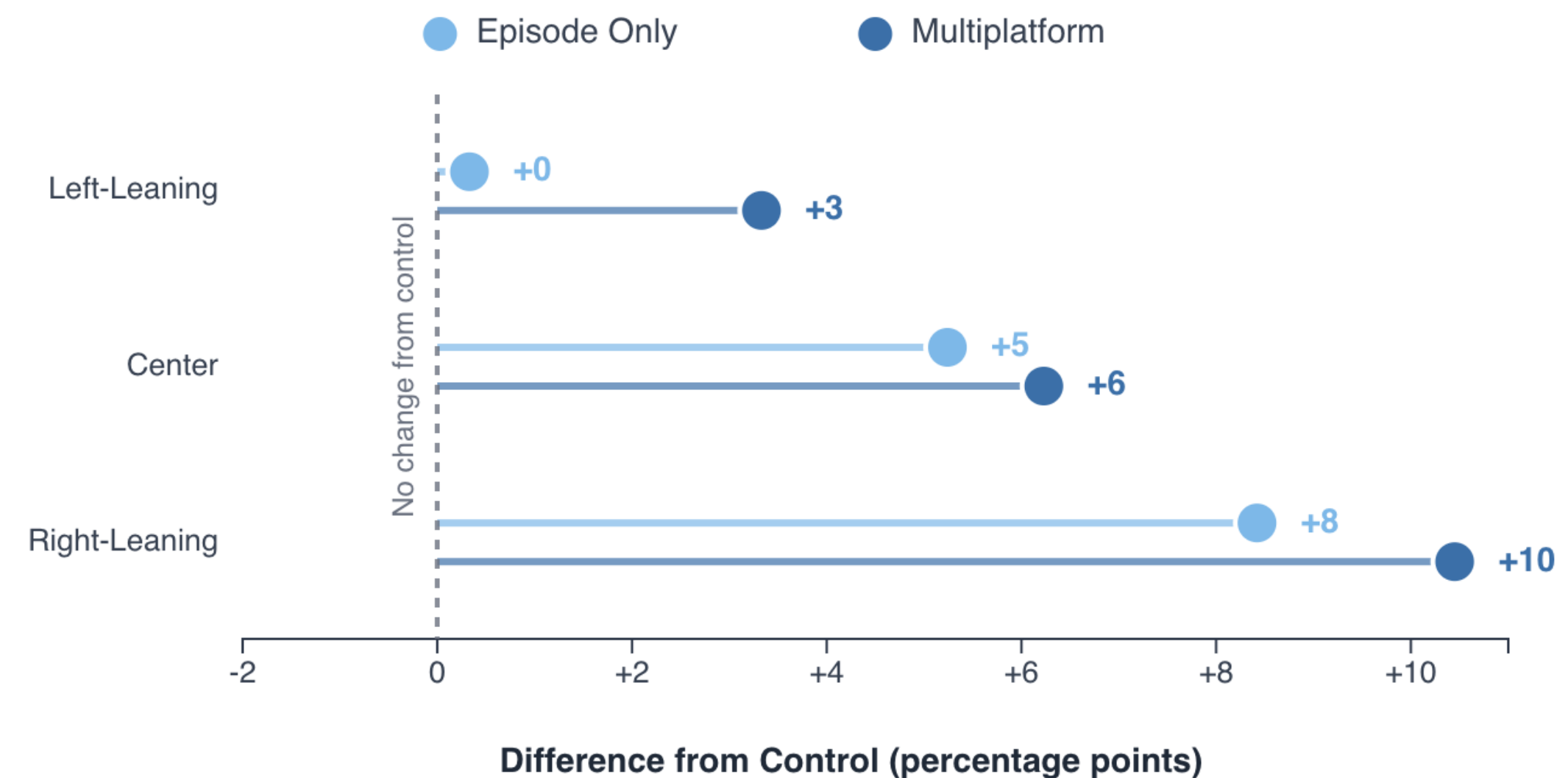
6

Case Study: *Grey's Anatomy's* Heat Dome

Grey's Anatomy, is a popular medical drama in the US. In the Season 21 episode "Drop It Like It's Hot", staff at Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital respond to a record-breaking heat wave. Though climate change is never mentioned explicitly, the episode vividly depicts the cascading effects of extreme heat: power outages, overwhelmed emergency services, and difficult triage decisions.

The impact of the episode, studied by Rare Media, was clear, the episode increased support for policies related to climate and health impacts.

Heat Episode Impact on Policy Support
*Average of government investment and cooling center support by political leaning
(Immediately after viewing)*



Credit: Rare media - <https://elab.rare.org/research/greys-anatomy-report/>

7

Power of culture

- Culture is more than just engaging audiences in new ways through a different medium
- Whilst strategic communications is the practice of targeted messages to specific audiences for specific short and medium term outcomes - for example specific policy or campaign goals
- Culture is a different space. It is our collective place for sense making, for reflecting or challenging the status quo
- When we talk about culture we are not just referring to 'the arts', this ranges from mass entertainment - TV/streaming, film, games - to music, theatre and literature and community arts, festivals, museums and visual arts

Popular culture role in climate change:

- Shape social norms and mindsets, which underpin social adoption of solutions
- Gives politicians the mandate to push business to do more
- Gives businesses the pull to meet the social demand



8

The narrative gap

The dominant narratives today have highlighted the problem, but not highlighted the solutions or empowered people, they:

- Skew fatalistic feeding into apathy and rationale for delay
- Skew technocratic, fuelling the sense that technology will solve the problem without social adoption, or that we need a silver bullet technology solution
- Sideline Global South protagonists as passive victims rather than protagonists
- Sideline the existing solutions and success stories, diminishing our belief that change is possible and already happening
- Focus too much on what is lost - decarbonisation and reduction - rather than what is gained by addressing climate, community resilience, energy independence and stability
- Create a sense that the current status quo is inevitable and too hard to change

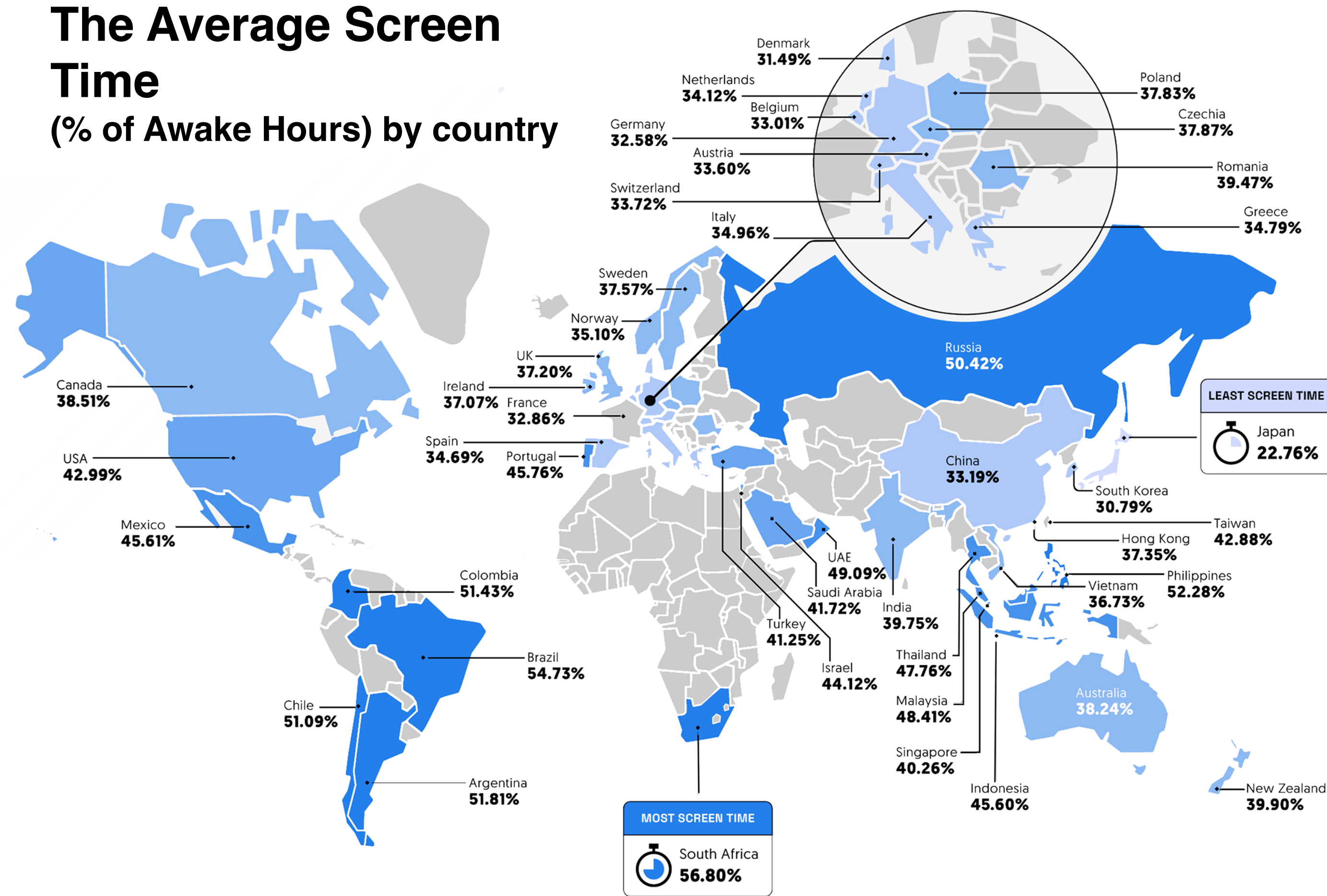


9

The power & scale of screen

- Around the world, people devote a significant portion of their waking hours to watching storytelling on screen, with the majority of adults spending upwards of two hours a day watching television or films
- In mature markets, over 70% of total video consumption by adults comes from TV
- TV and film continue to have unmatched reach and influence, with the market valued at around \$100bn in 2023 and projected to reach \$170bn by 2030
- Because film and TV reach mass audiences and shape what feels normal and possible, shifting climate narratives through mainstream screen entertainment is a high-leverage strategy for social and policy change

The Average Screen Time (% of Awake Hours) by country



Credit: Electronics Hub, 2024 (https://www.electronicshub.org/wp-content/smush-webp/01_The-Average-Screen-Time-By-Country.png.webp)

10

Mandate

Article 12 of the Paris Agreement establishes a commitment by signatories to engage the public, but governments are not doing enough. As one of the effective ways to engage audiences, storytelling through film and TV is an essential means to fulfilling the Paris Agreement.

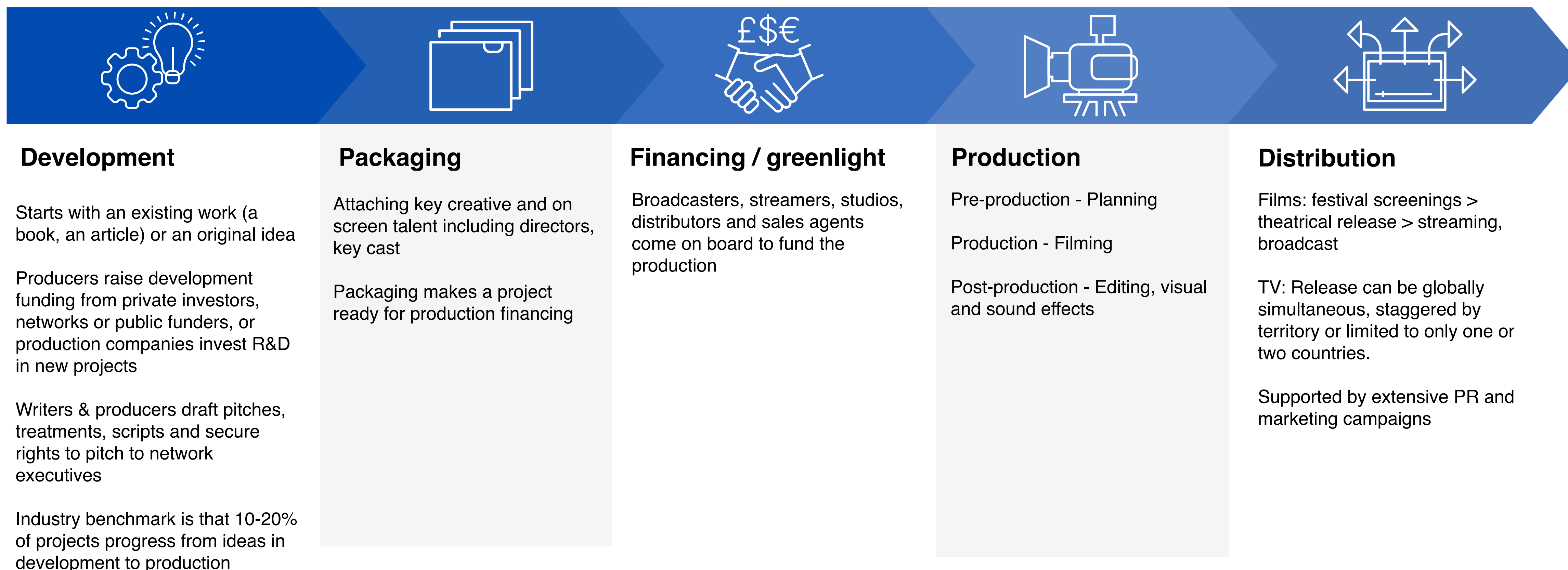
There are proven models for interventions that can unlock the potential of TV and film. Governments have historically provided public funding to address industry challenges such as supporting underrepresented voices, cultural advocacy or economic growth through the creation of funds, or providing tax incentives for industrial growth.

ECCA commissioned a study to explore the evidence and examples of what is already available, the gaps and how these interventions work.



11

How screen projects get made



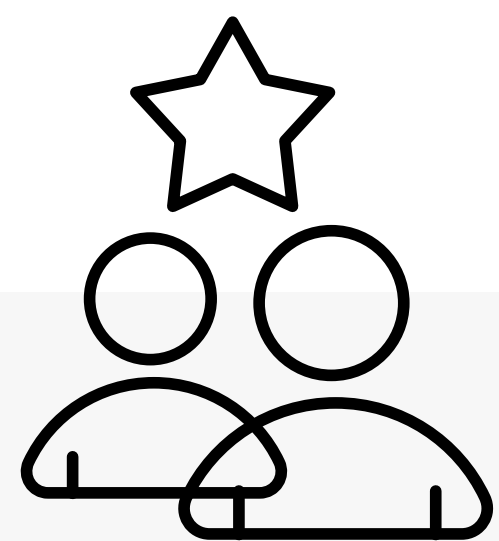
12

Interventions in the film/TV industry

- Shaping cultural narratives through TV and film can mean either engaging in independent, filmmaker-led approaches, or with the mainstream, commercial side of the industry
- Independent & filmmaker-led:
 - Maximises creative control and space for distinctive, challenging ideas
 - Often incubates new voices and forms that later cross into the mainstream
 - Typically longer financing timelines and smaller scale distribution
- Mainstream & commercial:
 - Prioritises audience numbers and thus subscriber / ad revenues
 - Operates at scale, with marketing and platforms that can reach millions
 - Projects must work commercially, and editorial decisions are secondary to commercial

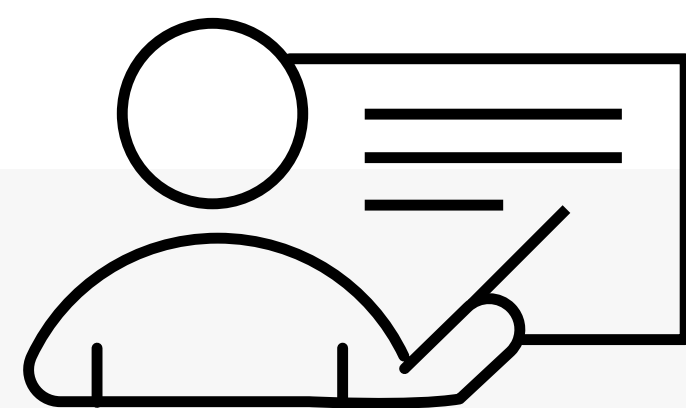
13

Interventions: Capacity building within TV and film creatives



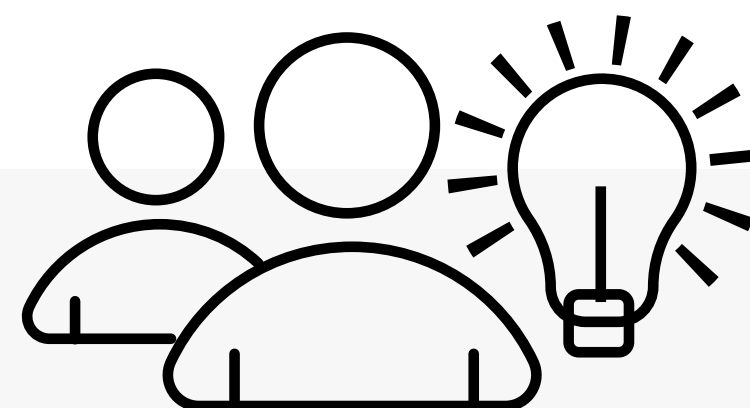
Developing Intellectual Property & Prizes:

Growing the commercial appetite for climate story by expanding the scope of the genre, and providing IP for development, incentivised by prizes



Training:

Demystifies climate for creatives, expands what's seen as commercially viable, and diversifies valued talent.



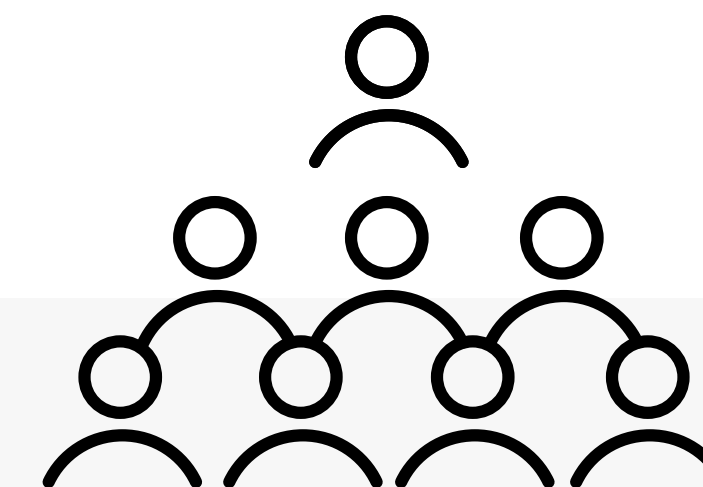
Development labs:

Pairs editorial and commercial feedback with mentors and experts to refine concepts before market as well as professional development.



Forums:

Connecting talent to buyers accelerates packaging and partnerships.



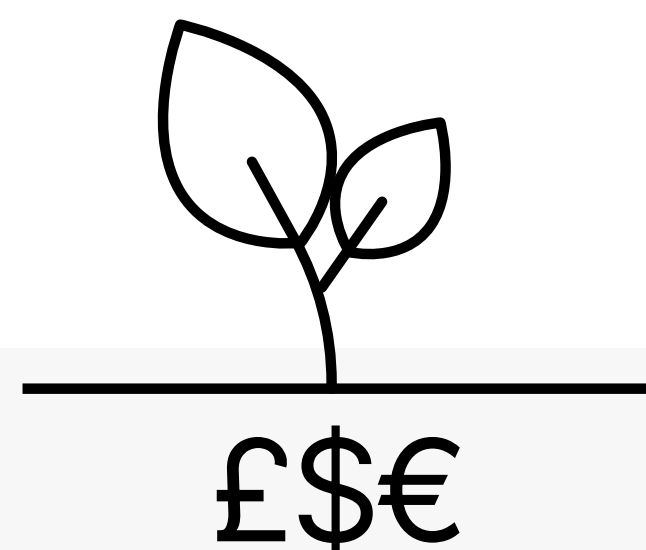
Movement building:

Convening practitioners grows a shared community, normalising climate themes inside the industry.

14

Interventions: Direct funding

Funding comes in three types:



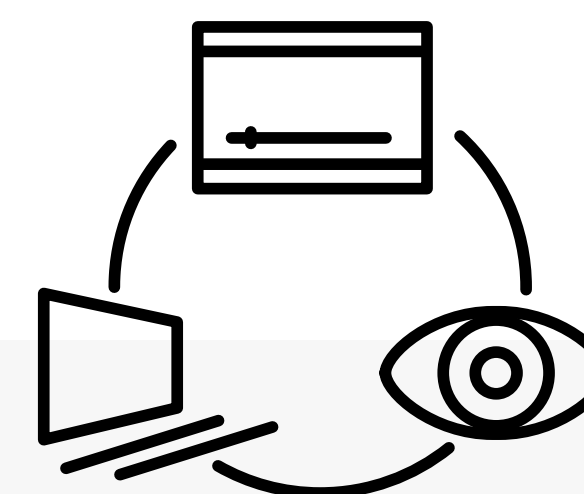
Development funding:

Small scale seed funding (\$10k - \$100k), hardest to get and essential for projects to progress. Usually a production company investing in their R&D or creatives developing ideas unpaid, which leads to slow process



Production funding:

Production funding: larger amounts (\$5m - \$500m), usually a mix of commercial financing for mainstream projects



Distribution/impact:

Distribution/impact: funding to support release with marketing. Additional communications partnerships might focus on wrap-around impact campaigns.

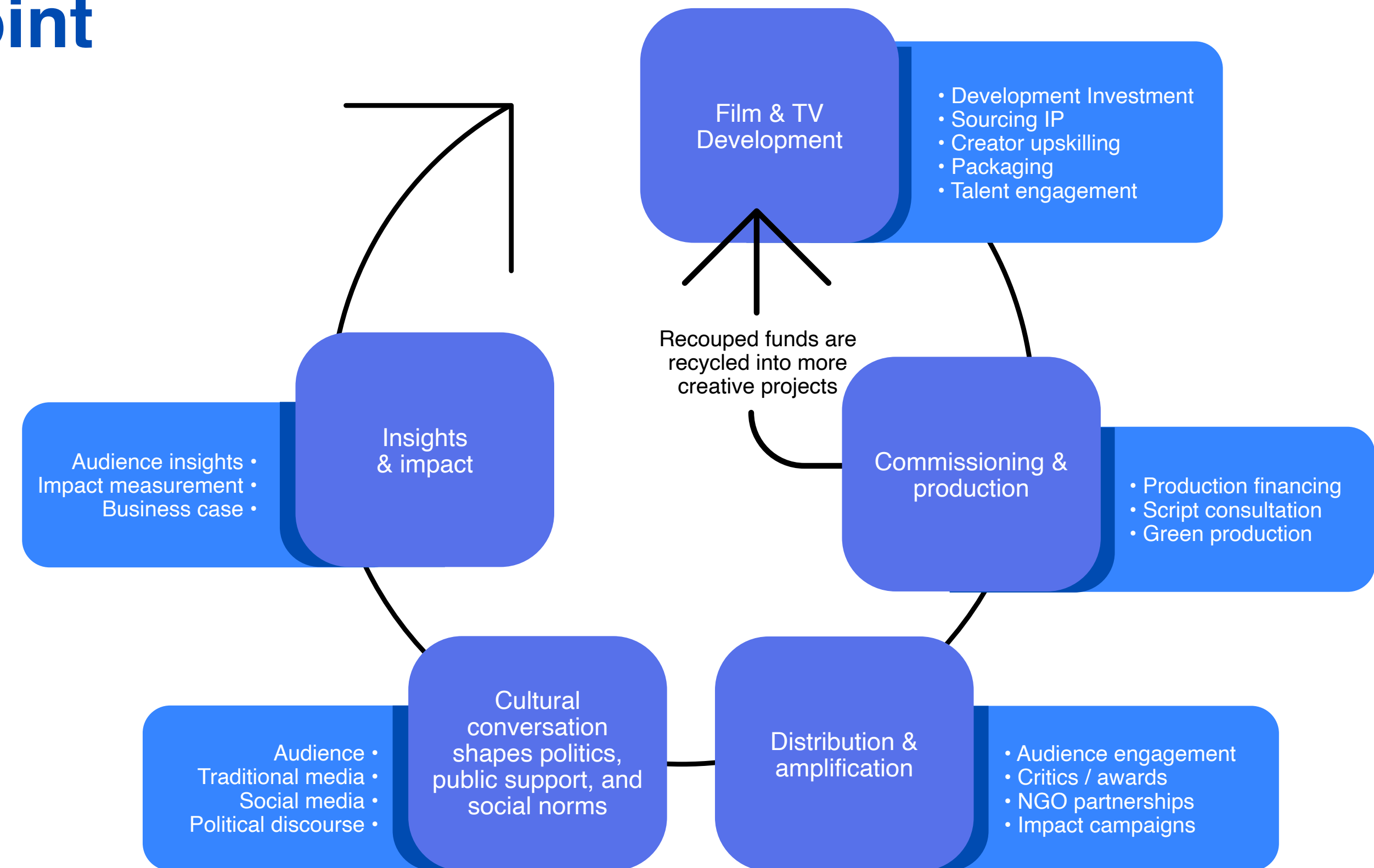
The most effective development funding bundles editorial mentorship, scientific advisors, and early audience and impact planning to help projects be greenlit for production.

15

Key learnings: Why development is the leverage point

ECCA commissioned Climate Spring to conduct interviews and desk research on the availability and efficacy of development funds which revealed key learnings:

- Film/TV projects often stall before production: weak package, unclear market fit, scheduling talent and financing can collapse if one piece drops out
- The entertainment industry is facing budget cuts and a scarcity of development funding
- Financial and strategic support at development and packaging is therefore where it's possible to have the most influence, and enable projects to progress to production
- Providing wrap around support - market access, editorial support, expert guidance, significantly increases the chances of success
- Projects which start with producers attached are most likely to reach the market - individual filmmakers struggle to get their projects to audiences

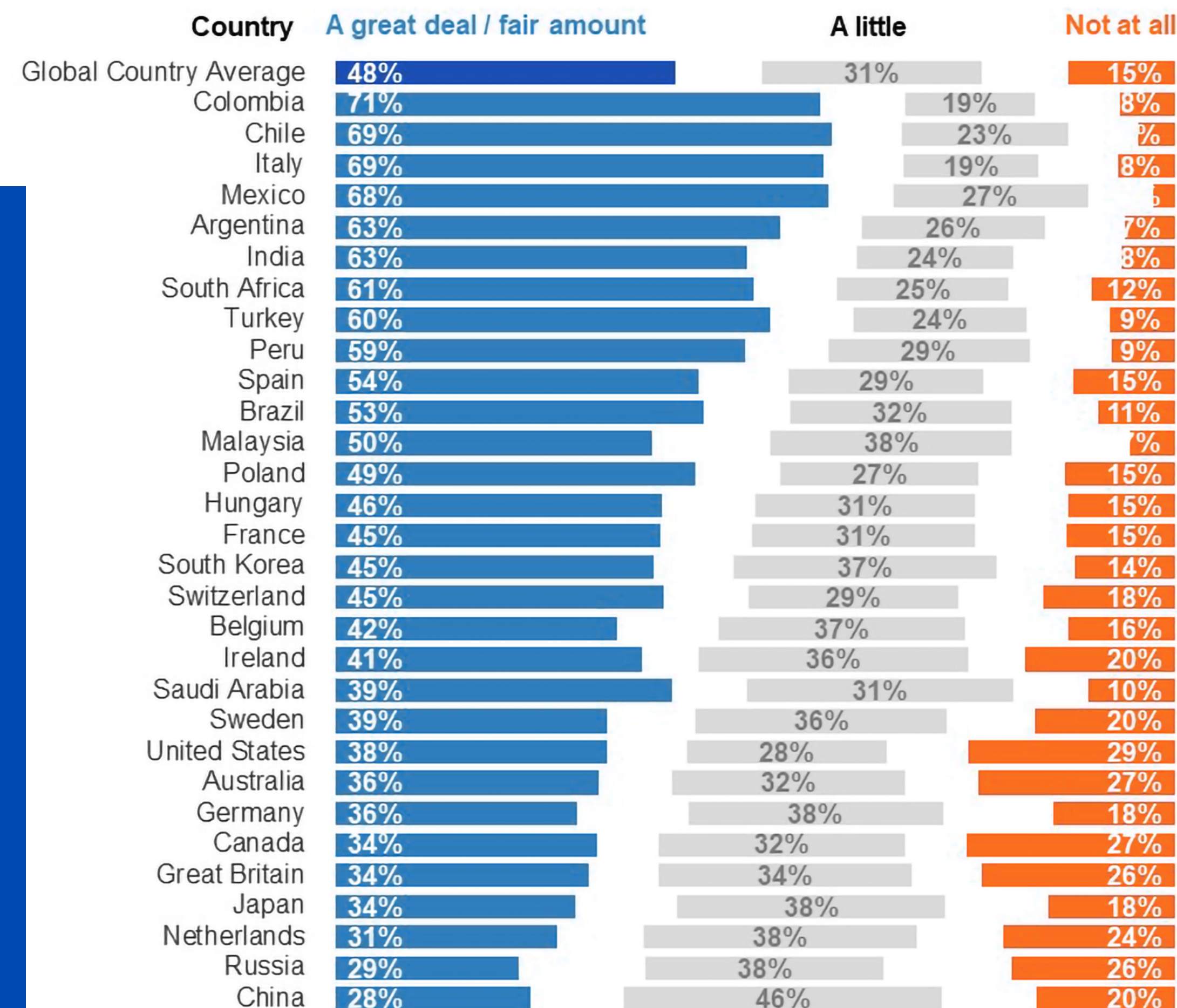


16

Different contexts, different strategies

- Global South countries tend to have a greater level of concern and engagement on climate issues than those in the Global North. They are the most impacted countries, with lived experience of climate change, and the least responsibility for the problem
- In the Global North, the priority is to create a public mandate for the rapid and immediate emissions reduction required by the historically most responsible countries
- In the Global South, contexts vary hugely - in rapidly growing economies the priority is about accelerating the transition to low carbon and sustainable economies; elsewhere engagement might be more on ensuring that climate action is equitably discussed and dispersed to usher in a just transition
- Contexts, of course, vary hugely across the Global South, and their approaches to transition will differ - the cultural narratives supported must reflect that

How much have you worried about climate change in the last 2-3 weeks



Base:22. 534 online adults aged 16-74 across 30 countries, 18 Feb - 4 Mar 2022

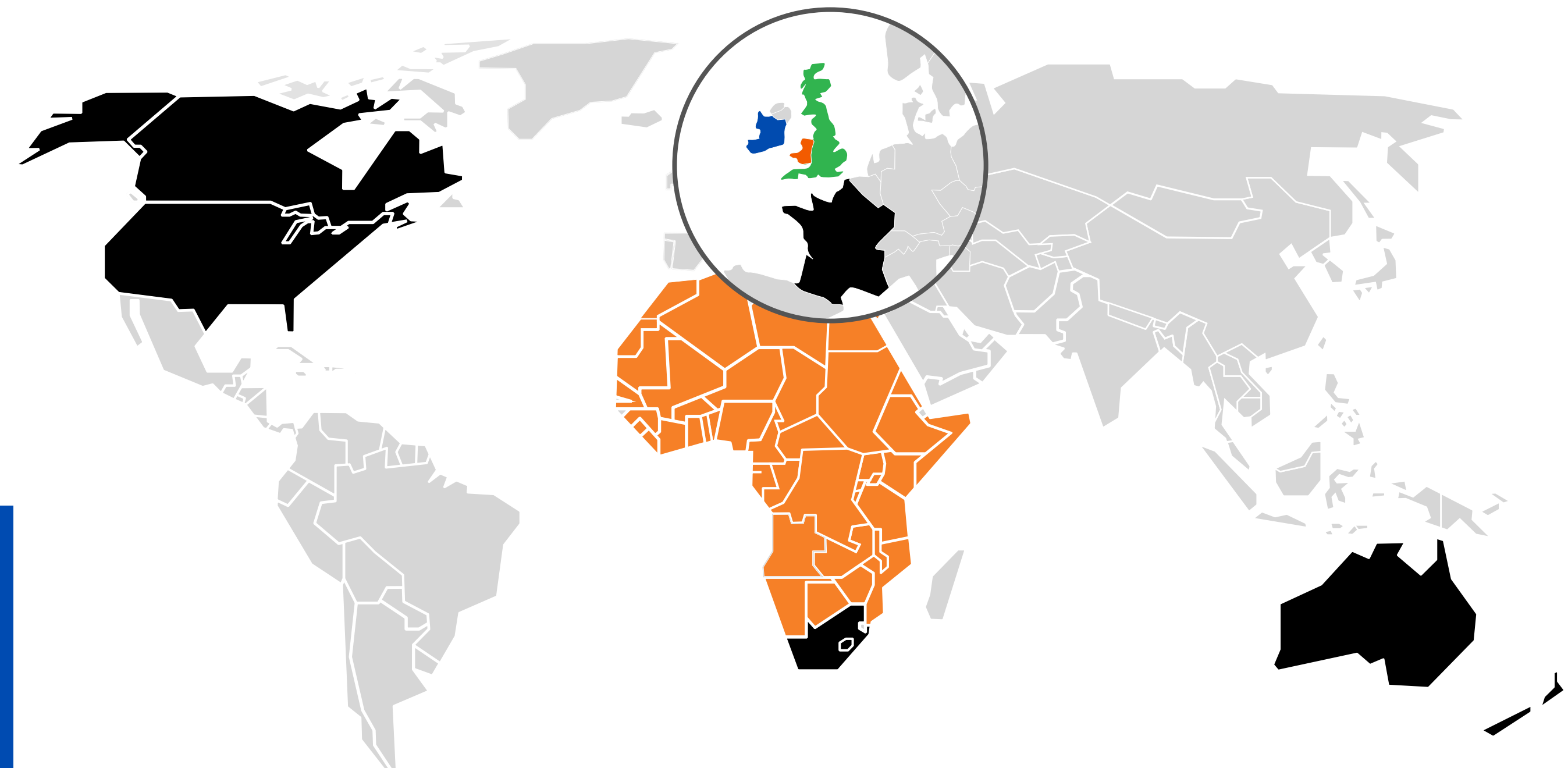
<https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/earth-day-2022-global-attitudes-climate-change>

17

Existing climate content funds

There are very few development funds available with a climate focus. Those that do exist are clustered in global English-language territories (UK, US and Australia) and Europe, with little support for the Global South. Beyond the climate focused development funds there are government backed development funds for regional/national objectives.

- Global funding for film/TV is skewed towards documentary and independent films, with limited support for mainstream film or TV
- Climate Spring and Minderoo Pictures are the only significant international funds providing investment for mainstream content, designed as investment for recycled capital
- Most funds pair funding with wrap-around support
- The Global South markets receive little or no funding for climate storytelling for long form mainstream climate narratives, despite high and growing screen consumption
- Funding channels already exist and provide robust infrastructure for distributing funding efficiently and at scale



Climate Spring
(Global - English language focused/France))

Minderoo
(Global - English language focused)

Doc Society Climate Stories Lab
(Global)

Greener Homes fund / Nesta
(UK)

Climate Stories Fund / Film Cymru
(Wales (UK))

Creative Climate Action / Creative Ireland
(Ireland)

Africa No Filter
(Africa)

18

Case Study: Climate Spring

- Climate Spring pioneered a development-led, industry-integrated model to normalise climate storytelling in mainstream film and TV. Working as funder, advisor and convenor, it focuses on a pipeline of commercially viable scripted and factual projects that embed narratives on accountability, solutions and agency rather than the problem
- Invests directly in projects by leading producers/writers, pairing with editorial support as executive producers
- 75+ film/TV projects in development with production companies and studios across the UK, US, Australia and Europe
- Development timelines significantly accelerated, halving the time from concept to screen
- Early capital unlocks co-investment and leverages development funding to unlock commercial production investment
- Funding availability creates a “halo effect” drawing more creators into climate storytelling and derisking climate storytelling for commissioners
- In addition to funding, running programmes to inspire creatives, partnering with NGOs for training to build capacity in the industry, providing strategic support to key industry stakeholders, and convening the ecosystem of organisations supporting this work
- Climate Spring’s impact to date demonstrates how a development fund can incentivise leading talent and mainstream content producers

19

The case for a new creative development fund for the Global South

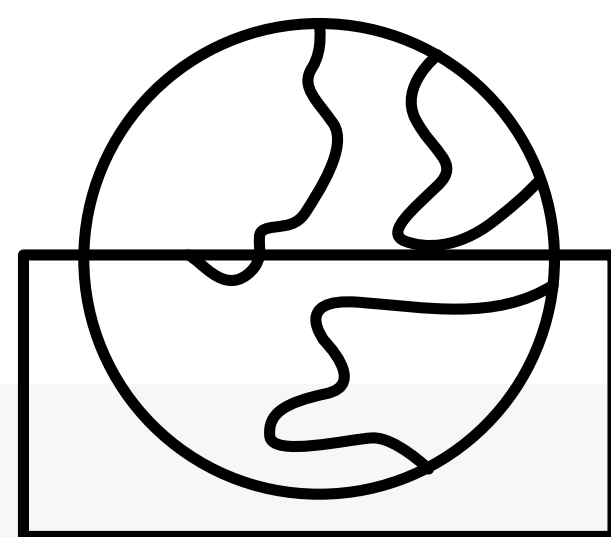
There is clear evidence on how popular culture, in particular film/TV, has outsized impact on social and environmental issues; the scientific and field evidence is well established on a range of social issues such as gender and health. It has only been in very recent years that there have been funds dedicated to climate storytelling, and it is too early to evidence their impact due to the long term cycles of production, but the evidence supporting the theory of change together with the mandate from the Paris Agreement, makes a robust case for the need for funding.

ECCA are recommending the creation of a new fund to support the creative development of climate content for film and TV for the Global South, addressing the gap in funding in comparison with the Global North for this essential strategy.



20

Fund purpose



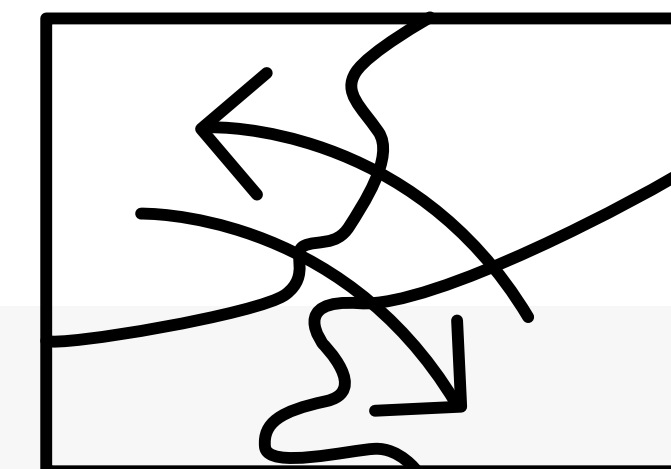
Purpose

Build the mandate for regenerative economies by funding creative development of Global South screen stories.



Approach

Combine localised decision making with commercial rigour and market stimulation in order for projects to land as entertainment, not simply messaging.

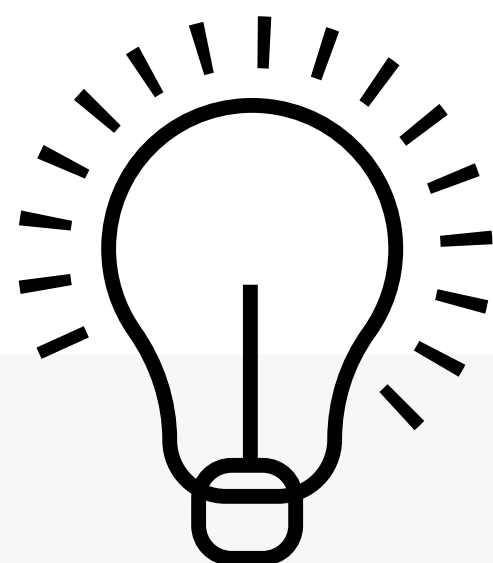


Focus

Back relevant concepts shaped by regional audience demands and cultural contexts, aiming for travel across language regions.

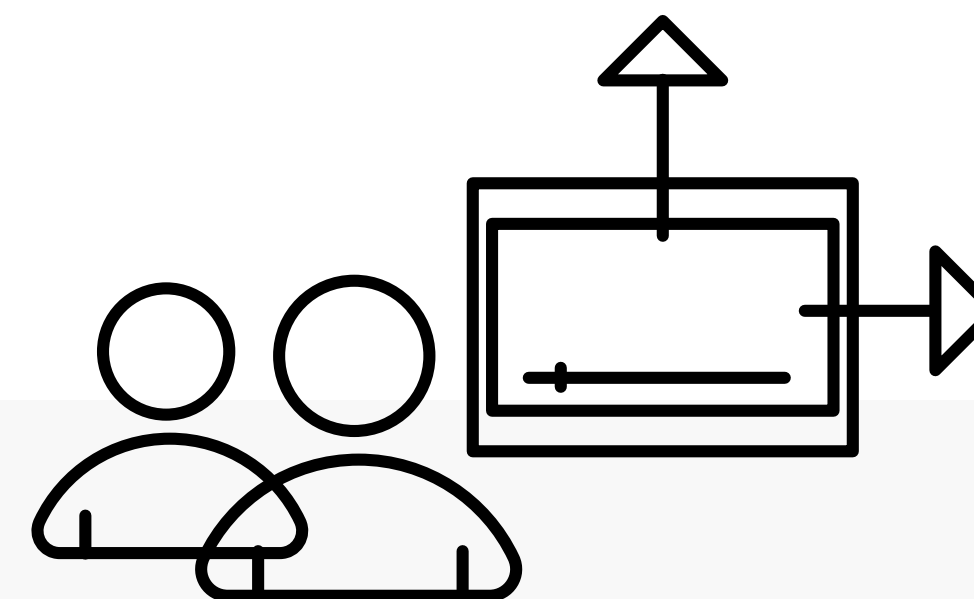
21

Funding mechanism: grants vs. investments



Grants (non-recoupable):

Enable maximum creative freedom. They are ideal for earliest exploration and under-represented voices. Limitations: external-to-industry positioning; no recycled capital.



Investment (recoupable):

Positions funder as an industry partner, unlocks producer-led routes to market, and recycles returns; terms can be generous since the fund itself is grant-backed.

Awarding recoupable funds to producers, not individual filmmakers, tackles a common blocker to projects progressing - which is having no producer attached - and accelerates packaging and finance.

A key insight from the research is that investing public funding as grants is risky without providing wrap around support.

An effective fund should combine non-recoupable seed funding for creatives to ensure access to filmmakers at all stages, and recoupable investment for producers with route to market.

22

Potential target geographies

Audiences and production capabilities across the Global South vary hugely. A strategy targeting the 25 most spoken language would account for 6.7bn viewers (compared to global population of 8.2bn)

While reaching audiences across the Global South is paramount, there are specific strategic markets that could have the greatest impact due to the volume and reach of their output:

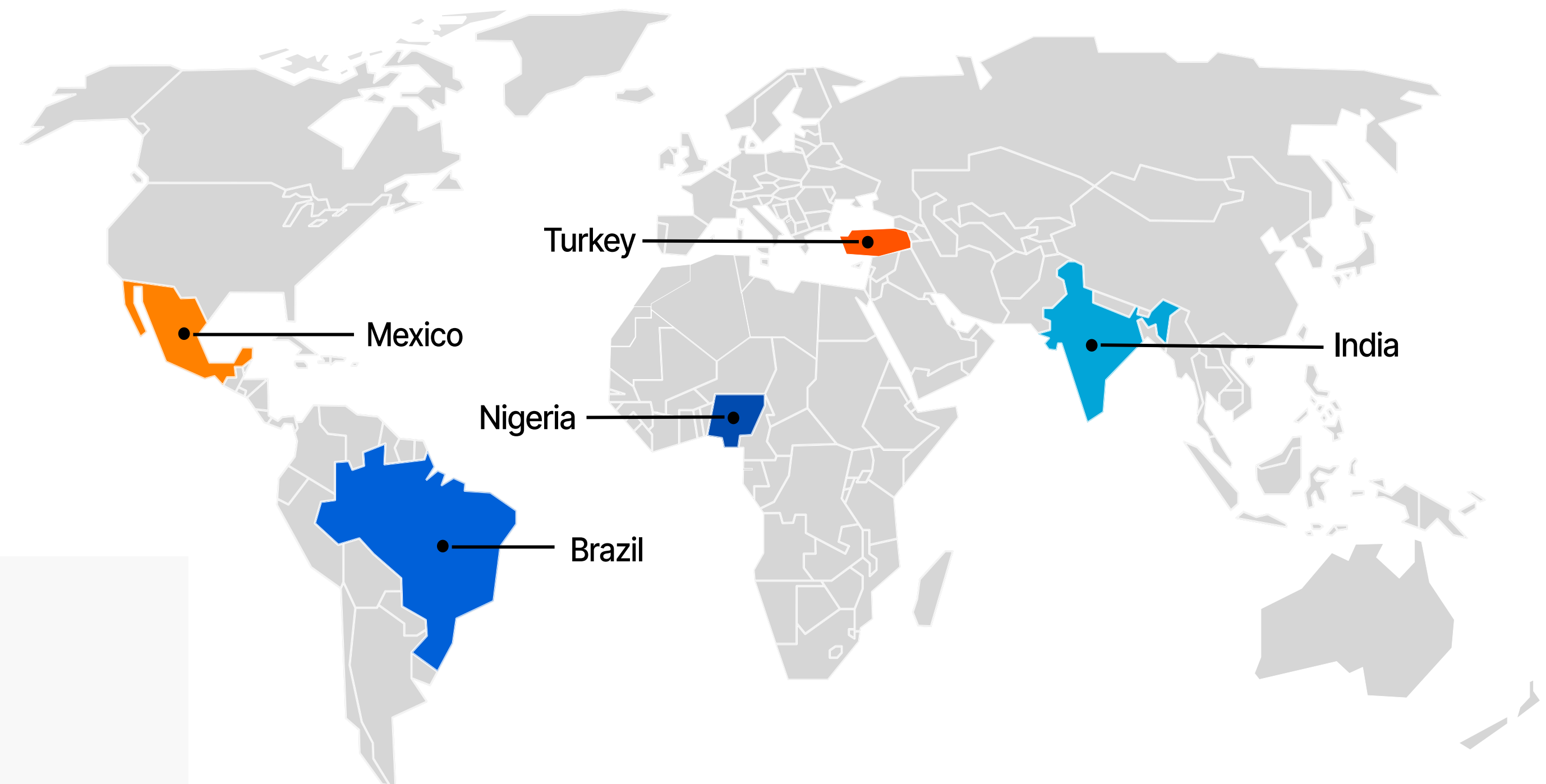
Brazil - major exporter of telenovelas

Mexico - significant creator of internationally acclaimed feature films

Nigeria - fastest growing content producer in Africa

India - one of the largest film producers in the world and an enormous exporter

Turkey - the world's third largest exporter of TV dramas



23

Potential target geographies

Illustrative example of the Hindi language market:

- A fund of \$7.5m focused on the Hindi language market would have the potential to reach the majority of the 600m audience.
- Key assumptions:
 - Average audience size per project reaching distribution: 20m
 - Projects required to reach audience of 600m: 30
 - Success rate for development into production: 10%
 - Cost of development of one project: \$25k
 - Projects needed in development: 300
 - Total development funding: \$7.5m



24

Principles

Decentralised decision making: Put decisions in-region: local partners with market fluency select and steward projects; the centre sets strategy, guardrails, and capital allocation.

Selection and decision rights: Mixed, rotating, panels (producers + climate/story advisors) of internal and externals assess projects on the basis of story strength, audience fit, editorial and feasibility.

Guardrails and risk management: Standardised due diligence, conflict-of-interest policy, milestone-based tranching, and light-touch central legal review.

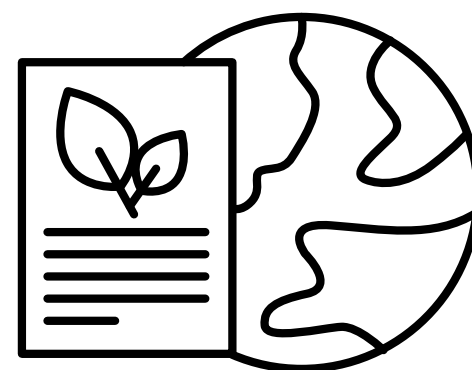
Accountability and learning: Shared impact framework; partners report pipeline quality, co-investment unlocked, reach and narrative indicators; mixed-methods evaluation across regions.

These approaches combine equity and efficiency: local expertise drives better picks and industry advocacy; the centre ensures consistency and comparability of impact.

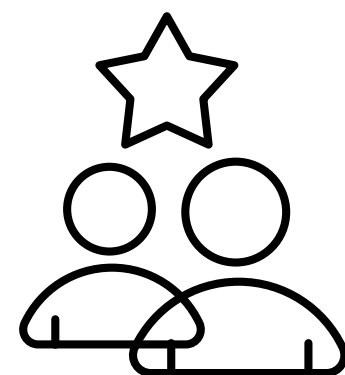
25

Wrap-around support

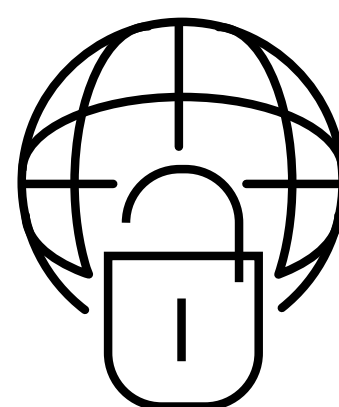
Funding that pairs cash with support is most likely to help projects progress, reach audiences and have impact. Key approaches include:



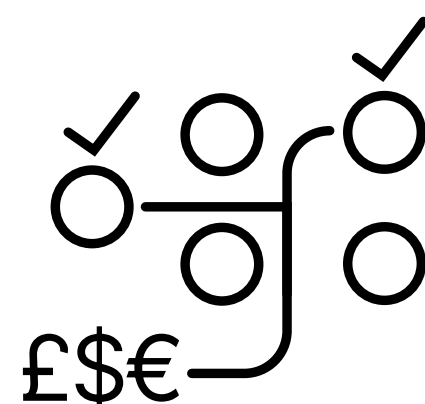
Editorial and climate consultancy:
script/story notes with climate expertise



Talent engagement and training:
writers' rooms, world-building workshops, mentorship



Finance and legal structuring:
Co-prod routes, packaging advice, legal support



Access to networks:
Warm referrals to producers, commissioners, labs and forums

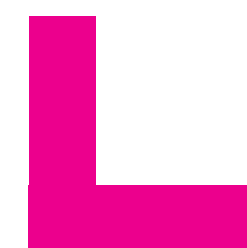
26

Conclusion

There is an exciting potential for Government funding into a global climate story fund to support creatives making TV and film storytelling for Global South audiences.

The model has been proven and the need identified.

The next stage is to explore this vision with ECCA.



Contact details



**CLIMATE
SPRING**

FUTERRA
SOLUTIONS
UNION

ECCA:

Solitaire Townsend: **Solitaire@wearefuterra.com**

Climate Spring:

Lucy Stone, Founder & Executive Director: **lucy@climate-spring.org**

Josh Cockcroft, Director of Impact & Research: **josh@climate-spring.org**