Culture Sector contribution

UN Special Rapporteur on cultural rights

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**QUESTIONNAIRE ON CULTURAL RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

**NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON CULTURE AND CULTURAL RIGHTS**

*Question 1: What negative impacts of climate change on culture, heritage and the enjoyment of cultural rights by all have been documented in your context? Are particular groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, rural persons or peasants, and youth or future generations, as well as cultural practitioners being impacted in specific and disproportionate ways? What efforts are being undertaken to inventory and monitor such impacts?*

Climate change is one of the most critical issues of our time, and its impact on both cultural and natural **World Heritage** is, unfortunately, more evident than ever. From the wildfires in Australia to the flooding of Venice, heritage is affected by climate change impacts in every corner of the globe. Cultural and natural heritage sites are threatened by increasing fires, floods, droughts, desertification and ocean acidification, while the uprooting of communities due to climate change is putting entire ways of life at risk, including the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage often related to heritage places. The loss and damage to cultural heritage, including World Heritage, may deprive local communities who live in and around them of their abilities to access and use the sites as has been their practice, as well as their abilities to care for the sites. Furthermore, the impact of climate change on our cultural heritage is not only physical, but also social and economic. Loss and damage to World Heritage properties also impacts future generations.

The uprooting of communities due to climate change threatens entire communities and ways of life. This includes the practice and transmission of a host of rich intangible cultural heritage practices – from oral traditions, to performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, traditional craftsmanship, and interactions and relationships with nature. Climate change is also leading to the loss of traditional knowledge, particularly knowledge about the environment and to the loss of economic opportunities in the cultural and creative industries and cultural tourism. Climate change is disrupting the everyday lives of communities across the globe, dramatically limiting their ability to access and benefit from their heritage, but also for their food production in living agricultural landscapes.

Through its unique Reactive Monitoring process, one of the most comprehensive monitoring mechanisms of any international convention, the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention provides reports to the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee on World Heritage sites impacted by climate change in order to provide the best advice possible to the States Parties, regional and local authorities and establish the most adequate mitigation measures. The World Heritage Committee is currently updating its Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World heritage properties, which will be presented to the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee.

Climate change can negatively impact the transmission and viability of **intangible cultural heritage**.Given that many intangible cultural heritage elements are directly tied to the natural environment, ecosystem disturbance and rapid environmental change caused by climate change can threaten access to the places and natural resources that underpin many living heritage expressions, practices and knowledge systems. For instance, the changing availability of plant and animal species will lead to loss of ecological knowledge and related language vital for the transmission of living heritage concerning food and medicinal plants, such as the [Andean cosmovision of the Kallawaya](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/andean-cosmovision-of-the-kallawaya-00048), inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Indigenous peoples and local communities living in vulnerable environments, such as small islands, high-altitude zones, desert margins and the circumpolar Arctic, are often disproportionately affected.[[1]](#footnote-1)

While there is growing recognition of the potential negative impacts of climate change on intangible cultural heritage, there is limited existing analysis and documentation on the issue. One challenge is the limited availability or accessibility of data that documents the impacts on intangible cultural heritage of disasters triggered by natural hazards, including those related to climate change. The documentation for nominations to the lists of the 2003 Convention is one potential source for understanding threats posed to intangible cultural heritage by natural hazards. National inventories of intangible cultural heritage and safeguarding plans could be other possible sources. A [survey](file:///C%3A/Users/v_aguiar/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/2G88TB3J/38266-EN.pdf_Safeguarding%20and%20Mobilising%20Intangible%20Cultural%20Heritage%20in%20the%20Context%20of%20Natural%20and%20Human-Induced%20Hazards.pdf) conducted in 2017 of elements identified on the Representative and Urgent Safeguarding (USL) lists indicated a lack of information regarding the impacts of natural hazards on intangible cultural heritage.[[2]](#footnote-2) While the USL nomination form asks States Parties to identify and describe ‘threats to the element’s continued transmission’, it does not specifically request or prompt consideration for the potential impact of climate change. There is thus a need to improve baseline data on the role and viability of intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change.

Climate change is affecting the **cultural and creative sectors** in many ways across the value chain. While these sectors are employing more people aged 15-29 than any other sector with nearly half of artists and cultural professionals being women, increasing threats posed by the climate crisis to the diversity of cultural expressions combined with a loss of economic opportunities in the cultural and creative industries are challenging the livelihood of creatives, placing a heavier burden on women and youth.

*Question 2: Are cultural sites or resources which are critical to participation in cultural life identified as being threatened due to climate change and if so, how? What processes are used to analyse the risk of harm or inaccessibility to these areas and resources? Are records being kept about these risks and impacts?*

As indicated above, through the unique Reactive Monitoring process of the **World Heritage** Convention, the World Heritage Centre is able to collect up-to-date data on the impacts of climate change to World Heritage properties worldwide and report, together with the Advisory Bodies –International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) - to the World Heritage Committee on the most pressing cases. To date, 310 reports on the state of conservation of 85 World Heritage properties located in 58 countries impacted by climate change-related factors have been examined by the World Heritage Committee. This data can be accessed through the World Heritage Centre online information system on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&id_threats=130%2C129%2C128%2C127%2C244%2C126%2C131> .

See response to Q1 above regarding lack of baseline data on the impacts of climate change on **intangible cultural heritage**.

*Question 3: Please provide examples of specific natural resources, local sites used for cultural practices or seasonal patterns that influence the ability to participate in diverse aspects of cultural life that may be subject to volatility due to climate change. Consider also diffuse geographical features or resources that may be at risk and are definitive or influential in the practice and development of culture on either a collective or individual basis.*

For example, in some sub-saharan African countries such as Mali, the climate change-related modifications of the seasonal raining patterns, intensity and the frequent droughts have led to changes in the availability of the grass traditionally used to rethatch the roofs of cultural places. Local communities have had to adjust by going further to collect the required material or changing the dates of their traditional practice.

**POSITIVE POTENTIAL OF CULTURE AND CULTURAL RIGHTS TO ENHANCE RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE**

*Question 4: What are ways in which culture and cultural resources, such as traditional knowledge, are being used to mitigate and/or adapt in the face of climate change? Where available, please share examples of best practices for applying traditional knowledge and cultural practices, such as those of indigenous peoples, peasants and fisher people, including traditional fire management and agricultural techniques that should be considered in developing mitigation and adaptation responses. What is being done to inventory and preserve such cultural resources that could be useful to addressing climate change?*

All properties inscribed on the **World Heritage** List need to have an effective Management Plan in place, or a Management System, which could be based on traditional management practices at the site level. Numerous World Heritage cultural landscapes (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/>) are governed by traditional Management Systems, which take into account the practices of the local communities, indigenous peoples’ and ancestral agricultural practice. In addition, the current Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties (2007) highlights that “*World Heritage site managers and researchers will continue to better develop their use of both traditional and advanced technologies (…)*”.

As an illustration, the World Heritage site of the Historic Town of Grand-Bassam (Côte d’Ivoire) was affected in October 2019 by heavy rainfall causing flooding of the Comoé river and its tributaries (Ebrié and Ouladine lagoons). The floods affected the village N'zima and caused serious damage to the World Heritage site. Consequently, the traditional Abissa celebration had to be postponed twice and its sacred grove has been flooded. The N’zima community responded to this crisis with traditional management through rituals aimed at initiating the recession of the Ouladine lagoon.

Traditional building practices such as traditional construction with earth or local stone use local materials and technology and could contribute to climate change mitigation/adaptation strategies. Historic towns that were densely built with a mix of commercial and residential uses and often pedestrian, also serve as models for developing mitigation/adaptation solutions.

In 2015, the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the **Intangible Cultural Heritage** adopted provisions in its [operational directives](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-7.GA-PDF-EN.pdf) focused on community-based resilience to natural hazards and climate change. The provisions also emphasize the role that intangible cultural heritage could play in climate change adaptation, for instance, through the recognition of communities and groups as the bearers of traditional knowledge about geoscience, particularly related to the climate. State Parties are encouraged to carry out studies and research aimed at better understanding the environmental knowledge recognized by communities as part of their intangible cultural heritage. They are also encouraged to adopt appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures to ‘fully integrate communities, groups and individuals who are bearers of such knowledge into systems and programmes of disaster risk reduction, disaster recovery and climate change adaptation and mitigation’ (OD 191).

Knowledge and practices relating to climate change, whether it concerns agricultural techniques, biodiversity, indicators of change, or weather prediction and response, provide the basis for many effective adaptation measures. Local communities and indigenous peoples have elaborated coping strategies over generations to deal with unstable environments, and in some cases, are already actively adapting to early climate change impacts. Their knowledge and practices are a considerable source of information, monitoring and offer potential solutions for ecosystem-based adaptation in a context of climate change. In this regard, there are several examples of inscribed elements on the lists of the 2003 Convention which could be useful in addressing climate change:

* Monitoring and weather forecasting systems i.e. [Suri Jagek (observing the sun), traditional meteorological and astronomical practice based on the observation of the sun, moon and stars in reference to the local topography](https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/suri-jagek-observing-the-sun-traditional-meteorological-and-astronomical-practice-based-on-the-observation-of-the-sun-moon-and-stars-in-reference-to-the-local-topography-01381)
* Traditional land and water governance systems: i.e. Traditional system of Corongo’s water judges; Knowledge and skills of the water measurers of the foggaras or water bailiffs of Touat and Tidikelt;
* Transhumance and pastoralism i.e. [Transhumance, the seasonal droving of livestock along migratory routes in the Mediterranean and in the Alps](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/transhumance-the-seasonal-droving-of-livestock-along-migratory-routes-in-the-mediterranean-and-in-the-alps-01470); [Cultural space of the Yaaral and Degal](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/cultural-space-of-the-yaaral-and-degal-00132) (Niger).
* Agricultural practices and food security strategies i.e. [Nsima, culinary tradition of Malawi](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/nsima-culinary-tradition-of-malawi-01292); [Traditional Mexican cuisine - ancestral, ongoing community culture, the Michoacán paradigm](https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-mexican-cuisine-ancestral-ongoing-community-culture-the-michoacan-paradigm-00400)
* Disaster risk reduction i.e. [Indigenous Architecture and Building Knowledge in Vanuatu](https://ich.unesco.org/en/individual-case-study-00988%26id%3D00026)

*Question n°5. What are the diverse legal frameworks, trends and practices at the national and international levels that promote intervention from across the cultural ecosystem, including by cultural rights defenders and cultural practitioners, as well as women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, rural people and peasants, and youth, in addressing disparate impacts and influencing decisions around climate change mitigation and adaptation? What are the challenges to such inclusivity and how are they being addressed?*

In the process to update its current Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on **World Heritage** properties (2007), the World Heritage Committee noted with appreciation the willingness of civil society groups to engage in this process and requested that the development of the updated Policy Document include consultation not only with States Parties, the Advisory Bodies but also with civil society. Within this framework, a wide online consultation took place and numerous NGOs, local communities and indigenous peoples representatives provided contributions, which were considered as much as possible. In addition, one of the two experts engaged by the World Heritage Centre in the update process is from civil society himself.

The **cultural and creative sectors** hold an untapped awareness-raising and innovation potential. Climate change has not been sufficiently addressed across cultural policies and plans yet. This is crucial in order to reap all the benefits of the cultural and creative sectors’ transformative power and to unleash the sectors’ capacity for creative mitigation and adaptation responses. The 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions promotes greater integration of culture in sustainable development policies and frameworks to support more resilient, dynamic and sustainable cultural and creative sectors in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Taken together, these are powerful instruments that are strategically aligned to positively transform not only cultural, but also economic, social and environmental policies in favour of sustainability.

Several innovative practices have also emerged within the cultural and creative sectors. Indeed, artists and other creatives innovate, challenge norms, inspire and entertain. Their innovations and creative expressions drive development processes that can widen people’s choices and inspire them to imagine alternative futures, especially in the context of the climate crisis.

At the global level, the [Creative Industries Pact for Sustainable Action](https://creativeindustriespact.com/mpipact) launched in 2019 gathers more than 70 organizations in the creative industries taking voluntary action to reduce their environmental impact and accelerate change toward greener and more sustainable cultural practices. Connect4Climate, the global partnership program launched by the World Bank Group and the Italian Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea, together with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, that takes on climate change, developed sectorial initiatives focusing [Film4Climate](https://www.connect4climate.org/initiatives/film4climate) and [Music4Climate](https://www.connect4climate.org/initiatives/music4climate).

At the national level, cultural practitioners are also positioning themselves are critical levers to raise awareness of the climate crisis and advocate for climate action and more responsive business models. The [Culture Fund of Zimbabwe Trust](https://www.culturefund.org.zw/) has been working on collaborative arts and environmental sustainable programme since 2012 to raise awareness of products and productions that showcase how arts and culture can tackle environmental issues. Another interesting practice is the [Rocking the Daisies Music Festival](http://rockingthedaisies.com/) in South Africa, which has achieved an 80% reduction in its carbon footprint through the use of biodiesel generators and eliminated harmful grey water and recycling trash (Rocking the Daisies, 2015).

*Question 6: What opportunities are available for people to publicly engage in cultural life in ways that demonstrate contemporary cultural shifts in response to climate change? Are there currently visible signs of cultural change underway? What factors might impede such practice of cultural life?*

As far as the **World Heritage** Convention is concerned, there is an increasing involvement of civil society into its effective implementation, including regarding the response to the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties. Petitions are frequently received by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in this regard and frequent exchanges take place. Civil society and NGOs participate in the yearly World Heritage Committee sessions.

The contribution of **intangible cultural heritage** in addressing climate change risks and impacts should be understood as embedded within broader systems of belief, values and ways of understanding and relating to the world. Many expressions of intangible cultural heritage serve not only to transmit knowledge about changing climatic patterns and their impact on the natural environment, but also shape a certain relationship to the natural environment, usually fostering notions of respect custodianship and connectivity towards the environment. Appreciating the diversity of these values can help explain and encourage broader cultural shifts in response to climate change. Creativity, heritage and the arts can also be a way to address societal anxiety, fear, denial and uncertainty about climate change and encourage a shift towards a more positive discourse, which also acknowledges gain, social cohesion and wellbeing.

*Question n°7. In what capacities do experts from across the field of culture and climate interact and exchange knowledge at the national and international levels? For example, are experts from various cultural fields involved in relevant climate change policy? Are climate change experts engaging with the cultural sectors, and if so how?*

On the eve of the 52nd session of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which took place on 24-28 February 2020 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the **UNESCO Reflection Group on Culture and Climate Change** held its first meeting, bringing together experts from across the globe to discuss the role of culture in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The experts noted that climate change represents one of the greatest threats facing culture today. Increasing fires, floods, droughts, desertification and ocean acidification are threatening both cultural and natural heritage, while rising sea levels, particularly in the world’s Small Island Developing States (SIDS) put entire ways of life at risk. Yet the experts also stressed that there is another side to this story, namely the role of culture as a resource for climate change mitigation and adaptation. They noted that culture makes communities more resilient in the face of climate change.

Despite the fundamental relationship between culture and climate change mitigation and adaptation, experts were unanimous in their assertion that culture is largely absent from discussions on climate change today. Culture is not systematically integrated into the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, or the Assessment Reports of the IPCC. Equally important is the inclusion of all aspects of sustainable development, including the environmental dimension, into cultural policies.

As regards the current updating of the Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on **World Heritage** properties (2007), a meeting of the technical advisory group, which is comprised by international experts in both fields of cultural and natural heritage as well as climate science hailing from all the regions of the world, was organized.

**Measures taken and recommendations**

*8. Are affected persons and groups being consulted and enabled to participate in discussions related to climate policy and climate action?*

Yes. As stated above, as part of the updating process of the current Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on **World Heritage** properties (2007), a wide public online consultation was conducted to collect the views, not only from States Parties and national authorities, but also from civil society, academics and any other interested parties in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. This consultation was promoted through various channels including the most used social networks.

###### The UNESCO Culture|2030 Indicators, which were launched in November 2019 during the UNESCO General Conference and the Forum of Ministers of Culture, includes a specific indicator to measure the role and contribution of culture in climate adaptation and resilience. The [Culture|2030 Indicators](http://whc.unesco.org/en/culture2030indicators/) is a framework of thematic indicators whose purpose is to measure and monitor the progress of culture’s enabling contribution to the national and local implementation of the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

*9. Are cultural rights defenders who are working on climate-related harms to culture and cultural rights facing specific challenges in their work, and are they at particular risk of threats, harassment and human rights violations? If so, how should these human rights defenders be better protected and supported?*

As indicated above, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre receives numerous petitions related to the destruction of heritage or any threats to World Heritage sites. In the process of reviewing the information with States Parties, the Centre protects the source of the information to avoid any threats or risks.

*11. Are the impacts of climate policy and climate action on culture, cultural rights and human rights more broadly being assessed? What should be undertaken in future in this regard?*

Close collaboration with the IPCC is necessary. The World Heritage Convention has provisions on intergenerational equity, as the protection of World Heritage is intended to make this heritage accessible to future generations. Therefore, climate change may also impact the rights of future generations provided by this Convention and therefore its beneficial provisions should be more broadly implemented. In this context, a dialogue has been engaged with the IPCC on the relevance of examining the role of culture, and particularly cultural heritage, for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

*12. What opportunities or mechanisms, if any, for remedies and redress are being made available to respond effectively to the harm to culture and cultural rights caused by the climate crisis?*

As far as the World Heritage Convention is concerned, the current updating of the Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties (2007) represents a timely opportunity to more effectively respond to the harm to culture caused by climate change, at all levels, site-level, national level, regional and international levels. The updated Policy Document is due to be examined by the World Heritage Committee at its forthcoming 44th session for its consideration and possible adoption.

*13. What national, regional and international initiatives are being undertaken to address the intersections of climate change, culture and cultural rights? How effective have such initiatives been, what primary challenges have they faced, and what additional efforts should be suggested in this regard?*

See above on the World Heritage climate change policy: once adopted it should be implemented by all 193 States Parties to the 1972 World Heritage Convention. In addition, the [Sustainable Development Policy](https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabledevelopment/), adopted in 2015 by the General Assembly of States Parties, includes provisions on the intersection of human rights, gender equality and sustainable development.

*14. What recommendations should be made to States and other stakeholders concerning these topics?*

Concerning **cultural and natural heritage**:

* Cultural and natural heritage can make communities more resilient in the face of climate change. Tangible heritage and Intangible cultural heritage practices have proven to be highly effective tools for helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from climate change-related disasters, and they should be more systematically used in climate risk management strategies at national levels.
* Decisions adopted at national level should be based on, and guided by, the best available knowledge, including interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary science and cultural expertise, and by considering, as appropriate, local, traditional and indigenous knowledge.
* A precautionary approach should always be adopted to address the causes and minimize the risks associated with climate change.
* In addressing climate change, actors at all levels should work together in a spirit of climate justice, global partnership, inclusion, and in solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable people.
* With the adoption of the revised climate change and World Heritage policy at the forthcoming World Heritage Committee session, all actors should be alerted about its global implementation and this moment could be also used for a broad promotion of these topics;

Concerning the **diversity of cultural expressions**:

* Transformative cultural policies addressing climate change are needed. In order to harness this transformative power, cultural policies for sustainable development should be based on informed, transparent and participatory systems of governance.
* The cultural and creative sectors also need to be better included in sustainable development frameworks. Indeed, progress has been made in integrating culture into national sustainable development policies and plans that interconnect economic, social, environmental and cultural outcomes, particularly in the global South. However, culture is primarily acknowledged as an instrumentality, as a driver of economic or social outputs. Only 40% of national development planning documents contain outcomes or actions specific to the protection of the diversity of cultural expressions.
* It is not only the impact of climate change on the diversity of cultural expressions is under-assessed, it is also the environmental impact of the cultural sectors, from heritage preservation to cultural and creative industries that is still too little known, including in the digital environment. Available data remains very limited, particularly regarding global level data. Expanding attention in order to address these gaps would help assess how culture and creativity can be further mobilized as powerful resources for addressing climate change impacts. This is essential to inform policy-making and support transformative action within the cultural and creative sectors. Conversely, according to Tyszczuk and Smith (2018)[[3]](#footnote-3), a greater integration of contributions inspired by culture and creativity into climate change scenarios could help reshape climate model outputs and imagine alternative futures.
* Finally, wider efforts are needed to identify adaptation practices and responsive business models for artists, professionals and industries in the cultural and creative sectors.

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1. See also Nakashima, D.J., K. Galloway McLean, H.D. Thulstrup, A. Ramos Castillo and J.T. Rubis 2012. Weathering Uncertainty: Traditional Knowledge for Climate Change Assessment and Adaptation. Paris, UNESCO, and Darwin, UNU. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002166/216613e.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more information, see UNESCO (2017) [Safeguarding and Mobilising Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Context of Natural and Human-induced Hazards](file:///C%3A/Users/v_aguiar/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/2G88TB3J/38266-EN.pdf_Safeguarding%20and%20Mobilising%20Intangible%20Cultural%20Heritage%20in%20the%20Context%20of%20Natural%20and%20Human-Induced%20Hazards.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Renata Tyszczuk & Joe Smith (2018), Culture and climate change scenarios: the role and potential of the arts and humanities in responding to the ‘1.5 degrees target’, Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, Volume 31, 56-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)