unesco

PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FINANCING OF CULTURE AS A STAND-ALONE GOAL IN THE POST-2030 AGENDA

Key messages

- Culture is now recognized as a key driver of inclusive and equitable sustainable development. This has recently been evidenced in the Pact for the Future, adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2024, which explicitly calls on its Member States to integrate culture into their economic, social and environmental policies in Action 11. However, culture remains sidelined in discussions and policies on the financing of sustainable development. A more systematic integration of culture into the financing of sustainable development would also directly contribute to the acceleration of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the SDGs, as well as to advance inclusive sustainable development in the post-2030 agenda, including through culture as a stand-alone goal.

- Financing the cultural sector – including the ecosystems of the creative industries and cultural heritage – means investing in the foundations of resilient societies, fostering inclusive economic growth and social cohesion for lasting peace. Culture should therefore become a more central consideration in policymaking and the allocation of funds across domestic public resources, private sector investments and financing, international development cooperation and trade.

- The unanimously adopted Declaration during the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2022 – called for the inclusion of culture as a stand-alone goal in the post-2030 international development agenda, and for enhanced action to address priority areas for cultural policy: (i) Cultural rights, (ii) Digital Technologies in the Culture Sector, (iii) Culture and Climate Action, (iv) Economy of Culture, (v) Culture and Heritage in Crisis, and (vi) Culture and Education.

- The Fourth Conference on Financing for Development should serve as an opportunity for Member States and relevant stakeholders to discuss concrete policy actions needed to effectively address challenges and close gaps in financing sustainable development through culture, including in view of MONDIACULT 2025 (September 2025, Barcelona, Spain). This requires increased policy engagement to enhance strategic

RELEVANT ACTION AREAS

Domestic Public Resources

Domestic and International Private Business and Finance

International Development Cooperation

Addressing Systemic Issues

International Trade Engine Development

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Financing Policy Brief Series has been prepared by the Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development to inform the substantive preparations for the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), to be held in Sevilla, Spain, from 30 June to 3 July 2025.

The Inter-agency Task Force on Financing for Development is comprised of more than 60 United Nations Agencies and international organizations. The policy briefs in this series were not subject to review by Task Force Members, and represent the views of the authoring organizations.

The full series is available at: https://financing.desa.un.org/iatf/report/financing-policy-brief-series

MORE ABOUT THIS TOPIC

For further information on the topic of this brief, please see: https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/culture public investments in culture when possible, establish enabling environments that incentivize private businesses to invest in culture, promote the financing of culture for development by international financial institutions, and enhance data collection in the cultural sector to improve its financing.

Problem statement

The integration of culture into sustainable development plans, including into their financing considerations, can promote greater localization of development efforts through context-specific, people-centred approaches. The UN Secretary-General's report *Rescue Plan for People* and Planet explicitly calls for a "greater consideration of culture's role in supporting the achievement of the Goals [that] would generate an important boost for implementation of the Goals between now and 2030", considering "culture [as] a global public good and a critical enabler and driver of progress towards the Goals" that "serves as a source of knowledge, values and communication, as a contributor to environmental sustainability and as a generator of economic activity and jobs".[1] Similarly, the SDG 11 synthesis report submitted by UN Habitat at the 2023 High-Level Political Forum underscores the role of culture in SDG localization, noting that it has "gained traction with enhanced recognition by decisionmakers, including through greater decentralization and transfer of competences to local authorities in the field of culture".[2]

In addition to localization, the cultural and creative sector is a crucial driver of inclusive economic growth, accounting for 3.1 per cent of GDP as of 2022.[3] This growing sector supports nearly 50 million jobs worldwide[4] and accounts for 6.2 per cent of all employment[5], with a higher representation of youth and women than other sectors. The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) foster participation across diverse social groups and promote richer, more inclusive societies, not only generating economic value but also enabling individuals and communities to express their culture, exercising their cultural rights and enhancing cultural diversity.

The absence of culture as a stand-alone SDG within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development poses a significant challenge, as it limits the resources available to the cultural sector to contribute to inclusive sustainable development. Additionally, such absence has led to a lack of comprehensive data on current investments in the sector, as well as on a broader set of indicators that reflect culture's contribution to sustainable development. Establishing culture as a stand-alone goal in the post-2030 Agenda is therefore a strategic policy investment that would encourage governments, international financial institutions and private actors to reinforce capacities to effectively harness culture for development by and beyond 2030, while attracting necessary policy attention and investment to address structural issues that hinder the flourishing of the sector.

Currently sidelined, a more systematic integration of culture into discussions and policies on the financing of sustainable development is therefore essential for ensuring inclusive, context-relevant development plans. This is critical not only for accelerating the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but also for shaping an effective post-2030 development agenda through a stand-alone goal for culture.

Policy solutions

Domestic Public Resources

When budgeting and allocating public financial resources, government spending should be more aligned with development priorities that integrate culture, recognizing its central role in achieving sustainable and inclusive development. In this context, integrating culture from the early stages of Domestic Resource Mobilization (DRM)

1. Report of the Secretary-General (2023). Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Rescue Plan for People and Planet
2. SDG 11 Synthesis Report (2023). Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet.
3. UNESCO (2022). Re-shaping policies for creativity: addressing culture as a global public good.
4. UNESCO (2021). Cultural and creative industries in the face of COVID-19: an economic impact outlook.
5. UNESCO (2022). Re-shaping policies for creativity: addressing culture as a global public good.

strategies is fundamental to ensure adequate budgetary space to finance the cultural sector. It is also important that public incentives are designed for long-term stability, preserving their effectiveness across government changes. This could be achieved, for example, by developing multi-year national strategies and frameworks in the field of culture, establishing independent cultural investment funds or reaching multipartisan agreements on subsidies and tax incentives for the sector. Such policy initiatives are important because state funding often plays a catalytic role for private sector investments in the cultural sector.

Domestic and International Private Business and Finance

Private sector investment in development should integrate culture, while public policies should aim to create enabling environments that encourage private businesses to invest in sustainable development through culture. This could be achieved, for example, by (1) enhancing lending capacity from banks to the cultural sector through agile guarantee schemes, (2) incorporating culture more centrally into Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria for investment institutions, or (3) adopting policies to foster more professionalized CCIs that encourage private investment, especially in developing countries.

1. Bank guarantee schemes have proven to be effective mechanisms to encourage private investment in the cultural sector, notably by reducing financial risks for lenders. An example includes the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility put in place by the European Investment Fund, where c. US$285 million in public funds facilitated nearly US$3 billion in financing for cultural and creative sector companies through more than 20 approved financial intermediaries across 23 countries.[6] To ensure attractive lending rates to companies in the cultural sector, such schemes should be agile and appealing for lenders, including in terms of ease of funds recovery in case of loan defaults.

2. While many investments in the cultural sector can yield solid financial returns, some may provide greater social value than financial gain, particularly through promoting social inclusion, environmental conservation and participatory governance. A 2022 PwC report[7] projects that ESG investing will reach US$33.9 trillion by 2026, highlighting a shift in investor mindset toward prioritizing social and environmental impact alongside traditional financial metrics. By incorporating culture more centrally into ESG criteria, the sector could benefit from increased financial flows within this new investment paradigm.

3. Capacity building efforts are needed to develop more structured and professionalized CCIs that can attract increased private investment, notably by reducing financial risk for investors and lenders. Policies aimed at developing stronger business models, establishing clear regulatory frameworks – including with regards to Intellection Property rights protection – and creating indicators on social and economic impact would make investment and lending in the creative industries more attractive, especially in developing countries. At the same time, the ever-evolving and informal nature of cultural work calls for more adaptable, flexible financial frameworks that reflect such reality and that enable cultural actors to clearly understand how to access them.

International Development Cooperation

Development cooperation agents are increasingly recognizing that integrating culture into sustainable development projects enhances their effectiveness by promoting localization and contextualization, while also advancing inclusive economic development, notably through the CCIs and the cultural heritage sector. The integration of cultural diversity into development plans places individuals and communities at the forefront of the conception, decision-making and operationalization of development pathways, including of indigenous peoples and local communities, as explicitly recognised in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.[8]

6. European Investment Fund's Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility (CCS GF) – Information for businesses
7. PWC (2022). Asset and wealth management revolution 2022 – Exponential expectations for ESG
8. Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, para. 117

In recognition of this, several initiatives are emerging within both Official Development Assistance (ODA) programs, such as the EU's Practitioners' Network Culture and Development Workstream, and Public Development Banks (PDBs), like the Coalition for Sustainable Development through Culture and Arts[9], established within the Finance in Common network. Building on this momentum, decision-makers in development cooperation institutions should prioritize investments in the cultural sector in more structured and systematic ways.

International Trade

International trade stakeholders should recognize the role of culture in promoting inclusive and equitable economic growth and development. Cultural goods and services, which reached an estimated US$2.1 trillion in exports in 2022[10], can be key in integrating developing countries into the global trading system. With 95 per cent of total exports of cultural services coming from developed countries[11], the promotion of a more balanced flow of cultural goods and services, along with an increased mobility of artists and cultural professionals, are key policy areas that require attention. This is emphasized by the objectives of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which places particular emphasis on preferential treatment for developing countries, as enshrined in its Article 16. In this sense, policy support is needed to encourage developed countries to refrain from systematically requesting reciprocity when negotiating trade agreements in the field of cultural goods and services with developing countries.

Systemic Issues

In the quest to create a global financial system that supports sustainable development, it is fundamental to integrate culture, in all its diversity, into discussions aimed at achieving a more inclusive, contextual and responsive financial architecture that addresses the needs of individuals and communities, particularly in developing countries. An example of how culture can be integrated into global financing discussions includes the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP28 to address, among others, non-economic losses faced by developing countries, which include cultural heritage and expressions. In this context, Member States could advocate for culture to be a more central consideration in the Loss and Damage Fund, enabling countries to access funds in the face of the loss of their cultural expressions and diversity, as well as in other relevant existing climate-related funds. Other initiatives such as the UN Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI), developed in collaboration with Small Island Developing States (SIDS), illustrate how new mechanisms can be designed to reflect the local realities of countries and communities to enhance their access to development financing, taking into account the world's diversity. In this regard, Member States could advocate for a more prominent integration of vulnerabilities related to the loss of cultural diversity and to the risks to both tangible and intangible heritage within the MVI's conceptual framework. Additionally, integrating culture more centrally within Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs), United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs), and other relevant multilateral mechanisms would enable Member States to develop strategies to increase investments in the cultural sector at the country level.

Specific recommendations for FFD4

To effectively address challenges and close gaps in financing for sustainable development through culture, the following recommendations are proposed for the Conference's Outcome Document:

1. Call on Member States, in close collaboration with the UN system and the private sector, to **firmly integrate culture as a central consideration in sustainable development discussions at the UN and other relevant international fora, including its financing,** in

9. Coalition for Sustainable Development through Culture and Arts, Finance in Common
10. UNCTAD (2024). Creative economy outlook 2024: technical and statistical report
11. UNESCO (2022). Re-shaping policies for creativity: addressing culture as a global public good.

order to enhance its visibility and importance in global development agendas, including through culture as a stand-alone goal in the post-2030 Agenda.

2. Call on Member States to **increase their dialogue with the private sector and international financial institutions** to more structurally and systematically integrate culture into their sustainable development financing frameworks, projects and programs.

3. Call on Member States, with the support of the UN System and the private sector, to **establish enabling environments that incentivize private businesses to invest in sustainable development through culture,** including through the establishment of effective guarantee schemes, the integration of culture into ESG investment criteria, including in dialogue with the UN Principles for Responsible Investment network, or the development of capacity building initiatives to develop more professionalized CCIs to attract increased private investment and lending.

4. Call on Member States and the private sector to **enhance systematic, coordinated data collection related to culture,** incorporating both quantitative and qualitative metrics, with a focus on results measurement and impact assessment, in order to inform policymaking and increase investments in the cultural sector.

5. Call on the **UN Secretary-General to report on the above recommendations and on Member States to integrate these in discussions at MONDIACULT 2025,** as appropriate.