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# UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda

## **Culture: a Driver and an Enabler of Sustainable Development**

**Thematic Think Piece**

**UNESCO**

Please note that the views expressed in this paper are those of the signing agencies and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

Following on the outcome of the 2010 High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Secretary-General established the UN System Task Team in September 2011 to support UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda, in consultation with all stakeholders. The Task Team is led by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme and brings together senior experts from over 50 UN entities and international organizations to provide system-wide support to the post-2015 consultation process, including analytical input, expertise and outreach.

## **UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda Membership**

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Co-Chair  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Co-Chair  
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)  
Department of Public Information (DPI)  
Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)  
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)  
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)  
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)  
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)  
Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG)  
Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)  
Global Environment Facility (GEF)  
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)  
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)  
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)  
International Labour Organization (ILO)  
International Maritime Organization (IMO)  
International Monetary Fund (IMF)  
International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)  
Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)  
Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS)  
Office of the Deputy Secretary-General (ODSG)  
Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked  
Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS)  
Office of the Special Advisor on Africa (OSAA)  
Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO)  
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)  
United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women)  
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)  
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)  
United Nations Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP)  
United Nations Global Compact Office  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)  
United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)  
United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)  
United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)  
United Nations Millennium Campaign

United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA)  
United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)  
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)  
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)  
United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)  
United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Secretariat (CEB)  
United Nations University (UNU)  
United Nations Volunteers (UNV)  
United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)  
Universal Postal Union (UPU)  
World Bank  
World Food Programme (WFP)  
World Health Organization (WHO)  
World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)  
World Meteorological Organization (WMO)  
World Trade Organization (WTO)

## I. Introduction

The Outcome Document of the 2010 MDG Summit,<sup>1</sup> published ten years after the Millennium Declaration, emphasized the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

These crucial messages were reiterated in two consecutive “Culture and Development” UNGA Resolutions in 2010 and 2011, which called for the mainstreaming of culture into development policies and strategies, and underscored culture’s intrinsic contribution to sustainable development.

The forthcoming ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review on “Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals” will be an opportunity to address the direct nexus between culture and the achievement of the MDGs.

The post-2015 agenda should take into account the critical lessons learned on the two ways in which culture fosters sustainable development: as a driver and as an enabler.

## II. Culture drives sustainable development

Throughout the past decade, statistics, indicators and data on the cultural sector, as well as operational activities have underscored that culture can be a powerful driver for development, with community-wide social, economic and environmental impacts.<sup>2</sup>

Of particular relevance is the **cultural sector’s contribution to the economy and poverty alleviation**. Cultural heritage, cultural and creative industries, sustainable cultural tourism, and cultural infrastructure can serve as strategic tools for revenue generation, particularly in developing countries given their often-rich cultural heritage and substantial labour force.

**Cultural and creative industries** represent one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the global economy with a growth rate of 17.6 % in the Middle East, 13.9 % in Africa, 11.9 % in South America, 9.7 % in Asia, 6.9 % in Oceania, and 4.3 % in North and Central America.<sup>3</sup> Promoting this sector requires limited capital investment, involves low entry barriers and can have a direct impact on vulnerable populations, including women. In Ecuador, recent studies show that the formal and private cultural activities contributed 4.76% to the 2010 GDP and in the same year, 2.64% of the total employed population worked in cultural occupations. Almost 60% of the latter were women.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Keeping the promise: united to achieve the Millennium Development Goals”.

<sup>2</sup> By January 2012, culture was included in 70% of the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks.

<sup>3</sup> PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), 2008

<sup>4</sup> Recent UNESCO Statistics (March 2012) obtained through the Culture for Development Indicators Suite (CDIS) funded by Spain, Figures are preliminary. Based on the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics, the methodology of the CIDS economic indicator on GDP distinguishes between central cultural activities which represented 2.74%, and equipment and support cultural activities which reached 2,02% in Ecuador for 2010.

Furthermore, the tourism sector has become one of the world's fastest growing economic sectors. Gross worldwide tourism receipts grew at an average rate of 7 % from 1998 to 2008, with 12 % for the Least Developed Countries for the same period.<sup>5</sup> **Cultural tourism** - that relies on tangible and intangible cultural assets - accounts for 40 % of world tourism revenues. Investment in culture and creativity has proven an excellent means for **revitalize the economy of cities**. Today, many cities use cultural heritage and cultural events and institutions to improve their image, stimulate urban development, and attract visitors as well as investments. Most Middle-Income Countries are developing vibrant culture sectors and initiatives and request assistance in this area.

Culture-led development also includes a range of **non-monetized benefits**, such as greater social inclusiveness and rootedness, resilience, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship for individuals and communities, and the use of local resources, skills, and knowledge. Respecting and supporting cultural expressions contribute to strengthening the social capital of a community and fosters trust in public institutions.

Cultural factors also influence lifestyles, individual behaviour, consumption patterns, values related to **environmental stewardship**, and our interaction with the natural environment. Local and indigenous knowledge systems and environmental management practices provide valuable insight and tools for **tackling ecological challenges**, preventing biodiversity loss, reducing land degradation, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

The UN Inter-agency projects, implemented under the MDG-F Achievement Fund<sup>6</sup> carried out in recent years, have demonstrated concretely the power of culture to respond to gender issues, to health and environment concerns, to challenges in the areas of education and livelihoods – let alone the fact that these projects have generated new jobs, new market opportunities, and greater income levels, that they have improved living conditions and fostered community-based economic growth, and contributed to empowering individuals.

### **III. Culture enables sustainable development**

Culture-sensitive approaches have demonstrated concretely how one can address both the economic and human rights dimensions of poverty at the same time, while providing solutions to complex development issues in an innovative and multisectoral manner. Indeed, culture has a transformative power on existing development approaches, helping to broaden the terms of the current development debate and to make development much more relevant to the needs of people.

Development interventions that are responsive to the cultural context and the particularities of a place and community, and advance a human-centred approach to development, are most effective, and likely to yield sustainable, inclusive and equitable outcomes.

Acknowledging and promoting respect for cultural diversity within a human right based approach, moreover, can facilitate intercultural dialogue, prevent conflicts and protect the rights of marginalized groups, within and between nations, thus creating optimal conditions for

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<sup>5</sup> UNWTO, June 2011

<sup>6</sup> MDG Achievement Fund – Culture and Development Window, funded by the Spanish Government.

achieving development goals. Culture, understood this way, makes development more sustainable.

#### **IV. Capitalizing on the Potential of Culture Beyond 2015**

The failure of well-intentioned development programmes, and the gaps in achieving the MDGs, revealed the inadequacy of universal policies and approaches to development regardless of cultural context.

The integration of culture into sustainable development strategies and policies advances a human-centred and inclusive approach to development, in addition to serving as a powerful socio-economic resource.

Culture is transversal and cross-cutting concern and, as such, affects all the dimensions of development. However, consideration for the role of culture in sustainable development requires that due attention be paid to processes as well as outcomes.

A better articulation of a shared agenda, and guidelines towards mainstreaming culture into the distinctive mandates of United Nations beyond 2015 could ensure a more effective response to development needs.

The post-2015 development agenda should also recognize the specific contribution that culture as a sector, encompassing tangible and intangible heritage, cultural and creative industries and cultural infrastructures, has made towards achieving sustainable development, as evidenced in terms of poverty alleviation, social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

There is a growing interest for culture as an integral part of the broader development debates at country level. Whereas 5 years ago culture was mentioned in only less than 30% of UNDAF, it is now mentioned in 70% of them. Culture has been defined as an UNDAF outcome in several countries. Indeed, as the 2010 UN Secretary General's Report on Culture and Development has shown, 18 UN organizations work in the area of Culture or regularly adopt culture-sensitive approaches.

#### **V. Integrating culture in the development agenda: the normative framework**

To integrate culture in the development agenda, clear objectives, definitions, mechanisms, tools, monitoring and evaluation systems are needed.

An important normative apparatus exists in this area: seven Cultural Conventions deal with tangible and intangible heritage, the diversity of cultural expressions and creative industries, and illicit trafficking of cultural goods (e.g. the World Heritage Convention, the Intangible Heritage Convention and the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions). The United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organisation has devised policies, legislations, standards, operational guidelines, monitoring and evaluation tools, capacity building programmes, international funds, as well as concrete operational actions that safeguard and promote culture, contribute to capacity development of cultural institutions, build networks of professionals, and actively involve local communities.

## **VI. The way forward**

The following proposed measures can build on culture's contribution to sustainable development:

### *Integrating Culture into Governance*

- Integrating culture in the conception, measurement, and practice of development with a view to advancing inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.

### *Capitalizing on the Cultural Sector's Contribution to Economic Development and Poverty Reduction*

- Supporting sustainable cultural tourism, cultural and creative industries, cultural institutions and culture-based urban revitalization as powerful economic sub-sectors that generate decent employment, stimulate local development, and foster entrepreneurship.
- Culture-led economic development should take into account the protection of cultural assets that are often fragile and constitute a unique and non-renewable capital.

### *Capitalizing on Traditional Knowledge to foster Environmental sustainability*

- Integrating traditional knowledge and practices in sustainable environment schemes and seeking synergies between traditional environmental practices and high technologies.

### *Building on Culture to Promote Social cohesion*

- Promoting intercultural dialogue to harness social cohesion thereby, creating an environment conducive to development.
- Capitalizing on the potential of the arts to promote social cohesion and develop entrepreneurship, especially among youth, and in post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

# How Culture Contributes to Development

