



CULTURE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA:

A REPORT BY
THE CULTURE 2030 GOAL
CAMPAIGN



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Leading up to the adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, several global cultural networks campaigned under the banner “[The Future We Want Includes Culture](#)” for the inclusion of one specific goal devoted to culture, or for the integration of cultural aspects across the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). This campaign was also known as the **#culture2015goal campaign**. In the [final document](#) of this campaign (23 September 2015: “**Culture in the SDG Outcome Document: Progress Made, but Important Steps Remain Ahead**”), the networks committed to keep their cooperation active.

Building on this commitment, the members of the campaign have taken the occasion of the first UN [SDG Summit](#) that takes place in New York on 24-25 September 2019 as a perfect opportunity to re-energise the campaign, now updated as **#culture2030goal**. Through this, they will underline key messages on the role that culture is playing (and should play) in the implementation of the SDGs, with this report, entitled “Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda”.

The report takes stock of the **first four years of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, from the perspective of culture**. It provides an analysis of the presence of culture and associated concepts in the annual progress reviews for the SDGs, focusing on the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by State Parties to the UN for the High Level Political Forums (HLPFs) in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

The report also explains the parallel developments of policy in the global conversation on culture in development, and includes an analysis of the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs, submitted by cities and local governments). Finally, the report provides key recommendations for all parties involved in the next cycle of HLPF.

The report shows some interesting **evidence related to the existence of cultural policies and programmes** related to SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities, on cultural heritage and on the use of public spaces). There are also important cultural initiatives in SDG4 (quality education), SDG5 (gender equality), SDG8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG9 (infrastructures), SDG10 (reduced inequalities), SDG12 (sustainable production and consumption), SDG15 (life on land) and SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

However, the report expresses concern about the **limited presence of culture in the VNRs and in the broader documents emerging from the HLPF review process**, including the relevant Ministerial and Political Declarations. This is especially acute in SDG16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which fail to take advantage of the potential of citizen participation in cultural life and of local, national and international cultural collaborations.

The reality is that **references to culture in the SDGs are scarce** and do not sufficiently acknowledge the many ways in which cultural aspects influence and contribute to sustainable development. The keyword analysis of the VNRs research finds that the **cultural dimension of sustainable development lags significantly behind** (between one eighth to one fifth of) the other three recognized dimensions (the social, economic and environmental). We would like to see an increase in the share of the cultural dimension in the coming years, at least as much as the environmental dimension.

Taking into account the global “acquis” on culture in sustainable development and the body of existing knowledge and extremely relevant initiatives that are explicitly or implicitly connecting culture to the SDGs, it is sad to confirm that **the potential to relate culture to the SDGs appears to remain largely untapped in national strategies to implement the SDGs.** To a large extent, this results from the feeble presence of explicit references to culture in the text of the 2030 Agenda, but it is also because the implementation and reporting process does not necessarily include the communities, leaders and cultural networks who are most engaged in culture and who understand its impacts best.

In a sentence: there is a gap between existing expertise and on-the-ground practices engaging culture for sustainable development and the reflection and prioritization of this in documents emerging from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Implementation of the 2030 Agenda with the Sustainable Development Goals at its heart is the most important shared agenda that the humanity has ever adopted. But, as the UN Secretary General has affirmed in his 2019 Report to the HLPF, the global response to the 2030 Agenda has not been ambitious enough. Four years after its approval in 2015, the challenges are even greater: growing inequalities, mistrust in policy systems, violence against vulnerable groups, military conflicts and climate emergency. **In the face of such urgency, culture should be at the heart of the response.**

We believe indeed that further awareness-raising must be done in order to convince all relevant actors that **culture is essential for the achievement of all Goals. The Implementation Decade (2020-2030) is about to begin. We are convinced that an explicit presence of culture in the “action and delivery” efforts to achieve the SDGs is more essential than ever.** This is because:

(a) the adaptation of the SDGs at the national or local level requires recognition of specific cultural contexts – what may be termed the ‘**cultural localisation**’ of the SDGs, which involves translating the universal language of the SDGs into the individual and collective lives of citizens inhabiting specific communities, cities and regions; this is valid for all SDGs, but particularly salient in areas like health and wellbeing (SDG 3), cities and settlements (SDG 11), education (SDG 4) or governance, peace and justice (SDG 16);

(b) in many areas, including zero hunger (SDG 2), sustainability education (SDG 4), sustainable use of environmental resources (SDGs 6, 7, 13, 14, 15), promotion of sustainable tourism (SDG 8), sustainable evolution of urban and rural settlements (SDG 11), adoption of sustainable patterns of production and consumption (SDG 12) or mitigation of and adaptation to climate change (SDG 13), **cultural knowledge and resources can act as enablers** of sustainable development; and

(c) cultural practices convey forms of **expression, creativity and identity building** that relate to the core of **human dignity**, and as such embody **people-centred**, sustainable development. Libraries, museums and community cultural centres can be seen as basic services (SDG 1), while the interrelation between gender equality and culture holds potential for positive social transformation (SDG 5) and the integration of the arts and cultural knowledge, diversity and creativity can be seen as integral to inclusive education (SDG 4). Cultural facilities may also be seen as part of resilient, quality infrastructures (SDG 9), cultural programmes contribute to reducing inequalities (SDG 10) and the protection of cultural heritage is key to sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11); last, but not least, Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17) should foster more international cultural collaborations.



The report also proposes some **key avenues of action** for all actors, in order to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as to prepare for an enhanced reflection of culture in future global agendas on sustainable development:

- All concerned parties should **consider culture from the outset in their national development planning frameworks for implementing the SDGs, as well as in their reporting through the VNR process**. In particular, they should use culture-related targets and their indicators more actively, and ensure that the role of culture is recognised in the plans for each relevant individual policy area.
- We encourage UN member states to foster **wider consultation and participatory exercises** in the elaboration of their VNRs and other planning, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the context of the 2030 Agenda. These exercises would be enriched by the engagement of cultural actors, who can help visualise how culture is, at the national and local level, relevant for the achievement of the SDGs, and to discuss what further opportunities may exist in this respect.
- We **commit to developing a coherent community around culture and sustainable development**. Such a community would build on and expand beyond each of our networks' scope of work, to mobilize the resources of international bodies, including UNESCO, governmental, non-governmental and business organisations that express their support. Thus, we will invite new networks to join in the #culture2030goal platform and to jointly explore the creation of a formal '**Major Group for Culture**'.
- We suggest that, taking the idea of convening high-impact meetings and taking the numerous UN resolutions on culture one step further, the UN devotes a **High-Level Meeting to Culture** within the next HLPF cycle of reporting (2020-2023), to create a global momentum for actors at all levels to coalesce.
- We require **better dissemination of already existing evidence and improved data** and call on governments and other organisations to support evidence-based research and the design and implementation of quantitative and qualitative indicators reflecting the place of culture in sustainable development, disaggregating the data wherever possible.
- We recognise the importance of cultural contexts in the **local implementation of the SDGs** and the crucial role played by local cultural actors, institutions and organisations. Therefore, in line with several cities' efforts to produce VLRs, we encourage the role of cities and local governments, as well as grassroots organisations and communities, in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda.
- We believe the **cultural sectors need to strengthen their own efforts towards the implementation of the SDGs**: cultural policies, institutions and organisations need to contribute to the response to our common challenges as one humanity, and be bolder and more explicit in annual and long-term programmes on issues such as human rights, gender equality, the fight against all inequalities and the struggle against climate change.
- We commit to continuing to **develop partnerships** at local, national, regional and global level to work with public authorities, civil society and communities to strengthen the integration of the cultural dimension in the SDGs.

We need parties involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs to consider culture as an invaluable driver and enabler to help communities thrive and be sustainable. We need the cultural communities, sectors, actors and agents, to come closer together for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.





CREDITS

The report can be reproduced for free as long as the authorship is mentioned. We recommend the following quote: Culture2030Goal campaign (2019), "Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda". Published in Barcelona, Paris, Harare, Sydney, Montreal, The Hague and Brussels, in the frame of the first UN SDG Summit taking place on 24-25 September 2019.

The report expresses the consensus of the members of the campaign. The report does not necessarily reflect the exact views of each one of its members. Please refer to each one of the members of the campaign for these individual views.

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