

Inter-Agency Platform on Culture for Sustainable Development Inaugural Meeting (Tuesday 11 May, 2021, 3.30-5 pm CET) Summary

●●● Context and Objectives

The Decade of Action for the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been marked by the manifold impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The health crisis has exacerbated global development challenges across the policy spectrum, and brought forward the need for more transversal and adaptive policy models. In particular, the urgency to address global priorities such as growing inequalities, the resurgence of conflicts and accelerating climate change has been made bare. These issues are further complexified due to fast-evolving global landscape in which countries are increasingly interdependent; in other words, no single actor can tackle these challenges alone. To address the scope and magnitude of this disruption, the United Nations system is urged to strengthen cooperation and coordination across its Specialized Agencies and Programmes, while expanding its synergies with other global and regional development partners, with a view to rebuild more sustainable, equitable societies.

In this unprecedented context, harnessing the multifaceted contribution of culture for sustainable development is more critical than ever. Culture is firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Unlocking its transformative potential to accelerate the achievement of the 17 SDGs and fill in implementation gaps is crucial. The economic and social impact of culture is increasingly recognized by countries around the world. The critical importance of culture in building resilient and sustainable societies was also further brought to light by the current pandemic. This growing momentum is notably reflected by the [integration of culture in the G20](#) by Saudi Arabia and Italy, as well as by the [International Year of the Creative Economy for Sustainable Development](#) proclaimed by the UN General Assembly. The growing integration of culture in the Voluntary National Reviews undertaken by Member States on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda also reflects culture's transversal contribution to advancing development at the national and local levels. These important achievements are also the result of UNESCO's efforts to strengthen [inter-governmental dialogue](#) and international cooperation on culture for sustainable development across a variety of stakeholders from the Member States to [artists and cultural professionals](#), [development banks](#), [international and regional intergovernmental organizations](#).

To leverage this momentum on the impact of culture on sustainable development and foster concerted efforts, UNESCO has convened the first Inter-Agency Platform on Culture for Sustainable Development. As the only UN agency with a specialized and global mandate on culture, the Organization is committed to amplifying the cooperation with sister agencies and

key partners at national, regional and global levels to leverage the impact of culture. The Platform is thus intended to foster the relevance, efficiency and cohesiveness of interventions and actions in areas relevant to culture to maximize impact in monitoring culture's pivotal contribution in development processes globally. Notably, it aims to promote the mainstreaming of culture within the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, at global and country-level. The Platform has the potential to trigger more systemic and robust collaboration, joint advocacy, the pooling of resources, and the sharing of lessons learnt through open dialogue and – possibly – joint mechanisms. The regular meetings also facilitate the monitoring and assessment culture's impact on socio-economic recovery at national, regional and global levels.

●●● Key elements of discussion

During the pilot meeting of the Platform, the importance of culture as a transversal dimension towards context relevant and people-centered policymaking was highlighted by most of the UN agencies and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO). Participants also underscored the importance of synergies across strategic policy sectors to leverage culture for public action and advance the reflection around key topics for the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda. Discussions clearly highlighted that **culture is not a standalone sector but is relevant to many policy areas**, from health, education, social inclusion, climate action, employment or urban development – “Culture impacts all human activities” as put forward during the meeting.

Participants welcomed UNESCO's initiative to develop the Platform, as a way to build a structured dialogue on areas relevant to culture and allow for more impactful cooperation. Common development challenges – including rising inequalities, climate change, the digital transformation and protracted conflicts – were extensively discussed, calling for amplified collaboration and strengthened synergies across the UN system and beyond to deliver as one.

The discussion was structured around three proposed transversal thematic areas, which cut across the different domains of culture and reflect core components of culture's contribution to the SDGs: Culture for Reduced Inequalities, Culture for Climate Action, and Culture for Dialogue and Peace. Participants were invited to provide their inputs around these three topics from their specific areas of mandate and expertise. Representatives were reminded that the core themes will streamline the working process across the development of the platform in the coming months.

I. On the first thematic area: Culture for Reduced Inequalities

Around the first thematic area, Culture for Reduced Inequalities, participating agencies underscored the role of culture for social cohesion, notably by amplifying the voice of marginalized groups. Speakers highlighted increasing inequalities, particularly in cities and more acutely in the informal economy. The challenges and opportunities of digital technologies were also underlined, emphasizing the need of cooperation to ensure a sustainable adaptation of the culture sector to the digital transition. Several participants reported on their respective investments in the cultural economy, in particular through the development of tools and

mechanisms to measure the economic and social impact of culture. Building data on cultural employment and trade at national and subnational levels was one such example.

Among strategic priorities put forward by participants were the cooperation with local authorities, the strengthening of social security and intellectual property frameworks for culture professionals, the regulation of global platforms, and the inclusion culture in global policy discussions on the future of work. Participants also underlined the importance of education and training to build skills and address social inequalities; arts education was identified as a catalyst for critical thinking and resilience.

II. On the second thematic area: Culture for Climate Action

Addressing the second thematic area Culture for Climate Action, participants highlighted that culture is a wellspring for climate action. The need to strengthen efforts to place culture on the global climate agenda was particularly brought forward. Living heritage and indigenous knowledge were also identified as sources of both climate adaptation and mitigation. Participants also highlighted that the joint management of natural and cultural resources is conducive to more sustainable agriculture, and that culture-based approaches can activate the ecological transition across many policy areas spanning urban planning, food security, disaster-risk management and sustainable tourism.

The importance of rolling out existing technologies and investments in training and capacity building was underscored. Improving networks and raising awareness to take into account geographical differences and to foster synergies between culture and non-culture ministries were identified as key elements. Engaging children and youth to drive transformative change by harnessing the linkages between environment, culture and sustainable development was deemed particularly important in this regard. The role of culture in fostering behavioral change in favour of the environment and climate action was equally emphasized, notably in the urban context.

III. On the third thematic area: Culture for Dialogue and Peace

In reference to the thematic area, Culture for Dialogue and Peace, participants acknowledged that culture is critical to dialogue and peacebuilding. Its vital role in conflict mitigation and prevention was explicitly mentioned, echoing the UN Secretary General's call for engagement towards more systematic focus on conflict prevention. Promoting the respect for cultural diversity and enhancing synergies between education and culture to build more peaceful and inclusive societies were highlighted as a commitment across all UN agencies. Specific examples of restorative justice, building on cultural values of reciprocity, were shared. The importance to mutualize efforts to ensure that conflicts do not target culture to undermine the stability of societies was also underlined.

Participants also underscored that the upholding of cultural rights, in particular in relation to indigenous peoples or conflict-affected areas, will require further attention and strengthened cooperation in the coming years, also calling for a refinement of related conceptual approaches and legal frameworks that take into account recent developments and global challenges in today's increasingly multicultural societies.

●●● Looking forward

Together, participants underlined that the joint reflection during this Platform is intended to inform their respective areas of work and cooperation, thus fostering a more robust inclusion of culture across sustainable development policies and frameworks.

As recalled, culture is now clearly acknowledged as a transversal enabler for the achievement of the SDGs providing for enhanced inclusiveness, buy-ins and ownership that are essential requirements to foster long-term sustainability. Culture is also increasingly reflected in country-level UN interagency programmes as well as in funding priorities of international ODA partners.

The Platform will build on and expand this momentum, with a view to enabling culture to renew and better inform policymaking across the board, while supporting a socially just transition to sustainable development. Echoing the pledge of some participants, discussions within the Platform shall stimulate a culture of collaboration and cohesiveness across the international development community, thus maximizing the impact of policy interventions in laying the foundations for a more sustainable world.

Next steps in the implementation of the Platform

In order to guide and streamline participants' work over the coming months according to their thematic expertise and organizational mandates, UNESCO will provide all members of the Platform an in-depth Concept Note for each of the three thematic areas which are intended

The Concept Notes will also delineate (i) the specific areas of focus building on the inputs shared during the first meeting by the members of the Platform; ii) a preliminary proposal on shared expected outcomes for each of the three priorities for discussion; iii) the periodicity and working modalities of the Platform. Participating UN agencies and IGOs will be invited to join and contribute to the thematic working groups most relevant to their respective mandates.