



A Real Mosaic of Solutions to Respond to Loss and Damage from Climate Change

Culture, Heritage, Knowledge,
and Ways of Being

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Introduction

This publication is part of a [series of briefs](#) unpacking the pieces of a fit for purpose “mosaic of solutions” to respond to loss and damage from climate change. This series expands on our earlier work, which presented a [five-year vision for Loss and Damage under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#) to look beyond the international climate regime at catalysing a wider mosaic of solutions.

In the [flagship paper](#) of the series, we unpack the pieces of the mosaic. In these thematic briefs, we dive deeper into existing solutions and how they can be strengthened. We also consider any reforms needed and explore emerging solutions.

This brief unpacks responses to loss and damage to culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being. It provides a short introduction to how loss and damage is impacting these things, highlights emerging and existing solutions and related challenges, and how these challenges can be addressed.

Loss and damage to culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being

Climate change is impacting culture, heritage, local and Indigenous knowledge, and ways of being in a myriad of ways. The UNFCCC identifies loss and damage to cultural heritage, Indigenous Knowledge, and societal and cultural identity as three categories of non-economic loss and damage (NELD).¹ However, researchers have identified more than one thousand ways that climate-related intangible harm is being experienced around the world.²

When considering culture and heritage, a distinction is often made between tangible (e.g. sites and artifacts) and intangible (e.g. traditions, languages, and knowledge) heritage. However, an increasing number of researchers are critical of this differentiation and what they consider to be a false dichotomy between NELD and economic loss and damage.³ This critique reflects the reality that impacted communities do not often differentiate between economic and non-economic loss and damage. It also reflects how the framing of so-called “non-economic loss and damage” can suggest that finance is not required to address it, and that NELD does not also lead to economic impacts (e.g. the loss of a heritage site could impact tourism revenues).⁴

Actions to prevent, reduce, and address loss and damage to culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being, span across [disaster risk reduction](#), sustainable development, climate mitigation, and adaptation, the just transition, and loss and damage response.

What are the existing solutions?

Under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, the [Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage \(WIM\) Executive Committee’s \(ExCom\) Expert Group on Non-Economic Losses \(NELs\)](#) is tasked with enhancing data, knowledge, and approaches for addressing NELD. Specific targets and indicators related to culture and heritage are also included within the [Global Goal on Adaptation \(GGA\)](#)⁵ and its [Belém Adaptation Indicators](#).⁶ Cultural heritage is also being integrated into [National Adaptation Plans \(NAPs\)](#), and [Nationally Determined Contributions \(NDCs\)](#). These efforts are supported by the [Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform \(LCIPP\)](#), which promotes the protection of traditional knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge systems, innovations, and cultural practices.

The [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#) leads the response to loss and damage to cultural heritage under the [1972 World Heritage Convention](#) and the [Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage](#). This has included the development of the [Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage](#)⁷ and being the lead knowledge partner of the [Group](#)

of [Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action \(GFCBCA\)](#). Response to culture and heritage in emergency situations is also supported by [UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund \(HEF\)](#).

In [human rights law](#), States are expected to respect, promote, and protect the right to take part in cultural life (the right to cultural life), including the ability to access and enjoy cultural heritage and take actions.⁸ They are also expected to respond to loss and damage to culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being, to prevent harm—including providing reparations where needed—and uphold human rights in their responses.⁹ Within the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), [SDG 11 \(Sustainable cities and communities\)](#), target 11.4 made the first mention of culture in the context of sustainable development, calling for strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.¹⁰ However, despite only one explicit mention in the SDGs, culture contributes to each of the economic, social, and environmental objectives of the goals.¹¹

What is the problem?

80 percent of [UNESCO World Heritage Sites](#) are currently experiencing significant loss and damage.¹² A lack of funding for heritage preservation is a major issue.¹³ Developing countries were only able to spend 3.86 USD per capita on heritage preservation in the period 2019–2023.¹⁴ Indigenous Knowledge holders are receiving less than 1 percent of climate finance.¹⁵

Cultural heritage is also frequently overlooked in climate adaptation, making up less than 1 percent of reported actions in countries' [Biennial Transparency Reports \(BTRs\)](#).¹⁶ There is also a lack of legal frameworks and operational strategies to carry out adequate management of cultural and natural heritage sites at the local level.¹⁷

The UNFCCC's policy frameworks on Loss and Damage are reinforcing climate coloniality by frequently excluding and de-valuing Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Science, and ways of being and knowing, as well as local knowledge and ecological wisdom. The erasure of knowledge and denial of participation of these knowledge holders is excluding them from Loss and Damage decision making, planning and implementation, and is causing further harm to the production and exchange of knowledge. It also neglects a vast array of solutions and measures to respond to loss and damage.¹⁸

By prioritising the economic value of loss and damage, the UNFCCC's technocratic and monetised approach to Loss and Damage fails to adequately recognise the vast scale of climate-related intangible harm. It also fails to acknowledge the significant and urgent need for hugely scaled up support to respond, including finance, capacity building and technical assistance.¹⁹

UNESCO has a Global North bias that is marginalising the culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being of the Global South and Indigenous Peoples.²⁰ Of 1,199 World Heritage sites, nearly half are in Europe or North America.²¹

What do we need to see?

To protect and safeguard culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being, developing countries must receive guidance from technical experts on including culture and heritage into NAPs, NDCs, and BTRs. This should be supported by the development of knowledge products by the WIM ExCom's NELs expert group, increased finance and technical assistance—including from the [Santiago Network](#)—and capacity building, for the development and implementation of plans.

Indigenous Peoples and local communities must drive all planning and implementation related to the protection and safeguarding of culture, heritage, ways of being, and knowledge. To do so, they must have easy access to finance and support to respond to context specific NELD. They must also be recognised as two distinctly different groups with different needs and priorities. The LCIPP must

be supported to increase the protection of traditional knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge systems, innovations, and cultural practices.

UNESCO must be adequately funded to lead the response to loss and damage to cultural heritage. These efforts must be supported by a fully capitalised HEF that enables rapid response to protect cultural heritage alongside support from the [Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage \(FRLD\)](#). UNESCO must reform its approach to centre Indigenous Peoples rights and knowledge and address its Global North bias.²² The WIM ExCom's Expert Group on Non-Economic Losses, must increase understanding of NELD and produce guidance on its economic quantification. Table 1 highlights how to strengthen existing and emerging solutions to respond to loss and damage to culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being.

Table 1: Strengthening existing and emerging solutions to respond to loss and damage to culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being.

CURRENT SOLUTIONS	HOW DOES IT WORK?	WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?	WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?
UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF)	The HEF is a funding mechanism established to enable rapid response to crises impacting culture. It finances immediate actions to protect cultural heritage from natural disasters (including climate-related disasters) and armed conflicts, supporting Member States with emergency preparedness and recovery.	The HEF has only mobilised approximately USD 15.6 million to date. ²³	The HEF requires consistent contributions to fund rapid-response to loss and damage to cultural heritage. Developed countries must take the lead in mobilising funding at the scale of the needs.
Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action (GFCBCA)	The GFCBCA is an informal, international coalition of UN Member States launched at COP 28 to integrate culture, heritage, and the arts into international climate policy.	The GFCBCA faces challenges, including a lack of formal recognition of culture, heritage, and the arts within UNFCCC decisions. ²⁴	The GFCBCA should push for continued recognition of culture, heritage, and the arts in UNFCCC decisions, including loss and damage decisions, and specifically those regarding NELD.

CURRENT SOLUTIONS	HOW DOES IT WORK?	WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?	WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?
Expert Group on Non-Economic Losses (NELs)	The WIM ExCom's NELs Expert Group is tasked with enhancing data, knowledge, and approaches for addressing non-economic loss and damage to things like cultural heritage, biodiversity, and human life.	Despite having produced important knowledge products ²⁵ on NELD to culture and heritage, the NELs Expert Group has failed to provide guidance on assessing and quantifying NELD.	The NELs Expert Group should ensure that the knowledge product on existing methodologies for assessing economic and non economic loss and damage and the regular State of Loss and Damage Report mandated under the third review of the WIM include culture, heritage, knowledge, and ways of being. ²⁶ The NELs group must also work with the WIM ExCom's <u>Action and Support Expert Group</u> to produce guidance on the quantification and qualification of NELD. ²⁷ The group must also produce knowledge products on: 1). Loss and damage to Indigenous, local and traditional knowledge systems, and ways of being; 2). Culture, language, social cohesion, and identity; and; 3). Health and wellbeing. The group must revise its membership to include local and Indigenous experts from each of the <u>seven socio-cultural regions</u> and members of the LCIPP.
Climate Adaptation efforts on Culture and Heritage	Cultural heritage is increasingly being integrated into NAPs. The GGA has specific targets and indicators related to culture and heritage.	The integration of culture and heritage into NAPs is hindered by several challenges, including governments struggling to bridge the gap between national-level planning and local, place-specific cultural needs. It is also hindered by a lack of specific mandates or capacity to incorporate cultural heritage and a lack of participation of Indigenous Peoples and traditional knowledge holders. ²⁸	Developing countries need technical expert guidance for including culture and heritage in NAPs. This should be supported by increased finance, technical assistance, and capacity building provided by developed countries.

CURRENT SOLUTIONS	HOW DOES IT WORK?	WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?	WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?
Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform led efforts on Culture and Heritage (LCIPP)	The LCIPP promotes the protection of traditional knowledge, innovations, and cultural practices.	The LCIPP has faced challenges in effectively integrating local and Indigenous Knowledge into loss and damage policy, primarily due to limited funding, language barriers, and the need for greater capacity to engage in negotiations. ²⁹	The LCIPP must receive increased funding, support to overcome barriers to access such as translation and to ensure the meaningful engagement of Indigenous and local knowledge holders. Developed countries must provide this support.
Digital Initiatives	Digital initiatives are being deployed to avoid, reduce, and address loss and damage to culture, heritage, and identity. Tuvalu's pioneering Digital Nation initiative aims to preserve its land, culture, and statehood as a digital twin to combat the existential threat of sea-level rise. This includes taking state administration online so that Tuvaluans in diaspora can access services such as issuing passports.	Digital twinning requires considerable resources, including financial, technical and capacity building support. It also requires careful navigation of issues including copyright ownership of digital access, ensuring access to digital platforms to affected populations, and overcoming the digital divide.	Developing countries must receive financial, technical assistance, and capacity building support from developed countries to implement digital initiatives and to ensure they remain in control of intellectual property.
Tourism Levies	Sustainable tourism levies present an opportunity to offset the environmental impact of travel, while funding the preservation of cultural and heritage and responses to loss and damage to culture and heritage. ³⁰ Examples include Bali's 150,000 rupiah fee for environmental protection, ³¹ the Maldives' 12 USD a night "Green Tax", ³² and Bhutan's 200 USD per day fee, ³³ all of which fund a mixture of cultural preservation, ecosystem restoration, and protection as well as sustainable development.	Tourism levies face resistance from the travel industry. ³⁴	Developing country governments must receive financial, technical assistance and capacity building support from developed countries to put in place tourism levies.

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