

Culture-Based Climate Action

Mapping the global evidence
from COP26 to COP30

October, 2026

Research conducted by

KEA

EUROPEAN AFFAIRS

www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight



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View of the reclaimed garden at The Wonder Cabinet,
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KEA European Affairs. (2026). *Culture-Based Climate Action: Mapping the global evidence from COP26 to COP30*. British Council.
<https://doi.org/10.57884/9TSD-MG64>

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Glossary

ACE – Action for Climate Empowerment (UNFCCC)

AHRC – Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK)

ALIPH – International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas

AMAN – Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago, Indonesia)

AMPB – Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques (Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests)

ANCINE – Agência Nacional do Cinema (Brazilian National Film Agency)

APAC – Asia-Pacific

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

AWHF – African World Heritage Fund

CAREC – Cultural and Artistic Responses to the Environmental Crisis

CBCA – Culture-Based Climate Action

CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity

CCS – Cultural and Creative Sectors

CH – Cultural Heritage

CHN – Climate Heritage Network

CMA – Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement

COICA – Coordinadora de las Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica (Coordinator of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin)

COP – Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC); numbered sessions referenced: COP26, COP27, COP28, COP29, COP30, COP31

CPF – Cultural Protection Fund (British Council)

CSP – Climate Stories Project (British Council)

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport (UK)

DFFF – Deutscher Filmförderfonds (German Federal Film Fund)

DG CONNECT – Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (European Commission)

ESG – Environmental, Social and Governance

ETC – European Theatre Convention

EU – European Union

EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture

FAR – First Aid and Resilience (ICCROM programme)

FCS – Framework for Cultural Statistics (UNESCO)

FTFG – Forest Tenure Funders Group

GATC – Global Alliance of Territorial Communities

GCF – Green Climate Fund

GFCBCA – Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action

GGA – Global Goal on Adaptation

ICCROM – International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property

ICOM – International Council of Museums

ICOMOS – International Council on Monuments and Sites

IDB – Inter-American Development Bank

IIPFCC – International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change

INTO – International National Trusts Organisation

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

IPLC – Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities

IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature

KMGBF – Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

KSI – Key Sustainability Indicators

LATAC – Latin America and the Caribbean

LCIPP – Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform

MEL – Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

MONDIACULT – UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development

MRV – Measurement, Reporting and Verification

NAP – National Adaptation Plan

NDC – Nationally Determined Contribution

NEMO – Network of European Museum Organisations

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

ODA – Official Development Assistance

SDG – Sustainable Development Goal

SEACHA – Southeast Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance

SIDS – Small Island Developing States

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UK – United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UNCCD – United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

V20 – Vulnerable Twenty Group

Foreword

This report arrives at a timely and important moment. Beginning with COP26, the United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change hosted by the UK in Glasgow in 2021, this report reflects on five years of culture-based climate action and the growing recognition of the role of arts, culture and heritage in addressing the climate crisis. It also comes at a pivotal time for the British Council as we consider the contribution of arts, culture and heritage to our wider climate ambitions and future priorities.

Through our Climate Connection Pavilion at COP26, and in spaces across Glasgow and around the world, the British Council brought together artists, scientists and digital innovators to collaborate on creative responses to the climate crisis. Presenting the *Creative Commissions for Climate Action*¹ marked a defining moment in our work, demonstrating how creativity, culture and storytelling can reframe climate issues, connect global challenges to people's daily lives and make complex debates more accessible and relevant. The commissions amplified perspectives often underrepresented in climate discussions and reinforced the value of bringing together artists, cultural

practitioners, researchers, policymakers, heritage professionals, Indigenous knowledge holders and local communities.

As COP26 closed on 12 November 2021, my immediate reflection was that arts and culture had not been prominent enough. This report demonstrates just how much has changed since then. As it notes, *'culture has moved from the margins of climate policy to a recognised enabler of climate solutions, reflecting the increasingly mainstream understanding that cultural factors shape both the impacts of climate change and the pathways to respond to it.'*

The journey from COP26 to COP30 tells the story of a growing recognition that climate change is not only a scientific, economic and political challenge, but also a cultural one. Over this period, a growing body of evidence has demonstrated how culture can build understanding, create emotional and social connection, strengthen climate literacy and deepen public engagement with climate action. These approaches complement technical and policy solutions by helping people understand what climate change means in the context of their own lives, communities

¹ An ongoing grants programme through which the UK has partnered with over 80 countries and reached four million people. These interdisciplinary collaborations bring together artists, scientists, communities and digital innovators to connect and collaborate on creative responses to the climate emergency. Each Commission is a unique project that addresses different climate challenges, from rising sea levels and deforestation to plastic waste, consumption, and our carbon footprint. They highlight the personal stories and local contexts of some of the people who are most affected by the climate crisis.
<https://arts.britishcouncil.org/projects/creative-commissions-climate-action>

I was particularly pleased to note that the report highlights the importance of Indigenous knowledge and community-led approaches. These knowledge systems provide not only practical insights into adaptation and resilience, but also alternative ways of understanding humanity's relationship with place, environment and stewardship. Too often, the accumulated wisdom of generations is overlooked. Yet customary practices, cultural continuity and place-based governance offer valuable examples of how adaptation can be locally grounded, socially relevant and sustainable over time.

For the British Council, the report provides not only a reflection on progress but a challenge for the future. Our role is not to design climate policy or deliver technical climate interventions. Our distinctive contribution lies in cultural relations: convening diverse partners, fostering trusted international connections, facilitating knowledge exchange and enabling collaboration across borders, sectors and disciplines. As arts, culture and heritage gain greater recognition within climate frameworks, we must strengthen long-term partnerships, support the generation and sharing of evidence, and ensure that diverse voices, particularly those of young people, Indigenous Peoples and

frontline communities, are heard and valued.

The report makes clear that the next phase of this work is not about further proving that culture matters. Over recent years, the evidence base has become both broader and more robust, providing greater confidence on how and where cultural approaches can contribute most effectively to climate action. The challenge now is to translate recognition into implementation and influence, ensuring that cultural approaches are embedded within wider adaptation, resilience and sustainable development agendas. Five years after COP26, culture-based climate action has established itself as an important part of the global response to the climate crisis.

For the British Council, this report is both a reflection on how far the field has come and a call to action. We are uniquely positioned to help shape the next phase of this work through our strengths in cultural relations, partnership development, evidence generation and international exchange. By building on those strengths, we can help ensure that culture is not simply recognised as part of the climate conversation but is empowered to contribute to the long-term transformation needed to build a more sustainable and resilient future.



A handwritten signature in white ink on a purple background. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Stephen Stenning OBE

British Council Director Arts Development



Executive summary

Purpose and scope of the study

Since COP26, the role of culture in addressing climate change has gained unprecedented visibility within global policy and practice. What was once primarily understood as a sector affected by environmental change is now increasingly recognised as an active contributor to climate action supporting mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and societal transformation. This shift reflects a growing understanding that climate change is not only a technical or economic challenge, but also a cultural one: it is shaped by values, behaviours, knowledge systems, and collective imagination.

Within this evolving landscape, cultural practices, heritage systems, creative expression, and Indigenous and local knowledge are playing a growing role in how societies understand climate risks and respond to them. Culture contributes to climate action in multiple ways: by fostering public engagement and awareness, by safeguarding heritage and knowledge systems under threat, by supporting community-led adaptation, by enabling international collaboration, and by reshaping the environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors themselves.

This report presents a global mapping and analysis of Culture-Based Climate Action (CBCA) across the period from COP26 (2021) to COP30 (2025), with the

aim of consolidating emerging evidence, identifying key trends, and highlighting opportunities for future development. Rather than providing an exhaustive inventory, the study focuses on the dominant mechanisms through which culture contributes to climate action and the conditions under which these contributions are most effective.

The analysis is structured around six core intervention typologies, which capture the main ways in which culture is mobilised within climate action:

- Creative climate action, engagement and imagination
- Heritage protection, adaptation and climate resilience
- Indigenous knowledge and community-based adaptation
- Networks, partnerships and cultural relations
- Environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors
- Evidence systems, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

Across these typologies, the report examines both the global evidence landscape (drawing on international interventions, policy developments and sectoral practices) and the contribution of the British Council, situating its

portfolio within the wider field. This dual perspective allows for a comparative analysis of approaches, identifying both shared patterns across regions and actors, and distinctive contributions emerging from cultural relations practice.

Within each typology, the report explores global trends, illustrates concrete examples, and provides insights into how cultural approaches are being implemented in different contexts. It also highlights emerging outcomes across cognitive, affective, behavioural, relational, and structural

dimensions, showing how culture contributes to climate action not only through direct interventions but also through shaping the enabling conditions for change.

By bringing together these elements, the report aims to contribute to a growing body of knowledge that positions culture as an integral component of climate action. It provides a foundation for dialogue, collaboration, and future development, supporting the continued integration of cultural perspectives into global climate strategies and practice.

Headline findings

What the global evidence base tells us

Five years on from COP26, the global evidence base demonstrates a clear structural shift: culture is no longer treated solely as a sector impacted by climate change, but increasingly as an active pathway for climate action. Throughout this report, ‘culture’ is understood in its broadest, multidimensional sense, encompassing the arts and creative industries, heritage, languages, knowledge systems, beliefs, values, and the everyday practices through which communities make sense of and act upon the world.² This framing is

consistent with the British Council’s longstanding approach to culture as a dynamic space of meaning-making, identity, and collective agency, rather than a discrete sector or set of products.

² This understanding draws on Clifford Geertz’s interpretive view of culture as ‘webs of significance’. See Geertz, C. (1973), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books

Across the six intervention typologies, the evidence shows that:

- **Creative climate action, engagement and imagination** build climate awareness, emotional engagement and public participation at scale, which in turn can be translated into behavioural or structural change when embedded in wider enabling systems, such as new regulations or institutionalised policies.
- **Heritage protection and adaptation** have undergone rapid institutionalisation within climate governance, culminating in the inclusion of cultural heritage as a standalone adaptation target and the adoption of dedicated indicators under the Global Goal on Adaptation at COP30.
- **Indigenous knowledge, local culture and community-based adaptation** are among the most effective forms of place-based climate action, yet remain unevenly recognised and constrained by access barriers to direct finance and decision-making.
- **Networks, partnerships and cultural relations mechanisms** play a critical role in scaling CBCA, facilitating cross-sector learning, policy influence and international dissemination of practice.
- **Environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors (CCS)** has accelerated markedly, with growing adoption of standards, reporting tools and compliance mechanisms, especially in Europe, though coverage remains uneven globally.
- **Evidence systems and MEL innovations** are emerging but remain fragmented, with limited longitudinal data, inconsistent indicators and weak integration into formal climate monitoring frameworks.

Overall, the global evidence base is strongest on cognitive, affective and relational outcomes, and weakest on long-term behavioural, institutional and structural change. In this report, ‘outcomes’ refer to the spectrum of changes that CBCA interventions seek to produce: *cognitive* (awareness and understanding of climate issues), *affective* (emotions, values and motivation), *relational* (trust and community cohesion), *behavioural* (sustained changes in practices and lifestyles), *institutional* (shifts in organisational norms), and *structural* (longer-horizon transformations in economic, political and governance systems).



Identified gaps in evidence and practice

The study identifies several persistent gaps that constrain the ability of CBCA to influence climate policy and finance at scale, despite growing recognition of its value.

- **Evidence gaps:** limited longitudinal data, undermeasurement of behavioural and structural outcomes, weak documentation of legacy effects, and inconsistent use of shared indicators.
- **Finance gaps:** a persistent disconnect between policy recognition and access to sustained, dedicated climate finance.
- **Intangible heritage and cultural practices:** systematically underrepresented, relative to built heritage and tangible assets.
- **Gender and intersectionality:** rarely embedded as core design or measurement dimensions, despite their relevance to cultural continuity and climate vulnerability.
- **Geographical imbalance:** strong concentration of evidence and infrastructure in Europe and parts of Latin America, with thinner coverage in South Asia, the Sahel, the Pacific and parts of Central Africa.

Priority recommendations (2026–2030)

The recommendations set out below are drawn from the desk-based mapping analysis work that underpins this study. The stakeholder consultations (interviews and focus groups) and regional workshops conducted were then used to test, refine and prioritise these directions.

They respond to the main gaps it identified in evidence, finance, the representation of intangible heritage and cultural practices, the embedding of gender and intersectionality, and the geographical balance of activity. They are broad strategic directions for the wider cultural field, with short notes on the implications for the British Council where relevant.

1. Move from short project cycles to long-term cultural infrastructure for climate action

The most durable culture-based climate work depends on relationships and institutions that outlast individual funding cycles. Yet, short, project-based funding rewards speed and visible results over the slow, relational work continuity depends on. The direction for the field is to mainstream climate across existing cultural programmes, funding structures and partnerships rather than expanding stand-alone initiatives. For the British Council, this means continuing to embed climate across its cultural, education and English programmes, building on the progress and priorities set out in the Climate Change Strategy 2024–2026 (The Climate Connection) alongside platforms such as the Cultural Protection Fund and the International Seasons of Culture.

2. Close the climate finance gap for culture

The most consistent structural weakness identified is the disconnect between growing policy recognition of culture and access to sustained, dedicated climate finance, with most programmes still dependent on philanthropic and bilateral funding. The emerging Indigenous-led finance architecture shows that the design of access, not only the volume pledged, determines whether finance reaches culturally grounded action. The recommendation, directed to funding bodies and authorities, is to recognise culture and cultural heritage as eligible dimensions of climate finance, establish dedicated funding windows and simpler access routes, and fund the preparatory and relational work that culture-based action requires.

3. Build a shared evidence and MEL architecture that makes culture legible to climate policy

Culture-based climate action risks remaining marginal for as long as it cannot generate evidence that climate policy systems recognise, since cultural contributions are largely qualitative and relational while climate measurement, reporting and verification is built around quantifiable metrics. The direction for the field is to converge on light, comparable evidence frameworks that capture awareness, behavioural and relational change without flattening their qualitative dimension, drawing on infrastructure such as the MECCE project and UNESCO's Culture|2030 indicators. The 2025–2030 Nationally Determined Contributions cycle is a practical window

4. Strengthen cultural rights as a normative foundation of culture-based climate action

Protecting culture as an asset is not the same as protecting people's rights to participate in culture-based climate responses in culturally meaningful ways. Anchoring action in cultural rights (participation, non-discrimination and community agency) provides a shared normative baseline grounded in international law, and offers a coherent way to address gender as well as the



experiences and needs of marginalised and under-represented groups, through an intersectional lens. Yet, these considerations remain rarely embedded as core design or measurement dimensions. The MONDIACULT 2025 outcome document, adopted by more than 160 Ministers of Culture, reinforces that climate action disconnected from cultural rights risks undermining both legitimacy and effectiveness.

5. Bridge the cultural and climate sectors via shared vocabulary and climate-culture literacy

The study points to a persistent absence of shared vocabulary between the cultural and environmental sectors, which limits exchange and joint decision-making, particularly at ministerial level. The constraint is asymmetric: accredited climate and carbon literacy provision for cultural practitioners already exists, while climate and conservation professionals, and the policymakers who convene them, often lack a frame of reference for working with cultural actors and knowledge systems. The direction is to build cultural fluency among climate and policy professionals and broker sustained exchange between the two communities; a role the British Council is well placed to play through the platforms it already holds.

6. Leverage COPs to institutionalise culture as a pillar of global climate governance

Recent gains in recognising culture within climate processes are real but fragile, with culture now present in the Global Goal on Adaptation, the COP30 Action Agenda and a growing Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action, yet still at risk of fragmentation. The direction for the field is to use COP platforms and the wider UNFCCC architecture to move culture from scattered visibility towards coordinated agendas and recognised institutional entry points across adaptation, loss and damage, and just transition, including a more permanent home for

culture in climate governance and its reflection in the second Global Stocktake, and building on initiatives such as the Culture Global Stocktake which seeks to demonstrate and assess culture's contribution to climate action globally.³ As a convener and knowledge partner of the Group of Friends, the British Council is positioned to help coordinate a coherent agenda between conferences.

7. Position creative imagination as foundational to climate action, not as an add-on

Climate communication consistently builds knowledge and awareness but has weaker effects on attitudes and action, the so-called awareness–action gap; what makes the difference is the capacity to imagine alternative futures and reframe people's relationship with nature. The direction for the field is to treat creative imagination as integral to programme development from the outset, rather than appending it as a messaging tool once priorities are set. For the British Council, this reinforces a strength it already demonstrates through its creative commissioning for climate action approach, encompassing initiatives such as the Creative Commissions programme, Climate Futures, the Anhar Culture & Climate Platform collaboration with Art Jameel, and Human Nature. It suggests embedding creative approaches early and actively inviting artists and cultural practitioners into climate fora.

³ Culture Global Stocktake for Climate Action (CGST), Draft 2 (v2), 2026. Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/13IWmCBrisngAWpiTt7hEW_ZvT4QUNDtl/view

Areas of British Council strength and positioning

The British Council occupies a distinctive position in the CBCA landscape as a cultural relations organisation working through trust-based partnerships, international exchange and locally grounded collaboration, rather than through technical implementation of climate policies or large-scale climate finance. Key strengths include:

- a broad international footprint, with CBCA interventions distributed across all regions, particularly MENA, APAC, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe;
- a strong concentration in creative imagination and public-facing cultural engagement, exemplified by flagship programmes such as *Creative Commissions for Climate Action* and *Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform*, as well as a substantial and institutionalised contribution to heritage protection and climate resilience through the *Cultural Protection Fund*, notable for its focus on local partnerships, capacity building and intangible heritage;
- a recognised comparative advantage in networks, partnerships and cultural relations, enabling the British Council to act as a connector between cultural actors, climate policy spaces and international fora;
- emerging strengths in research, learning and evidence production, including strategic literature reviews, programme evaluations and applied knowledge tools;
- a clear commitment to gender equality and to equality, diversity and inclusion as a strategic priority across its work, and support for progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5, and for the integration of climate and gender in cultural policy through international processes such as the COP agenda and MONDIACULT 2025.



Photo: Michael Pinsky's Pollution Pods installed in Guanajuato, Mexico during Cervantino 2025 © Michael Pinsky

1. Introduction and background

Culture's role in addressing the climate crisis has gained unprecedented visibility and recognition since COP26. Global policy frameworks, international organisations and civil society actors increasingly acknowledge that climate change is not only an environmental and economic challenge but also a deeply cultural one. Culture operates simultaneously as a driver and a resource for mitigation, adaptation, resilience and behavioural change, shaping how individuals and societies understand climate risks, form emotional and cognitive connections to the climate crisis, and mobilise collective capacities for action.

The research shows that creative climate action, engagement and imagination interventions help build awareness, climate literacy and emotional resonance at scale, while heritage protection, adaptation and resilience efforts safeguard vulnerable cultural assets and embed risk-preparedness into institutional structures. Indigenous knowledge and community-based resilience initiatives demonstrate how customary practices, cultural continuity and place-based governance contribute to locally grounded adaptation. Networks, partnerships and cultural-relations approaches expand these effects by enabling international cooperation, knowledge exchange and peer learning, supporting the dissemination of good practice and collective action.

Meanwhile, environmental sustainability efforts across the Cultural and Creative Sectors and the strengthening of evidence systems and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning innovations are reshaping sectoral standards, compliance mechanisms and data infrastructures.

The growing inclusion of culture in global climate governance - from the Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh Global Goal on Adaptation work programme and MONDIACULT 2022, to the launch of the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action at COP28 and the integration of culture and heritage into COP30's Action Agenda - signals a structural shift: culture has moved from the margins of climate policy to a recognised enabler of climate solutions, reflecting the increasingly mainstream understanding that cultural factors shape both the impacts of climate change and the pathways to respond to it.

In this evolving policy and practice landscape, organisations operating at the intersection of culture, international cooperation and climate action play a critical role in translating these global frameworks into concrete initiatives and partnerships. The British Council is particularly significant in this context. As the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities, its wider mission is to support peace and prosperity by building connections,

understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. This institutional identity, together with the organisation's Climate Connection Strategy (2024-2026)⁴ frames its role in CBCA. The British Council works through a cultural relations approach grounded in reciprocal, trust-based and long-term way of working across borders, where the value lies not only in outputs but in

the relationships, dialogue and opportunities created through collaboration.⁵ By connecting the UK's expertise in arts and culture, education and the English language to its global presence and networks, the British Council positions itself as an actor able to operate across diverse contexts and to engage governments, institutions, practitioners and communities at scale.⁶

1.1 Purpose and research objectives

The purpose of this study is to generate a consolidated, evidence-based understanding of CBCA by systematically reviewing what the existing evidence reveals about how cultural practices, creative expression, heritage systems, Indigenous knowledge and cultural relations mechanisms contribute to climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience, and behavioural change.

The research examines CBCA across the six intervention typologies and five outcome domains, identifying which approaches demonstrate innovation, effectiveness and measurable change. Through the British Council Portfolio Mapping and the Global Landscape Mapping, the study assesses the strength, maturity and geographical distribution of evidence, highlighting patterns of success alongside persistent gaps.

A core objective is to situate culture-

based approaches within the broader global landscape of climate action, examining how culture contributes to resilience, adaptation, behavioural change, creative innovation and public engagement. Through a review of the evidence base, the research explores which approaches are demonstrating impact, where innovation is emerging, and what evidence gaps continue to constrain policy and practice. It also considers opportunities for the British Council, its partners and the wider cultural sector to strengthen their contribution to Culture-Based Climate Action. The research ultimately aims to inform stronger policy, practice and partnerships by pointing to enabling conditions, emerging trends, capability needs, and areas where evidence systems or collaborative infrastructures could strengthen CBCA globally, contributing to British Council's strategic planning for 2026–2030.

⁴ British Council. (2024). The Climate Connection: A strategy to address climate change to 2026.

https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_connection_strategy_to_address_climate_change_to_2026.pdf

⁵ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultural_relations_in_action.pdf

⁶ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/about-us>

1.2 Scope and methodology

The methodology combines extensive desk research with stakeholder engagement to map the CBCA global landscape and assess contributions across the six intervention typologies and five outcome domains.

The mapping is anchored in two interlinked evidence matrices, which will be published separately alongside this report. The British Council Portfolio Mapping (Annex 1) identifies and codes interventions across countries and delivery models. The Global Landscape Mapping (Annex 2) consolidates international and regional initiatives implemented by international organisations, NGOs, networks, and cultural actors, and codes programmes against typology, mechanisms, target groups, outcome domains and strength of evidence. A Theory of Change (ToC) was developed for each of the six determined typologies articulating context, activities, mechanisms, outputs and outcomes along a cognitive–affective–behavioural–relational–structural ladder. Gender equality was embedded as a cross-cutting field across both matrices.

Desk research was complemented by a two-stage consultation process. Stage 1 comprised semi-structured in-depth interviews with global and cross-regional experts (policy bodies, cultural networks, practitioners, heritage and Indigenous representatives, funders, researchers etc.) that was supported by a selective survey for invitees unable to attend. Stage 2 broadened engagement through focus groups organised by intervention typology, designed to test emerging patterns and validate outcome domains and indicators.

Finally, five Regional Stop-and-Think Workshops (UK, APAC, Europe and Wider Europe, MENA, Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa) convened regional stakeholders, project partners and selected British Council staff members to review regional findings and co-create recommendations. Throughout, the researchers triangulated across matrices, TOCs and consultations to mitigate uneven documentation quality and inconsistent outcome reporting.

1.2.1 Limitations of the study

When reading this report, five limitations should be borne in mind. First, the mapping is indicative rather than exhaustive. The sample of initiatives is sufficient to support inferences on dominant trends, recurrent mechanisms and structural gaps, but does not claim full coverage of the global CBCA field. The research team's working languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian) provided moderately wide coverage but inevitably under-represent initiatives documented primarily in languages less indexed by mainstream search engines or using non-Latin scripts, notably Arabic, Mandarin, Russian and several South and Southeast Asian languages. Findings on regional balance and diversity of actors should therefore be read as illustrative of visible patterns rather than a comprehensive census.

Second, the six intervention typologies are analytical constructs, not fixed silos. They emerged inductively to make

sense of and organise a vast landscape of objectives, delivery methods and envisioned outcomes. Because culture is itself multidimensional - tangible and intangible, an economic industry and a system of shared knowledge, an inheritance and a living practice - any framework that seeks to encapsulate its contribution to climate action will necessarily generate overlaps and ambiguities. Many initiatives could legitimately be coded under more than one typology. The typologies should therefore be read as a navigational device for comparative analysis, not as mutually exclusive categories.

Third, some cross-cutting themes are deliberately not treated as standalone typologies. In particular, innovation, sustainable growth, and gender inclusion surface across virtually all interventions and outcome domains: they are positive externalities and ambitions of the field as a whole, rather than discrete intervention logics. In this assignment, innovation is understood in multiple capacities across the analysis, including methodological innovation (such as the development of monitoring, evaluation and learning systems), creative and narrative innovation in artistic, cultural and cross-cutting practice, and practice-based innovation linked to the environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors. It also encompasses relational and institutional innovation through new forms of collaboration, partnership and cultural relations, as well as knowledge-based innovation rooted in community practices. Sustainable growth, on the other hand, is understood as a strategic horizon and desired outcome of CBCA, not as a means or category of action. Treating such themes as separate typologies would have introduced double-counting and reduced analytical clarity; they are, instead, transversal.

Fourth, the principal operational limitation stems from a compressed delivery timeline, which most directly affected the depth of qualitative stakeholder engagement. Coordinating in-depth consultations with global experts across multiple time zones and institutional calendars is intrinsically time intensive. While the 52 expert stakeholders consulted represent a substantive and analytically valuable sample, the figure remains marginally below the initial target.

Finally, the underlying evidence base is itself uneven. CBCA documentation is dominated by grey literature, self-reported programme outputs and narrative case studies, with few independent evaluations and limited longitudinal or counterfactual evidence. Causal attribution between cultural interventions and climate outcomes is inherently difficult, and the study privileges plausible mechanisms of change, triangulated patterns and convergent expert judgement over claims of direct attribution.

A further limitation applies specifically to the British Council CBCA portfolio mapping in that it should not be read as a complete inventory of every British Council programme that has included climate-related activity, since the study focused on larger umbrella programmes than single, individual projects, and prioritised interventions where the culture-climate link was most clearly visible and where CBCA relevance could be identified reasonably. This means that some broader programmes containing climate-related work are not captured here as distinct CBCA interventions in their own right. In some cases, programme boundaries were also difficult to define, as initiatives might have merged, or shifted over time.

1.3 British Council portfolio overview

The Climate Connection,⁷ the British Council's strategy to address climate change, emerged in the lead-up to COP26 as a global British Council platform, conceived to support the Glasgow summit, while creating opportunities for international co-operation and climate engagement across arts and culture, education and the English language. Over time, this evolved into a broader organisational platform for climate engagement and in 2024, this direction was formalised through the release of the strategy.

The strategy frames climate change as an organisation-wide priority rather than a standalone programme theme, setting out the British Council's response to the climate crisis across its core areas of work.⁸ In particular, it highlights the role of arts and culture (Strand 3) in fostering creative engagement, narrative development and international collaboration around climate change, alongside a dedicated focus on COP participation, research and policy engagement (Strand 5), which positions cultural activity within global climate governance processes and supports evidence-building and international dialogue. It combines outward-facing programme ambitions with internal operational change, including carbon reduction and a longer-term pathway to net zero.⁹ Within this approach, cultural programmes play a key role in supporting creative engagement with

climate issues, fostering dialogue between artists, communities, scientists and policymakers, and enabling locally grounded responses that connect environmental action with questions of identity, heritage, and social resilience. As the organisation develops a refreshed climate strategy for the period to 2030, these priorities continue to shape how climate action is embedded across programmes, partnerships and operations.

Progress achieved to date¹⁰ reflects this integrated approach. The British Council reports significant advances both in programme delivery and operational practice, including expanded participation of young people and cultural practitioners in climate initiatives, increased investment in artistic and heritage-based climate responses, the establishment of new partnerships across the cultural and education sectors, and measurable reductions in the organisation's own carbon emissions. Together, these developments signal a shift from climate action as a thematic add-on towards a more systemic positioning of climate change within the British Council's cultural relations mission, creating an enabling environment for long-term, collaborative and culturally informed climate engagement.

Amongst the organisation's strategic objectives,¹¹ one is especially relevant in

⁷ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/tr/en/programmes/climate-connection/about>

⁸ Ibidem

⁹ Ibidem

¹⁰ British Council. (2025). Climate change strategy 2024–25 progress report. Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_change_strategy_2024-25_progress_report.pdf

¹¹ Ibidem

a CBCA context: Artistic and cultural responses to climate change. This strategic objective focuses on mobilising arts and culture as both a protective and transformative force in response to climate change. It aims to safeguard cultural heritage at risk while using artistic and cultural expression to raise awareness of climate change and biodiversity loss. At the same time, it supports the transition of the cultural and creative sectors towards more sustainable practices. This is pursued through the development of partnerships and projects that protect vulnerable heritage and contribute to social and economic development; the promotion of artistic and cultural responses that engage audiences and foster environmental awareness; and the strengthening of capacity, knowledge exchange and environmental practices within the sector to enable sustainable growth. In the context of climate action, this perspective underpins culture-based approaches that link heritage informed adaptation, arts based awareness raising and more sustainable cultural practice.

This strategic direction is reinforced by the British Council's wider work in *Culture Responds to Global Challenges*, which supports artists, cultural practitioners, creative organisations and policymakers to address major social and environmental issues through training, grants, research and various types of engagement. Two strands are particularly relevant in a CBCA context. The first is Creative Climate Action,

which works through a cultural relations approach, bringing together artists, cultural practitioners and communities across countries to develop collaborative responses to global challenges including climate change, while supporting exchange and capacity-building around more sustainable cultural practice.¹² The second is Cultural Heritage, which supports artists and communities coping with the effects of conflict, social polarisation and climate change on cultural heritage, most notably through the Cultural Protection Fund, the UK's principal mechanism for international heritage protection, which is led by the British Council in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport¹³. In CBCA terms, this is significant because it shows that the British Council's climate work in culture is not limited to messaging or advocacy alone, but extends across heritage protection through the CPF, sector capacity-building programmes such as *Cultura Circular*,¹⁴ creative production initiatives including Creative Commissions for Climate Action,¹⁵ and knowledge exchange programmes such as Human Nature.¹⁶

The Climate Connection can therefore be understood not simply as a programme label, but as the British Council's organisational platform for responding to climate change through its international cultural and educational mandate. Here, the organisation's global footprint is central to its climate role. With a presence in over 100 countries, a

¹² <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/creative-climate-action>

¹³ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/cultural-heritage>

¹⁴ <https://americas.britishcouncil.org/programmes/circular-culture>

¹⁵ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/projects/creative-commissions-climate-action>

¹⁶ <https://www.britishcouncil.my/programmes/arts/humannature>

reach of 600 million people, and expanding networks of young people and partners, the British Council is positioned to convene diverse actors, amplify underrepresented perspectives, and extend climate-related work across multiple regional contexts.¹⁷ Seen in this light, the significance of *The Climate Connection* lies not only in the individual projects it contains, but in the way it allows the British Council to connect local initiatives, international partnerships and global policymaking instances through its wider cultural relations approach.

While the strategic framing above highlights the British Council's global infrastructure for climate engagement, the maps below show where the British Council CBCA interventions were active between COP26 and COP30.¹⁸ They provide a visual overview of the international spread, but they should be read with caution. Higher numbers show that more interventions were active in each country, but they do not in themselves indicate deeper engagement or greater strategic priority. The distribution also reflects programme design, local partnerships and the fact that this remains an expanding area of work across the organisation.

The mapped British Council CBCA portfolio comprises 28 distinct interventions active across 82 countries during 2021–2025. They are distributed across 10 regional categories, and consolidated into five broader regional clusters: Asia-Pacific (APAC), Middle East

and North Africa (MENA), the Americas, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe and the United Kingdom (UK).

Across these regions, the overall picture is one of broad international reach. In APAC, the portfolio is geographically broad, with the strongest concentration of interventions in South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia (India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia), which emerge as the clearest points of concentration. This is not only a question of climate relevance, but also reflects longstanding British Council relationships: its presence in Indonesia¹⁹ and Malaysia²⁰ dates back to 1948, while its India work rests on long-lasting relationships and an established presence across four cities.²¹

Local anchoring matters not only for delivery, but for a grounded understanding of place-specific priorities, vulnerabilities and ways of working. That is reflected in the programmes themselves. In parts of Southeast Asia, this is visible in initiatives such as *New Landscapes*, *Crafting Futures* and *Making Matters*, which bring together craft, fashion, materials and sustainability through collaborative making and exchange. Elsewhere, interventions respond to more specific climate realities. *Trouble in Paradise*, for example, is rooted in the acute vulnerability of Pacific islands to climate change, while in Malaysia the *Human-Nature* programme brings artistic collaboration into dialogue with community engagement and Indigenous knowledge in thinking about climate adaptation. In addition to

¹⁷ British Council. (2025). Climate change strategy 2024–25 progress report. British Council. Available at: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_change_strategy_2024-25_progress_report.pdf

¹⁸ Annex 1 - British Council Portfolio Mapping. To be downloaded at the dedicated link.

¹⁹ <https://www.britishcouncil.id/en>

²⁰ <https://www.britishcouncil.my/about/history>

²¹ <https://www.britishcouncil.in/about/what/our-presence-in-india>

programmes that respond to specific regional needs, the British Council also works in APAC through wider grant programmes, fellowships, scholarships and bilateral initiatives such as the International Seasons of Culture in Pakistan (2022), and Vietnam (2023), which reflect its broader cultural relations approach. This reinforces the sense that APAC is not a single programme geography, but a region where local priorities, international exchange and climate-related collaboration are closely intertwined.²²

APAC			
Bangladesh	7	Thailand	3
India	6	Kazakhstan	3
Indonesia	6	Uzbekistan	2
Nepal	6	China	2
Philippines	5	Afghanistan	2
Pakistan	5	Myanmar	1
Malaysia	4	Taiwan	1
Vietnam	4	Samoa	1
Australia	4	Singapore	1
New Zealand	3	Japan	1
Sri Lanka	3	South Korea	1

Figure 2. APAC region interventions' distribution

In the Americas, one of the clearest strands is work linking artistic exchange to sustainability transitions in the cultural sector, especially through programmes such as *Cultura Circular*, which connects festivals across Latin America and the Caribbean with the UK through funding, training and sustainability support. The *UK/Brazil Season* adds a different layer, showing how climate-related cultural work can also sit within wider cultural relations platforms designed to deepen bilateral exchange, particularly supporting projects with Indigenous communities.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, British Council's presence includes a visible strand of work around craft, fashion, materials and sustainability, reflected in programmes such as *Crafting Futures* and *New Landscapes*, where themes of fashion circularity and sustainable textile use were explored in Nigeria and Kenya.²³ The *Cultural Protection Fund* also provides one of the clearest anchors and broadest footprints in East Africa, showing how climate-related cultural work is also being carried through a place-based approach to heritage protection and resilience-building. Taken together, these strands further illustrate that the British Council's work across the Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa addresses and reflects different local contexts and needs, rather than following a single regional pattern.²⁴

AMERICAS AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA			
Nigeria	3	Tanzania	1
Canada	3	Peru	1
Mexico	3	Cuba	1
Brazil	3	United States	1
Argentina	3	Rwanda	1
Colombia	3	Trinidad &	1
Kenya	3	Tobago	1
Chile	2	Bolivia	1
Uganda	2	Angola	1
South Africa	2	Costa Rica	1
Ethiopia	2	Botswana	1
Venezuela	1		

Figure 3. Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa interventions' distribution

In MENA, the portfolio has broad regional coverage, extending across most countries in the region. Within this wider footprint, Egypt stands out as one of the clearest points of concentration, reflecting the British Council's long-

²² Annex 1 - British Council Portfolio Mapping. To be downloaded at the dedicated link.

²³ British Council. (2022). *New landscapes: Catalyst grants and international collaboration for climate action*. British Council. <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2022%20New%20Landscapes%20report.pdf>

²⁴ Annex 1 - British Council Portfolio Mapping. To be downloaded at the dedicated link.

standing presence there since 1938.²⁵ In programme terms, MENA is characterised not only by grant-based activity, but by a wider mix of platforms, partnerships and place-based heritage-focused work. Alongside public-facing and artist-led initiatives such as *Creative Commissions for Climate Action* and *From Ink to Action* there are also broader initiatives that grow out of local partnerships. *Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform*, in partnership with Art Jameel, for example, combines grants and artist support, organisational sustainability and regional collaboration. The *Cultural Protection Fund* gives the region a stronger heritage and resilience profile, particularly through its work in parts of the Middle East. At the same time, collaborations such as *Rooted in Resilience*, developed with the UAE Ministry of Culture, show that the British Council's work in MENA also includes a more research- and policy-oriented strand. Taken together, the mapped interventions suggest a broad span of activity, reaching across creative, regional partnership-building, and heritage resilience.²⁶

MENA			
Egypt	5	Syria	2
Morocco	4	Jordan	2
Lebanon	4	Kuwait	1
Algeria	3	Bahrain	1
Palestine	3	Libya	1
Tunisia	3	Sudan	1
Iraq	3		
United Arab Emirates	3		

Figure 4. MENA interventions' distribution

In Europe and the UK, the mapped portfolio is both geographically wide

and institutionally anchored. The United Kingdom stands out by far as the strongest single point of concentration, reflecting its role as the British Council's institutional home. Beyond the UK, activity is more dispersed across a broader set of European countries, suggesting a region shaped less by a small number of strong country anchors than by wider networks of collaboration and exchange. This is visible in grant and mobility schemes such as *Connections Through Culture Grants* and *Creative Commissions for Climate Action*, but also in learning- and exchange-oriented initiatives such as *Climate Adaptation for Creatives* in Wider Europe and *EARTH Scholarships*. *Making Matters* adds a further strand centred on materials and sustainability. Overall, this suggests that the European portfolio is shaped less by concentrated country presence than by grants, learning, mobility and wider collaboration across the region, while the UK's particularly strong presence reflects its broader role as a base for interventions across the global portfolio.

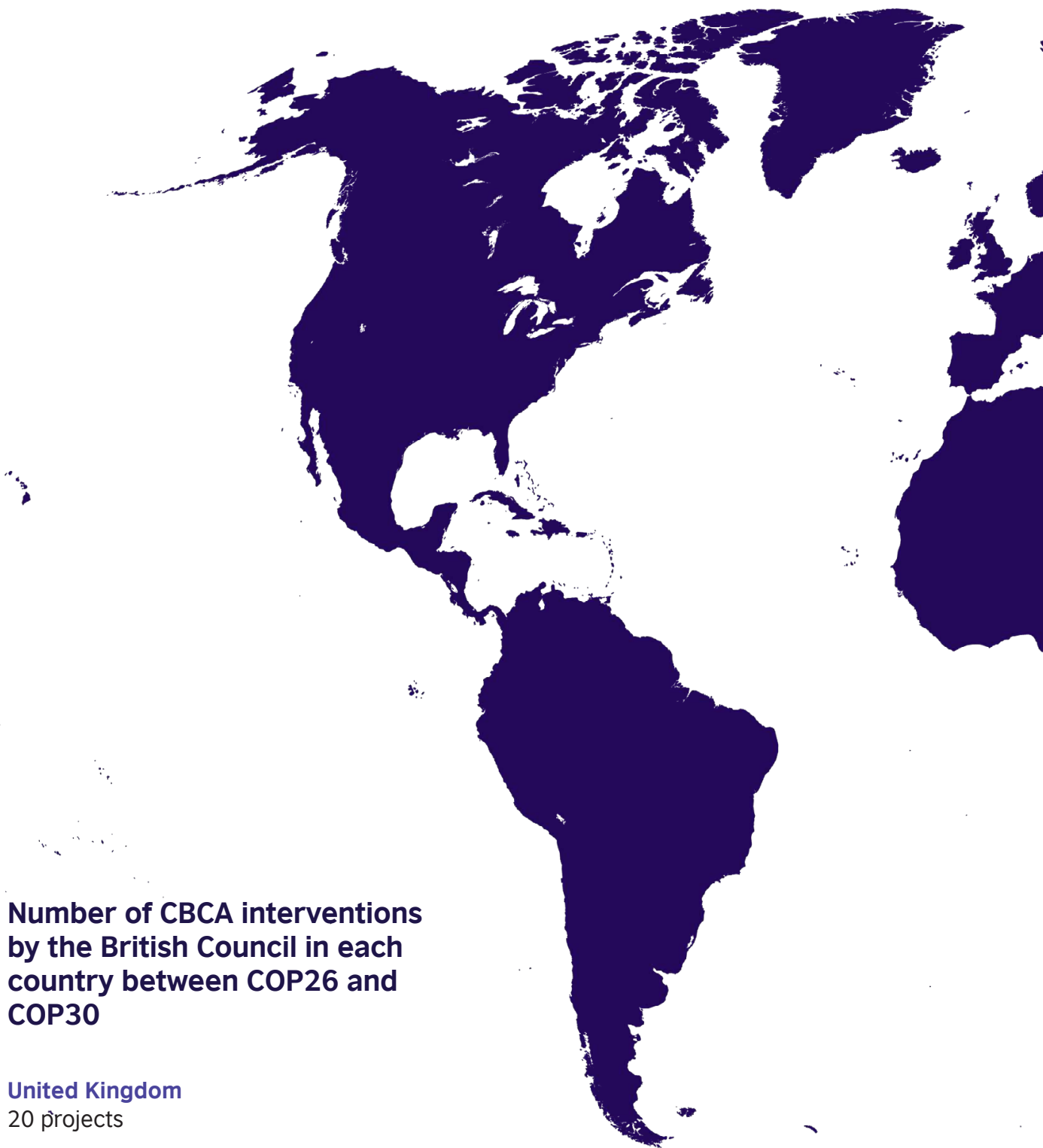
EUROPE			
Georgia	3	The Netherlands	2
Ukraine	3	Greece	1
Azerbaijan	3	Poland	1
Turkey	3	Romania	1
Italy	3	Russia	1
Albania	3	Switzerland	1
Norway	2	Denmark	1
Bosnia & Herzegovina	2	Serbia	1
Armenia	2	North Macedonia	1
Spain	2	Finland	1
Kosovo	2	Montenegro	1

UNITED KINGDOM	20
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Figure 5. Europe and UK interventions' distribution

²⁵ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/en/programmes/climate-connection/open-call-uk-egypt-creative-commissions>

²⁶ Annex 1 - British Council Portfolio Mapping. To be downloaded at the dedicated link



Number of CBCA interventions by the British Council in each country between COP26 and COP30

United Kingdom

20 projects

Europe

Georgia (3 projects); Ukraine (3);
Azerbaijan (3); Turkey (3);
Italy (3); Albania (3); Norway (2);
Bosnia & Herzegovina (2);
Armenia (2); Spain (2); Kosovo (2);
Greece (1); The Netherlands (2);
Poland (1); Romania (1); Russia (1);
Switzerland (1); Denmark (1);
Serbia (1); North Macedonia (1);
Finland (1); Montenegro (1)

Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa (ASS)

Nigeria (3 projects); Canada (3); Mexico (3);
Brazil (3); Argentina (3); Colombia (3);
Kenya (3); Chile (2); Uganda (2);
South Africa (2); Ethiopia (2); Venezuela (1);
Tanzania (1); Peru (1); Cuba (1); United States (1);
Rwanda (1); Trinidad & Tobago (1);
Bolivia (1); Angola (1); Costa Rica (1);
Botswana (1)

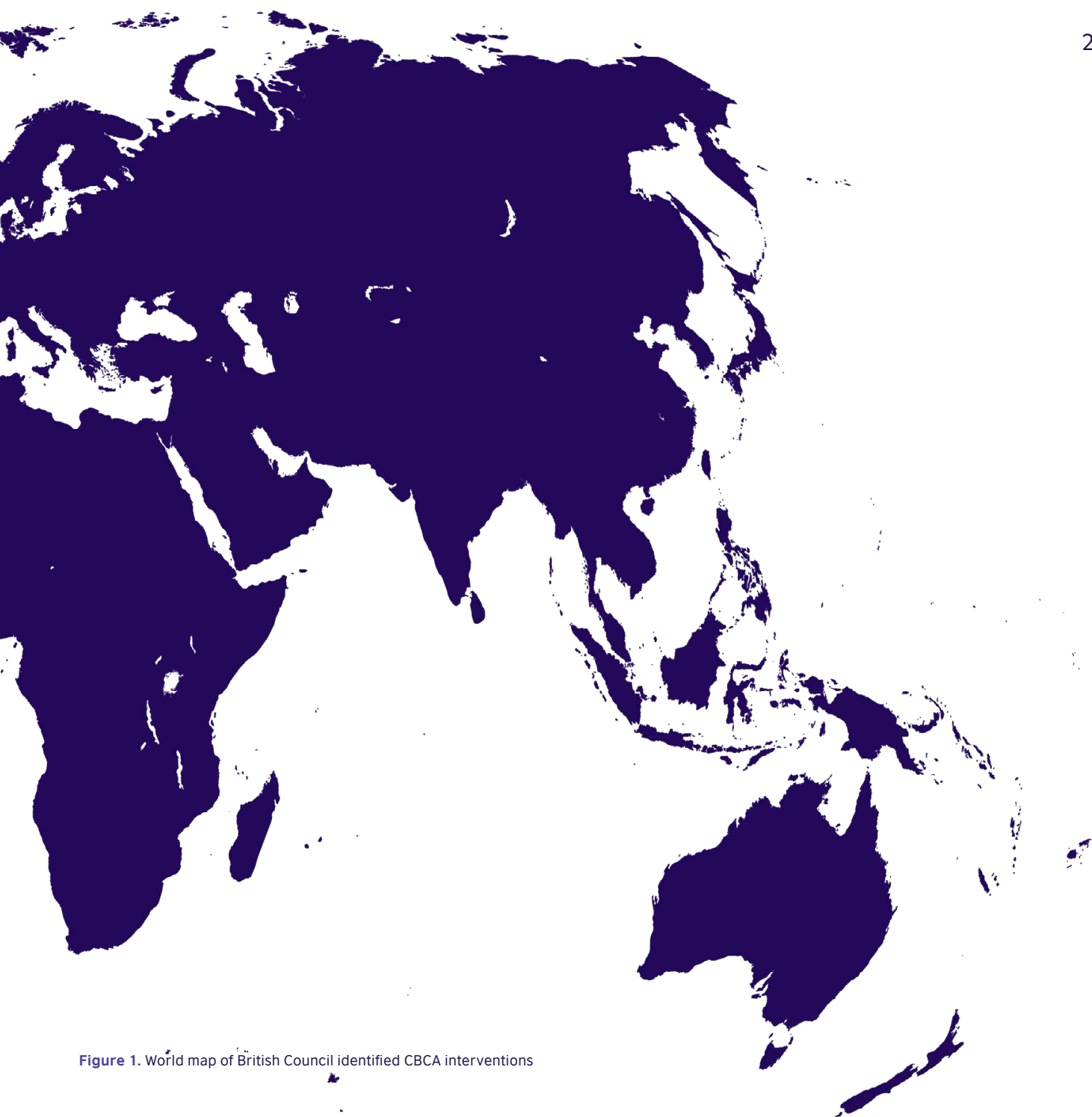


Figure 1. World map of British Council identified CBCA interventions

Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Egypt (5 projects); Morocco (4); Lebanon (4); Algeria (3); Palestine (3); Tunisia (3); Iraq (3); United Arab Emirates (3); Syria (2); Jordan (2); Kuwait (1); Bahrain (1); Libya (1); Sudan (1)

Asia-Pacific (APAC)

Bangladesh (7 projects); India (6); Indonesia (6); Nepal (6); Philippines (5); Pakistan (5); Malaysia (4); Vietnam (4); Australia (4); New Zealand (3); Sri Lanka (3); Thailand (3); Kazakhstan (3); Uzbekistan (2); China (2); Afghanistan (2); Myanmar (1); Taiwan (1); Samoa (1); Singapore (1); Japan (1); South Korea (1)

1.3.1 Initiatives and COP presence

A complementary perspective is provided by the timeline below, which shifts the focus from geographical spread to temporal distribution. Whereas maps and tables show where the portfolio has been active, the timeline shows when interventions were active across the period from COP26 to COP30, making visible patterns of continuity, overlap and sequencing within the portfolio over time. Particularly visible is the surge of interventions activated around COP26, hosted in Glasgow (2021), with 12 interventions started within that COP cycle. This concentration

makes sense, as COP26 represented a highly strategic moment for the British Council, not only because it was a major global climate milestone, but also because it took place on home ground, and the organisation was specifically commissioned to support ambitions for the ‘most inclusive COP’, with substantial resources mobilised around it.²⁷ The timeline shows that this level of new intervention development was not repeated in subsequent years. This should not be read simply as a loss of momentum or as evidence that COP26 generated less follow-on work. Rather, the pattern sits alongside a shift into a different phase, in which existing programmes continued while the British Council developed its strategy to embed climate concerns across programmes.²⁸



Photo: Trouble in Paradise. Faaiuga Vaialia (Samoa/New Zealand): ‘Young Women of the Islands’ © British High Commission

²⁷ British Council. (2022). Stronger together for climate: Final report (September 2021–March 2022). British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.be/sites/default/files/stronger_together_for_climate_sept21march22_final_report.pdf

²⁸ British Council. (2024). Our strategy to address climate change to 2026. British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_connection_strategy_to_address_climate_change_to_2026.pdf

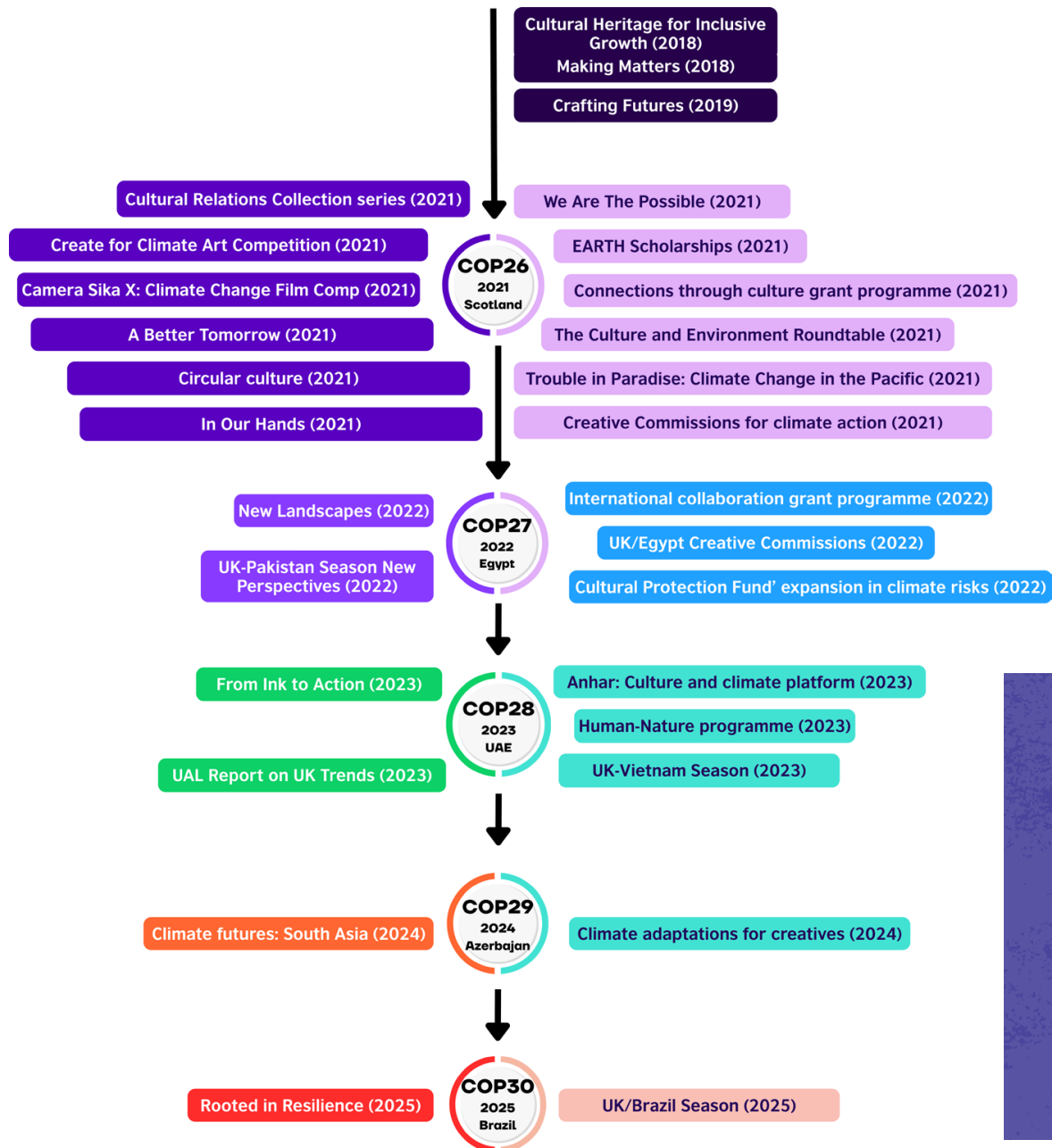


Figure 6. Intervention Timeline

COP summits are important in the British Council's climate engagement because they function as recurring points of visibility, convening and mobilisation within the wider portfolio. Across COP26–COP30, the organisation used these events not only to present existing programmes, but also to create entry points through which arts, culture and education can connect more directly to

climate policy, practice and international dialogue. Interventions are frequently developed or activated in the lead-up to a COP, shaped in response to host country contexts and thematic priorities, and then mobilised during the conference through a range of formats including exhibitions, performances, policy panels, research dissemination and multi-stakeholder dialogues.

Evidence from recent programme evaluations²⁹ shows that COP participation generates significant outputs and levels of engagement, while contributing to a range of cognitive, relational and, to a lesser extent, behavioural and structural outcomes. At COP30, programming included over 25 sessions and activities delivered across multiple formats and venues, engaging at least 2,957 participants (both in person and online), alongside 50 speakers and 53 partner organisations. These activities were complemented by 18 pre- and post-COP events, demonstrating that engagement extends beyond the formal conference period. In parallel, communication outputs reached larger audiences, with over 4.5 million digital impressions and an estimated 338.6 million potential reach through media and broadcast coverage. Together, these figures reflect the scale at which COP platforms operate as amplifiers of cultural and climate-related initiatives. Beyond outputs, qualitative evidence provides insight into the nature and limits of the outcomes generated through COP engagement. In relation to advocacy, influence and sector development (EQ1), COP participation contributes to placing arts, culture and education within formal policy spaces, including ministerial roundtables, UNFCCC processes and multilateral initiatives such as the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action. Evidence indicates strong performance in terms of access, visibility and cross-sector dialogue, enabling cultural actors, researchers and community representatives to engage with policy audiences that would otherwise be difficult to reach. However, the extent to which these activities

translate into measurable policy outcomes remains less clearly evidenced, with influence generally described as emerging and situated within a wider ecosystem of actors and processes.

In contrast, youth empowerment and skills development (EQ2) represents an area with particularly strong and measurable outcomes. COP participation supports capacity-building, knowledge development and access to policy spaces for young people at scale, including through training programmes, research initiatives and direct participation in negotiation processes. Evidence from COP30 indicates that over 300 young people from 75 countries were trained as climate negotiators, with more than 150 participating directly in the conference, while additional initiatives engaged thousands of learners through educational programmes and simulations. Notably, there is evidence of contribution to policy-relevant change, such as the adoption of youth-related provisions in Nationally Determined Contributions by several national governments, reflecting pathways through which COP engagement can link capacity-building to influence.

In relation to partnership development and collaboration (EQ3), evidence consistently highlights the centrality of COPs as spaces for building, strengthening and extending networks across cultural, educational and climate sectors. At COP30, collaboration involved over 50 partner organisations, including both new and long-standing relationships, with qualitative evidence

²⁹ The Social Investment Consultancy. (2026). Evaluation of the British Council's participation at COP30/COY20: Impact evaluation report. British Council.

pointing to the importance of trust-based, flexible and multi-year partnerships. These partnerships are not limited to conference delivery, but often continue beyond the event, contributing to ongoing projects, joint initiatives and, in some cases, policy engagement at national or international level. This suggests that relational outcomes, such as trust, credibility and network expansion, are among the most consistent and tangible effects of COP participation.

Finally, in terms of organisational learning, integration and legacy (EQ4),

evidence indicates that COP engagement plays a role in embedding climate considerations into year-round programming and strengthening internal capacities. In particular, COP cycles are used to scale or consolidate existing programmes rather than to launch isolated activities, contributing to the integration of climate themes across portfolios and geographies. At the same time, the evidence base suggests that longer-term organisational and systemic impacts remain in development and depend on sustained engagement across multiple COP cycles rather than on single events.

	COP26 GLASGOW	COP27 SHARM-EL-SHEIKH	COP28 DUBAI	COP29 BAKU	COP30 BELÉM
BEFORE	Intervention activation: Creative Commissions for climate action Cultural protection fund In Our Hands Cultural Relations Collection series Create for Climate Art Competition Camera Sika X Road to COP26 The Culture and Environment Roundtable A Better Tomorrow COP moments - China youth artist highlight videos - COY16 youth-facing activities	Intervention activation: In Our Hands We Are The Possible Cultural protection fund UK-Egypt Creative Commissions COP moments COY17 session with YOUNGO	Intervention activation: Anhar: Culture and climate platform Circular cultures Making Matters Creative Commissions for climate action We Are The Possible UAL climate mapping research COP moments Global Call to Action COY18 workshop with YOUNGO	Intervention activation: We Make Tomorrow Anhar: Culture and climate platform COP moments COY19 as a pre-COP youth platform	Intervention activation: UK/Brazil Season We Are the Possible COP moments Silver Sponsor for COY20
DURING	Intervention activation: Trouble in Paradise: Climate Change in the Pacific Creative commissions We are the possible COP moments - BC Climate Connection Pavilion (Blue Zone) - Culture: The Missing Link (Green Zone) Living-Language-Land showcase	Intervention activation: Cultural protection fund UK-Egypt Creative Commissions Creative Commissions for climate action COP moments Blue Zone youth roundtable with James Cleverly Blue Zone climate solutions Climate Connections booth The Earth Turns performance 12 Climate Stories for 12 Days Creative Commissions showcasing	Intervention activation: Anhar: Culture and climate platform Climate Skills Global Collaboration Grants Climate Connection Research Fellowships From Ink to Action COP moments Mother Earth International, Better Late Than Never Gender Ecologies screened Julie's Bicycle / Resilience Hub arts GFCBCA launch Blue Zone side event with INTO, the National Trust and Earth Day on financing, educational and cultural responses to climate change UK Pavilion session - Bright Light Burning, -How Creativity Can Build Resilient Communities	Intervention activation: Anhar: Culture and climate platform Climate Adaptation for creatives We Are The Possible UAE CBCA study pathway COP moments Bright Light Burning performance COP as a Catalyst panel CBCA panel (UAE Pavilion) Blue Zone Showcasing Julie's Bicycle partnership	Intervention activation: Rooted in Resilience featured We Are the Possible Cultura Circular / Festival Outros Nativos Learning for Sustainable Futures Live at COP30 Everything is Burning Unlimited COP moments Creative Climate Action: Stories Creative Climate Action: Inspiring Practices UK and Brazil Collaboration Culture at the Centre of Climate Action Advancing Climate Skills Blue Zone exhibition / Gaia Blue Zone partnership with INTO
AFTER	Intervention activation: EARTH Scholarships COP moments Julie's Bicycle partnership legacy	Intervention activation: We Are the Possible COP moments Egypt culture-climate summit	Intervention activation: UAE follow-up pathway We Are the Possible continues EARTH Scholarships COP moments GFCBCA coalition continues	Intervention activation: We Make Tomorrow COP moments UK-Azerbaijan theatre collaboration Documentary theatre workshop	

Figure 7. COP Timeline

In summary, the evidence highlights that the primary value of COP participation lies not only in visibility or immediate outputs, but in its function as part of a broader engagement cycle. COPs create conditions for access, exchange and collaboration at scale, while supporting the gradual development of relationships, knowledge systems and influence

pathways over time. Their contribution is therefore best understood as cumulative and relational, with longer-term impacts (particularly in relation to policy integration, institutional change and systemic transformation) emerging progressively through repeated engagement and interaction with a wider set of actors within the global climate ecosystem.



Photo: UK-Brazil Season 25-26.
Artists-in-residence Alberta Whittle and
Lícida Vidal, Salvador, Brazil © Manuela
Cavadas

2. Conceptual and analytical framework

2.1 Operational definition of Culture-Based Climate Action

The operational definition of CBCA used in this study derives from an inductive synthesis of practice-based evidence, British Council documentation and global climate-culture policy developments as part of this research. The definition reflects recurring patterns across diverse interventions and outcome pathways and is grounded in how culture-based climate action is implemented in practice. This approach enables analytical consistency, avoids conceptual inflation and ensures relevance across regions, sectors and scales.

Our CBCA definition:

Given that the climate crisis is not only environmental, but also a cultural one, “culture-based climate action” refers to the ways in which cultural practices, heritage, creative expression, Indigenous and local knowledge systems contribute to climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience-building and behavioural change.

It recognises culture as both a resource and a driver of climate action and innovation, shaping how communities understand climate risks, respond to them, and mobilise collective solutions. CBCA includes public engagement and narrative change, community-led and place-based resilience, heritage informed adaptation, sustainable cultural production, cross-cultural collaboration, and efforts to integrate culture into climate governance and evidence systems.’



This operational definition draws from the framing adopted by the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action (GFCBCA) launched at COP28, which positions culture as a multi-dimensional enabler of climate solutions. It also reflects the conceptual trajectory visible in global climate policy since COP26, where culture has shifted from being treated primarily as something vulnerable (heritage at risk) or as a repository of traditional knowledge, to being

recognised as an active contributor to climate action supporting climate literacy, influencing social norms, enabling adaptation, and facilitating systemic transformations. By grounding the definition in operational practice and shared outcome domains, the study avoids treating CBCA as a broad moral or advocacy concept and instead operationalises it as an analytical category that supports concrete comparison, evidence synthesis and impact assessment.

2.2 The six CBCA typologies

To analyse the CBCA landscape systematically, the study uses six intervention typologies representing distinct mechanisms through which culture contributes to climate action. They reflect observable intervention logics, delivery modalities and pathways of change, and are used consistently across the British Council portfolio mapping, global landscape mapping and Theory of Change development. As mentioned in the Limitation section, while the typologies structure the analysis, dimensions such as gender inclusion, innovation and sustainable growth are treated as cross-cutting, as they emerge across multiple intervention types and outcome domains rather than constituting distinct categories in their own right.

Creative climate action, engagement and imagination

This typology includes interventions that use artistic practice, cultural expression, storytelling and creative participation to engage the public, raise awareness, shape perceptions and influence early-stage behavioural intentions. These interventions operate through emotional resonance, meaning-making, public visibility and participatory engagement, enabling cognitive and affective shifts that support climate-related norms and action. Activities may include exhibitions, performances, creative commissions, residencies, festivals, narrative platforms, campaigns and media partnerships. This is one of the most widespread typologies globally and one strongly represented in the British Council portfolio.

Heritage protection, adaptation and climate resilience

This typology encompasses interventions aimed at safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the face of climate-related risks and ensuring adaptation and climate resilience. Activities include climate risk assessments, vulnerability mapping, adaptation plans, preparedness measures, emergency response protocols, capacity building for custodians and coordination mechanisms with environmental and risk management agencies. These interventions recognise heritage both as a climate-sensitive asset requiring protection and as a component of broader adaptation and resilience strategies aligned with the UNFCCC Global Goal on Adaptation adopted at COP30, including 5 indicators to track how well heritage sites and cultural practices are being protected and adapted to climate change.

Indigenous knowledge, local culture and community-based adaptation

Focusing on place-based, culturally embedded knowledge and customary governance systems, this typology mobilises Indigenous and local knowledge for climate adaptation and resilience. Activities may include participatory mapping, stewardship practices, intergenerational learning,

community climate monitoring, livelihood diversification and co-designed adaptation strategies. These interventions emphasise ownership, cultural continuity, collective agency and rights-based approaches, often supported through Indigenous-governed finance mechanisms or community-led governance frameworks.

Networks, partnerships and cultural relations

This typology covers alliances, practitioner networks, institutional partnerships and cultural relations mechanisms that enable dissemination, scaling and cross-border cooperation. Through convening, peer learning, joint programming, community of practice structures, exchanges and advocacy in climate fora, these interventions strengthen collaborative infrastructures and facilitate the transfer of knowledge, tools and policy approaches, particularly valuable when done across sectors. They represent a core strength of the British Council's cultural relations model and global network.

Environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors

This typology includes interventions that reduce the environmental footprint of cultural institutions and creative industries through standards, training,

tools, incentives and compliance mechanisms. Outcomes include improved environmental performance, adoption of sustainability standards, reporting frameworks, procurement reforms, and sector-wide behavioural change. These interventions often interface with national or regional green transition policies and represent a rapidly expanding global area.

Evidence systems, MEL innovations and cultural indicators for climate action

This typology comprises interventions that strengthen the measurement, evaluation and learning systems associated with CBCA. Activities include developing indicators, harmonising definitions, establishing data systems, publishing open datasets, generating methodological pilots and embedding evaluation practices. These interventions enable comparability, accountability and policy relevance by building the evidence required to understand CBCA contributions within broader climate governance frameworks.

2.3 Shared outcome domains

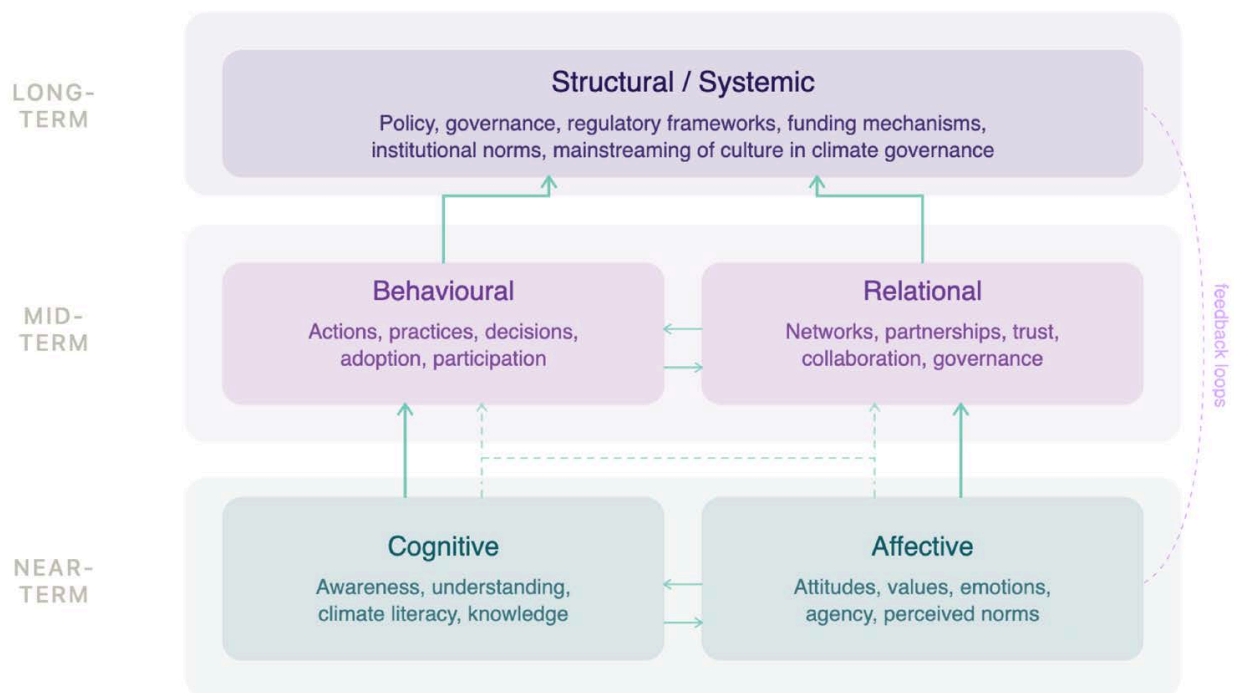


Figure 8. Outcomes domains. Image created by KEA

To enable comparability across interventions, regions and typologies, the study has developed five shared outcome domains reflecting different forms of change generated by CBCA. These domains are applied consistently throughout the evidence coding, Theory of Change development and analysis.

Cognitive outcomes

These refer to increased awareness, understanding, climate literacy and knowledge. They often represent near-term changes and are commonly associated with creative communication, training, documentation, evidence systems and public engagement.

Affective outcomes

These include shifts in attitudes, values, emotional engagement, motivation, agency and perceived norms. Culture is particularly well-positioned to influence affective outcomes, though they are often under-reported or difficult to measure.

Behavioural outcomes

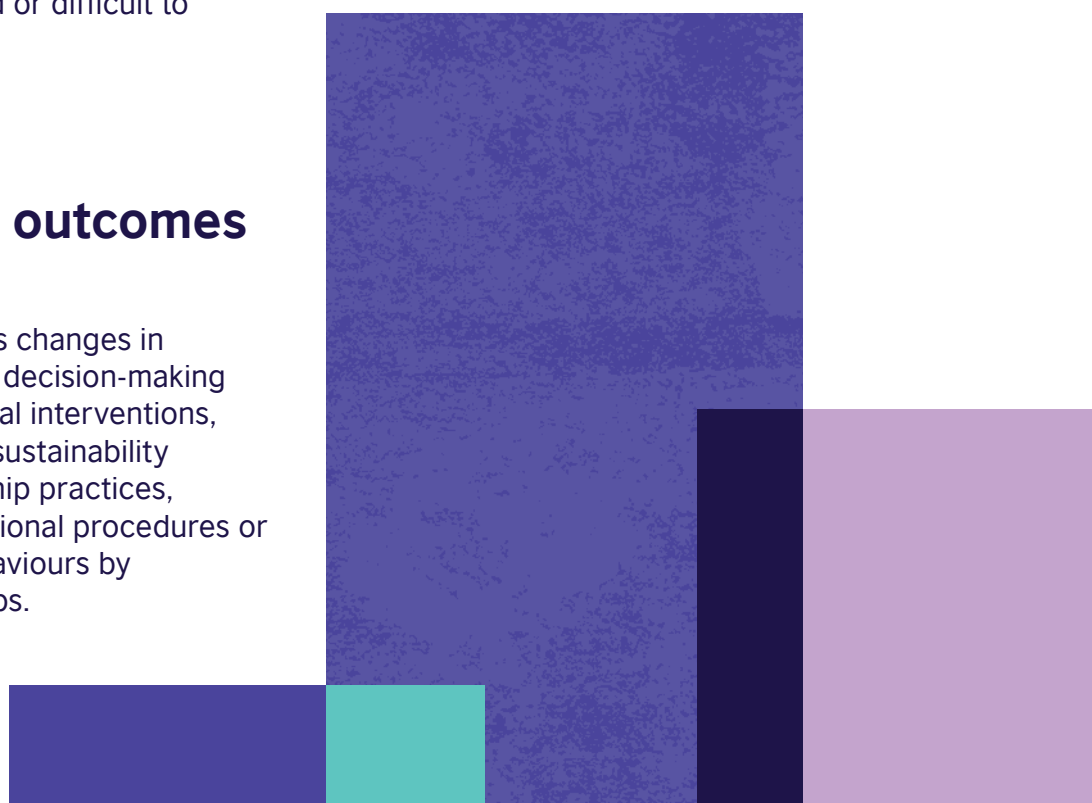
This domain captures changes in actions, practices or decision-making attributable to cultural interventions, such as adoption of sustainability standards, stewardship practices, changes in organisational procedures or climate-positive behaviours by individuals and groups.

Relational outcomes

These outcomes involve strengthened networks, partnerships, collaboration, governance structures, trust-building, inclusive participation and cross-sector linkages. They are core to cultural relations approaches and frequently observed across British Council interventions.

Structural/Systemic outcomes

These refer to shifts in policy, governance, regulatory frameworks, funding mechanisms or institutional norms. They typically emerge over longer time horizons and reflect deeper integration of culture within climate governance, such as the inclusion of heritage in adaptation plans, standardisation of sustainability requirements or the adoption of evidence frameworks by national or international bodies.





Poo Shree, India
KADAM Ranga Clothing, Tamil Nadu, India
Woo Rie Clothing, Tamil Nadu, India

Reimagining Desi Cotton

The Reimagining Desi Cotton project aimed to develop a fully biodegradable, 100% organic and responsible cotton textile for the Indian market. Through this, the project aims to support local cotton farmers and textile artisans, while regaining knowledge about the lost history of cotton in India. The project also aims to create a circular economy for cotton waste.

R&D

Collaborative experimentation with local cotton farmers and textile artisans to develop a fully biodegradable, 100% organic and responsible cotton textile for the Indian market.

Results

Developed a fully biodegradable, 100% organic and responsible cotton textile for the Indian market. The project also aims to support local cotton farmers and textile artisans, while regaining knowledge about the lost history of cotton in India.

Future Plans

Develop a fully biodegradable, 100% organic and responsible cotton textile for the Indian market. The project also aims to support local cotton farmers and textile artisans, while regaining knowledge about the lost history of cotton in India.



Desi Oon Wool Traceability Framework

Centre for Pastoralism, Delhi, India
Here We Are, Argyll, UK
Where Does It Come From? Ipswich, UK

India has the world's second-largest sheep population but discards more than 50% of its indigenous wool and imports significant quantities. The Desi Oon Wool Traceability Framework project aimed to develop a digital toolkit that enables traceability across the desi oon supply chain, supporting indigenous wool economies and transparent practices.

R&D

Supporting the desi oon wool economy, the project aims to develop a digital toolkit that enables traceability across the desi oon supply chain, supporting indigenous wool economies and transparent practices.

Results

Developed a digital toolkit that enables traceability across the desi oon supply chain, supporting indigenous wool economies and transparent practices.

Future Plans

Develop a digital toolkit that enables traceability across the desi oon supply chain, supporting indigenous wool economies and transparent practices.



Desi Oon Wool Supply Chain in Karnataka



Climate Positive Microbial

Truetone Ink, Ahmedabad
ColorAshram Foundation
Post Carbon Lab, London

Climate Positive Microbial Color is aimed to develop and scale sustainable and regenerative microbial color methods as alternatives to carbon-intensive, non-biodegradable synthetic dyes. The project develops how combining microbial color technology with plant-based and wet-processing systems can reduce the textile industry's CO2 emissions and water pollution.

R&D

Developed a sustainable microbial color method as an alternative to carbon-intensive, non-biodegradable synthetic dyes.

Results

Developed a sustainable microbial color method as an alternative to carbon-intensive, non-biodegradable synthetic dyes.

Future Plans

Develop a sustainable microbial color method as an alternative to carbon-intensive, non-biodegradable synthetic dyes.



Climate Positive Microbial Color

3. Thematic analysis by CBCA intervention type³⁰

3.1 Creative climate action, engagement and imagination

3.1.1 Global evidence landscape

Across intergovernmental policy, cultural institutions, grassroots activism, philanthropic initiatives, and artistic leadership programmes, several clear global trends are emerging in the field of *creative climate action, engagement and imagination*. As societies increasingly rely on engagement through creativity,

storytelling, and expressive cultural practices to make climate change emotionally, ethically, and politically legible.³¹ This is very relevant in climate forums themselves. Drawing on first-hand experience at COP, practitioners argue that creative practitioners could transform the quality of engagement in spaces currently governed by rigid protocols and generic statements by making discussions meaningful through storytelling, analogy, and by inviting delegates to relate as human beings³²

³⁰ The insights presented in the following sections are based on a combination of desk research and qualitative data collected through expert interviews and focus groups. All experts consulted are explicitly named and credited throughout the report, and a full list is provided in the Acknowledgements section.

³¹ <https://www.adruk.org/news-publications/news-blogs/how-can-the-science-of-storytelling-drive-action-on-climate-change/>

³² Interview with Jen Rae (Centre for Reworlding and Creative Climate), conducted for this study. Jen Rae is an award-winning artist and researcher of Canadian Scottish-Métis (Indigenous) descent living on unceded Djaara Country (Castlemaine) Australia. She is recognised for her practice and expertise situated at the intersections of art, speculative futures and climate emergency disaster adaptation + resilience. More about her work and expertise here: <https://www.jenraeis.com/aboutjen>

The evidence suggests there is a cognitive dissonance for people working in climate and humanitarian policy who are constantly processing devastating numbers and stories, becoming desensitised and unable to see the impact of their own work. Creative interpretations of and approaches towards the climate crisis – be they based in the visual arts, literary arts, and so on – can potentially act as a salve to this self-protective psychological detachment.

Indeed, how climate change is communicated matters substantially. Empirical research shows that climate change communication is consistently effective in increasing awareness and knowledge but has more modest effects on attitudes and behaviour. A recent meta-analysis of 53 climate communication and education interventions³³ found a medium to large effect on climate-related knowledge, while effects on attitudes and behaviour were smaller but statistically significant. Similarly, systematic reviews of climate communication research indicate that most interventions succeed in improving understanding and concern but are less likely to translate information into sustained action, highlighting a persistent

‘awareness–action gap’.³⁴ These findings suggest that communication alone is insufficient to drive behavioural change, particularly when structural, social, and economic barriers limit individual agency.

Meta-analytical and review studies show that communication strategies that are framed around moral, economic, or locally relevant impacts, and that enhance emotional engagement and perceived personal relevance, are more effective than abstract or purely scientific messaging.³⁵ Systematic reviews of behaviour-change interventions demonstrate that communication is most effective when combined with enabling mechanisms such as concrete guidance, goal setting, social norms, and opportunities for collective action.³⁶ Arts-based interventions such as installations, performances, speculative design,³⁷ and museum exhibitions have become powerful mechanisms for public mobilisation.

One example of good integration between climate communication and broader policy enforcement is Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) under the UNFCCC,³⁸ which positions public participation, cultural expression,

³³ Aeschbach, V. M.-J., Schwichow, M., and RieB, W. (2025). Effectiveness of climate change education: A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1563816. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1563816>

³⁴ Hochachka, G. (2024). When concern is not enough: Overcoming the climate awareness–action gap. *Ambio*, 53(8), 1182–1202. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-024-01999-5>

³⁵ Li, N., and Su, L. Y.-F. (2018). Message framing and climate change communication: A meta-analytical review. *Journal of Applied Communications*, 102(3). <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.2189>

³⁶ Masciangelo, L., Lopez Lumbi, S., Rinderhagen, M., Hornberg, C., Liebig-Gonglach, M., and McCall, T. (2024). Promising behavior change techniques for climate-friendly behavior change: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 12, Article 1396958. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1396958>

³⁷ Speculative design refers to a design practice that uses fictional, future-oriented, or alternative scenarios to provoke reflection, debate, and critical engagement with complex societal issues, rather than to propose immediately implementable solutions. In the context of climate communication, speculative design employs artefacts, prototypes, narratives, or installations to make possible futures tangible, encouraging audiences to question existing assumptions, explore ethical and political implications, and imagine pathways for change.

³⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2016). Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE). <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-and-youth/big-picture/ACE>

popular media, and accessible communication as essential pillars of climate action. Although ACE's implementation remains uneven, a 2025 RIFS review emphasises that effective engagement requires stronger collaboration between governments, cultural actors, and civil society. These insights were reinforced in interviews,³⁹ where practitioners pointed to a persistent structural disconnect between culture and climate diplomacy. Representatives involved in COP-related cultural programming highlighted the absence of clearly defined pathways for Culture-Based Climate Action within international processes, as well as the limited visibility of locally grounded and community-led practices within formal decision-making spaces.

Further evidence suggests that Ministries of Culture are not always systematically involved in COP processes, with cultural perspectives often represented by Ministries of Environment or Foreign Affairs.⁴⁰ While this can help integrate culture into broader climate discussions, interviewees noted that these actors may not always have specialised expertise in articulating the contribution of culture-based approaches within climate policy debates.

UNESCO has positioned cultural engagement as a foundational pillar of climate action through its Creative Cities Network. Launched in 2004 and now comprising more than 350 cities worldwide across eight creative fields,

the Network demonstrates how local cultural ecosystems can act as laboratories for climate-responsive urban development, embedding sustainability principles into food systems, cultural production, urban design, and community practices. UCCN member cities mobilise citizens, creative professionals, and public authorities around shared sustainability agendas, fostering behavioural change, social cohesion, and place-based climate action.

At the European level, the EU Climate Action Academy⁴¹ stands out for offering behavioural science-based climate communication guidelines, reinforcing the importance of narrative framing, creative storytelling, and public engagement tools in climate literacy. Ireland's Creative Climate Action Fund⁴² stands out as a model for evaluating creative public engagement. Its structured methodologies compiled in its respective evaluation toolkit⁴³ (developed by the Creative Ireland Programme and applied across all funded projects) is structured around a 'Goal-to-Impact' framework, a theory-of-change-based logic model that systematically links creative activities, outputs, and measurable impacts on climate literacy, attitudes, behaviours, and collective action. It explicitly operationalises behaviour-change pathways across predefined climate domains (e.g. energy, biodiversity, food systems, mobility) and distinguishes short-term engagement outcomes from longer-term behavioural

³⁹ Interview with Gunjan Nanda, (Entertainment & Culture Pavilion), conducted for this study.

⁴⁰ Interview with Samuel Rubin (Entertainment and Culture Pavilion), conducted for this study.

⁴¹ https://climate-pact.europa.eu/eu-climate-action-academy-0_en

⁴² <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/funding/heritage-funding-opportunities/creative-ireland-creative-climate-action-fund-2>

⁴³ <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2021/12/Creative-Climate-Action-Fund-Evaluation-Toolkit-Final.pdf>

and community-level change. Such evaluation frameworks have become international benchmarks for evidence-based evaluation of creative engagement in climate action due to their robustness and replicability.

Storytelling as a core modality of climate engagement

Storytelling – personal, communal, speculative, documentary, or digital – has emerged as one of the most influential approaches in creative climate communication. The Doc Society Climate Story Fund,⁴⁴ which has distributed over USD 4 million to more than 50 global projects, emphasises the power of diverse, justice-centred storytelling to seed new norms and beliefs and mobilise audiences. The British Council has partnered with Doc Society since 2021 to share a curated collection of climate films under a non-commercial license within their global network. The growing institutional weight of this argument is reflected in COP30's Global Climate Action Agenda, which formally included 'Catalysing Narratives for Change' in the Plan to Accelerate Solution (PAS)⁴⁵ selected projects in the Activation Group 19 under Axis V (Fostering Human and Social Development) of the GCA. Co-led by Creatives for Climate and the UN Climate ECCA alliance, the plan positions narrative and storytelling as

recognised levers for climate action within the UNFCCC implementation architecture itself.

A growing body of research confirms the effectiveness of arts-based climate communication. Studies of visual and experiential climate communication show that multimedia and artistic installations can evoke emotional responses and increase the personal relevance of climate change, which in turn supports greater awareness and reported behavioural intentions.⁴⁶ Arts-integrated education has likewise been shown to deepen climate engagement among young people by supporting emotional literacy and what Ojala⁴⁷ describes as “hope-based coping” in the face of climate change, helping participants process eco-anxiety without disengagement. At the intersection of science and culture, collaborative climate storytelling between artists and scientists plays a critical role in enhancing the accessibility and affective power of climate knowledge. Galafassi⁴⁸ argues that art–science collaborations create new spaces for dialogue and strengthen the emotional resonance of sustainability issues, enabling climate science to reach wider publics and become more meaningful to non-expert audiences.

To this, more recent literature highlights that climate storytelling has been shown to support sensemaking, emotional connection and collective imagination,

⁴⁴ <https://climatestoryunit.org/fund/>

⁴⁵ https://climateaction.unfccc.int/assets/documents/54_.pdf

⁴⁶ Ojala, M. (2012). Hope and climate change: The importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people. *Environmental Education Research*, 18(5), 625–642. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2011.637157>

⁴⁷ Ibidem

⁴⁸ Galafassi, D., et al. (2018). 'Raising the temperature': the arts on a warming planet. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 31, 71–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.12.010>

particularly where climate change is experienced as abstract or overwhelming⁴⁹. Narrative approaches are increasingly recognised as critical to climate adaptation and resilience, enabling communities to articulate local knowledge, values and future aspirations while fostering agency and social cohesion.⁵⁰

Participatory storytelling initiatives reinforce the value of connecting climate narratives to personal and community identities. The Climate Stories Project (CSP)⁵¹ offers workshops for schools, libraries, government agencies, and community organisations to help participants articulate their own experiences of climate change, record climate stories from others, and develop local storytelling networks. Through its Climate Stories Ambassadors programme (a free, globally accessible training series) CSP teaches participants how to conduct climate interviews, share their own stories, and build climate conversations within their communities. This grassroots model addresses one of the most persistent barriers to public climate engagement: the absence of everyday dialogue about climate change.

Storytelling for Hopeful Climate Futures at Stanford University⁵² (delivered by playwright and Arts and Climate Initiative founder Chantal Bilodeau) highlights how theatre and performance

can cultivate courage, emotional resilience, and imaginative possibility in the face of climate uncertainty - similar to the British Council's programme Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform, detailed below. Through live storytelling, Bilodeau argues, societies can rehearse alternative futures and develop shared visions for transformation that counter climate despair. Her call for hopeful, future-oriented narrative strategies resonates with a growing shift in climate communication research, which shows that solution-driven stories can enhance public motivation and reduce paralysis. Storytelling on-screen has also found an audience in Bangladesh through the Joler Chobi Matir Chobi Traveling Film Festival, a 'community-driven climate education initiative that brings cinema to rural Bangladesh to raise awareness about the climate crisis and adaptation strategies'.⁵³ Unlike traditional climate education programs, this initiative uses film as a visual, emotional, and accessible medium to engage rural audiences in the climate crisis.

These findings align with reflections from interviewees working at the intersection of arts and climate engagement, who emphasised the importance of maintaining a plurality of artistic responses to climate change.⁵⁴ Perspectives drawn from cultural practitioners highlighted that both emotionally confronting and more subtle or hopeful forms of expression play

49 Milkoreit, M., Hodbod, J., Baggio, J., Benessaiah, K., CalderónContreras, R., Donges, J. F., Mathias, J.D., Rocha, J. C., Schoon, M., and Werners, S. (2021). Defining tipping points for social–ecological systems scholarship. An interdisciplinary literature review. *Environmental Research Letters*, 16(11), 113008. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1748-9326/aaaa75>

50 NurseyBray, M., Palmer, R., Smith, T. F., and Rist, P. (2020). Old ways for new days: Australian Indigenous peoples and climate change. *Local Environment*, 25(4), 288–305. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13549839.2019.1590325>

51 <https://www.climatestoriesproject.org/>

52 <https://philosophy.stanford.edu/events/storytelling-hopeful-climate-futures>

53 <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nSTmeIPMOEYZKD--e2g-UxtNpmFs41G7/view>

54 Interview with Yasmine Ostendorf Rodriguez (GALA), conducted for this study.

complementary roles, engaging different audiences and enabling diverse entry points into climate discourse. This diversity of approaches was seen as essential to ensuring that climate communication resonates across contexts and publics.

Museums as mediators of climate knowledge, emotion and agency

The museum sector has emerged as a particularly influential arena for creative climate engagement. Museums increasingly function as civic forums for climate learning and collective imagination. The ‘Reimagining Museums for Climate Action’⁵⁵ exhibition at COP26 is a prime example. Developed from over 250 proposals submitted by practitioners from 48 countries, the exhibition showcased eight visionary concepts illustrating how museums could become catalysts for radical climate action, from community-led climate research centres to speculative ‘Natural Future Museums’ grounded in Indigenous stewardship. Seen by approximately 120,000 visitors across its 2021 installation and COP26 re-opening, the exhibition demonstrated museums’ capacity to transform climate communication through design, interactivity, and imaginative futures thinking.

The Climate Action Museum⁵⁶ in Chicago adopts another model, grounding climate communication directly in public experience. Its exhibits, ranging from

thermal imaging of energy loss to demonstrations of low-carbon household technologies, link climate science to everyday decision-making, creating what the museum describes as a ‘climate awareness awakening.’ By embedding climate understanding within urban culture, the museum strengthens community capacity for climate-related behavioural change.

Creative leadership programmes

Alongside museum-led initiatives, leadership programmes in the cultural sector have become central to scaling creative climate communication. Julie’s Bicycle’s Creative Climate Leadership (CCL)⁵⁷ programme has trained more than 150 cultural professionals across Europe and internationally, equipping them with tools to embed climate justice in their creative practice and to mobilise their audiences toward climate engagement. CCL fosters a network of cultural practitioners who work across disciplines to generate public-facing climate narratives and advocate for systemic change at municipal, national, and global levels. By strengthening the communicative capacity of artists and cultural workers, CCL builds a distributed leadership infrastructure that links culture to climate action in tangible ways.

Complementing this leadership focus, the Cultural and Artistic Responses to the Environmental Crisis (CAREC)⁵⁸ fellowship by the Prince Claus Fund and

⁵⁵ https://artsandculture.google.com/story/tAWB_rRlcmpjkQ

⁵⁶ <https://www.climateactionmuseum.org/>

⁵⁷ <https://juliesbicycle.org/what-we-do/creative-climate-people/changemakers/>

⁵⁸ <https://princeclausfund.nl/awards-and-programmes/fellows-award/carec>

Goethe-Institut has emerged as a globally significant platform for community-led and justice-oriented creative climate action. The year-long fellowship supports mid-career artists whose work addresses climate justice and the deep entanglements between ecological harm and social, racial, and political inequalities. Fellows participate in interdisciplinary workshops, peer exchanges, and co-created publications that foreground non-hegemonic, Indigenous, and Global South knowledge systems. CAREC's explicit commitment to South-to-South networks and its refusal to treat climate change as merely a scientific or environmental problem positions the arts as a site for contesting dominant narratives and imagining community-rooted climate futures.

Artist residencies

Artist residencies such as *The Climate Action Artist Residencies*⁵⁹ developed by Cultural Vistas and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office pair artists from Germany and the V20 nations (Fiji, Samoa, Philippines) with environmental research organisations for three-month immersive residencies. These cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary residencies invite artists to translate complex climate research into artistic outputs that can reach diverse audiences in both home and host countries. The culminating exhibition, *Echoes of Change* in Berlin, highlighted how collaborative work between artists and climate scientists can transform data into immersive visual, sonic, and spatial experiences that deepen public empathy and understanding of global climate vulnerabilities.

Gender dimensions

Within creative climate action, gender tends to be engaged implicitly through a broader justice and inclusion lens, rather than as an axis of programme design or measurement. Much of the most ambitious creative work in this space is justice-oriented by construction: fellowships such as CAREC foreground the entanglement of ecological harm with social, racial and political inequalities, and centre non-hegemonic, Indigenous and Global South knowledge systems. Gender sits inside that intersection framing, but is rarely named as a distinct objective or tracked through gender-disaggregated participation.

Where it is made explicit, the evidence is encouraging. The British Council's own Creative Commissions evaluation found that 42 per cent of projects addressed gender equality, with many connecting climate to wider questions of diversity, social justice and the voices of communities underrepresented in climate debate.⁶⁰ This suggests creative practice is a natural carrier of gendered climate narratives even where it is not labelled as such.

A credible gender dimension in this typology would mean moving from implicit inclusion to explicitly intent: capturing the gender composition of artists, audiences, and communities reached, and ensuring that the climate stories amplified include those told by and about women and gender-diverse people.

⁵⁹ <https://www.climateactionartistresidencies.org/>

⁶⁰ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Creative%20Commissions%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report%20with%20Foreword.pdf> . P.10

Conclusions

These museum interventions, leadership programmes, storytelling platforms, artistic residencies, and youth initiatives collectively illustrate the richness and diversity of creative climate communication practices worldwide.

However, despite the rapid expansion of creative climate communication worldwide, several persistent barriers constrain its integration into broader climate governance and action frameworks. One relevant constraint is the limited evaluation of creative climate interventions. Although pioneering frameworks such as that from Creative Ireland⁶¹ demonstrate how creative engagement can lead to measurable behavioural change, many global initiatives still lack the resources or methodologies to systematically assess their impact. Without robust evidence, creative climate communication struggles to gain recognition from policymakers and funders. Climate communication researchers stress that public engagement initiatives require robust, long-term evaluation beyond awareness and attitudes in order to demonstrate lasting behavioural and societal impact and to inform

evidence-based policy and funding decisions.⁶²

The initiatives presented in this section demonstrate that creative engagement is not a secondary layer of climate action but a foundational catalyst. It influences how societies perceive risks, value ecosystems, support transitions, and mobilise collective effort. CBCA strengthens the social and imaginative infrastructures without which technical and policy solutions remain abstract or politically fragile.

As the climate crisis intensifies and public fatigue deepens, the role of storytelling, art, heritage, and cultural practice becomes ever more vital. Creative climate communication provides the emotional resonance, narrative frameworks, and civic spaces that help communities move from awareness to action. It expands the boundaries of what is thinkable, desirable, and possible; and in doing so, it helps build the cultural conditions necessary for a just and regenerative climate transition.

61 Creative Ireland Programme. (2021). Creative Climate Action: Project evaluation toolkit. Creative Ireland Programme. <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/app/uploads/2021/12/Creative-Climate-Action-Fund-Evaluation-Toolkit-Final.pdf>

62 Corner, A., Shaw, C., and Clarke, J. (2017). Principles for effective communication and public engagement on climate change. Climate Outreach. <https://climateoutreach.org/media/principles-for-effective-public-engagement-on-climate-change-a-handbook-for-the-ipcc/>

3.1.2 British Council's contribution in this area

Category	Description
Typology	Creative climate action, engagement and imagination
Typology footprint	9 interventions
Geographic spread	Activity in 50+ countries (often multi-country by design); Regions: East Asia, Europe, Wider Europe, LATAC, MENA, North America, Oceania/ Pacific, Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, UK
Indicative funding (2021–2025)	£4.6 million (estimated, based on Anhar, Creative Commissions and Crafting Futures); mixed funding model across creative commissions, competitions and showcase programmes
Typical intervention delivery mechanisms	Creative commissions and open calls; exhibitions, festivals, competitions and touring; digital platforms and public-facing storytelling
British Council's main role	Funder and international connector; amplifier of cultural narratives within global climate moments (e.g. COPs)
Typical outcomes	Cognitive outcomes (awareness, reframing climate issues); affective outcomes (engagement, empathy, motivation); secondary relational outcomes through visibility and exchange

Category	Examples
Grants and commissioning	Funding and enabling creative production: <i>Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform</i> ; <i>Creative Commissions for Climate Action</i>
Skills and practice support	Building capacity and climate literacy: <i>Climate Adaptations for Creatives</i> ; <i>Crafting Futures</i>
Exhibitions and interpretive formats	Translating climate issues for public engagement: <i>Trouble in Paradise: Climate Change in the Pacific</i> ; <i>From Ink to Action</i>
Competitions and open calls	Mobilising participation and visibility: <i>Create for Climate Art Competition</i> ; <i>Camera Sika X Road to COP26</i> ; <i>A Better Tomorrow</i>

The British Council's contribution to this typology is best understood as a public-facing and relational form of CBCA. The interventions show that the organisation's role is not limited to funding creative work but extends to

enabling participation, building visibility and creating culturally grounded entry points into climate discourse. Rather than working primarily through technical standards or policy instruments, it works through artistic practice, cultural

expression, storytelling and participatory formats that make climate issues more relatable, emotionally resonant and socially meaningful. The strongest near-term effects thus sit in the cognitive, affective and relational domains.

This is also consistent with the British Council's broader cultural relations approach: reciprocal, trust-based and long-term ways of working across borders that find value in the processes of collaboration and mutual understanding, beyond outputs themselves.⁶³ *Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform*, developed in partnership with Art Jameel, illustrates this clearly: the British Council works through a platform model shaped by regional dialogue and designed to support not only creative responses to the climate emergency, but also peer exchange and UK–MENA collaboration. Another example is *Climate Adaptation for Creatives* delivered in the UK and Wider Europe,⁶⁴ which offers a more concrete sense of what this kind of partnership can make possible: space not only for learning and exchange, but also for turning reflection and experimentation into ideas with the potential to continue beyond the programme itself.

What varies across the portfolio is not whether partnerships are present, but how deep and sustained they are. Some interventions rely on contained co-delivery arrangements, while others create more sustained forms of interdisciplinary and cross-border collaboration. Some interventions are already supported by more developed

programme-level evidence, notably the external evaluation of *Creative Commissions for Climate Action*.⁶⁵ Across both the wider landscape and the British Council portfolio, evidence seems strongest on awareness, and early participation, while less is known about longer-term behavioural or systemic changes. Part of it is also temporal, as many of the interventions being discussed were launched only in the past few years, which limits the extent to which longer-term effects can already be observed. Partnership value is clearly visible, but not yet systematically evidenced. In that sense, the British Council's contribution in this area appears distinctive, but the evidence remains stronger on engagement and relational value than on longer-term change or on results that can be compared consistently across programmes.

COP relevance

COPs function as a recurring cycle of mobilisation, visibility and legacy-building is paramount to this typology. The British Council portfolio mapping shows that 16 interventions explicitly reference COP cycles, either in the lead-up, during the summit itself, or as part of post-COP legacy activity. These references have come as part of commissions, exhibitions and other public-facing activations used to position culture within climate diplomacy settings and to connect creative practice with wider climate conversations.

63 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultural_relations_in_action.pdf

64 <https://blackmountainscollege.uk/short-courses/climate-adaptation-for-creatives/>

65 The Audience Agency. (2025). *Creative Commissions: External evaluation report (activity from 2021 to 2023)*. British Council. <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Creative%20Commissions%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report%20with%20Foreword.pdf>

For this typology, the value of COP lies in three things. First, it provides a high-visibility platform through which creative work can enter climate spaces otherwise dominated by negotiation, policy language and technical debate. Second, it offers a practical framework for commissioning, convening and cross-regional collaboration, allowing the British Council to align public-facing cultural activity with moments of heightened international attention. Third, it can extend the life of interventions beyond the summit through touring, reactivation, partner development, and continued circulation. This is also consistent with the British Council's broader COP approach, which increasingly appears to treat COP participation as part of a longer-term climate learning and partnership agenda, rather than as a standalone event presence.⁶⁶ Together, these functions also place the typology in relation to the UNFCCC's Action for Climate Empowerment agenda, to which this area of work can contribute through its emphasis on public awareness, public participation, public access to information and international cooperation.⁶⁷ At the same time, previous COP evaluations suggest that the main opportunity is not simply to maintain visibility at future COPs, but to build more continuity around it. In this sense, the strategic value of COP for the British Council may lie less in one-off activation than in using COP cycles to deepen partnerships, strengthen legacy pathways, and generate more consistent evidence of longer-term value.⁶⁸



Photo: Malaysia. Human-Nature delegation to PACOS Trust in Sabah © KC Chong Studio

⁶⁶ The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC), British Council's Participation at COP29/COY19 – Impact Evaluation Report, July 2025

⁶⁷ <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-and-youth/big-picture/ACE>

⁶⁸ The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC), The Climate Connection 2023/24 and COP28 – Impact Evaluation Report, July 2024

Programme spotlight: Creative Commissions for Climate Action

Creative Commissions for Climate Action is the clearest flagship example of how the British Council operates within this typology. Launched in 2021 in the run-up to COP26, it brought together UK and international artists, creative practitioners, scientists, researchers and communities in the development of creative responses to climate change. Across 2021–23, the programme supported 38 projects involving more than 260 artists and creative practitioners, 100 scientists, researchers and academics, and 176 partner organisations across 46 countries, with total grant funding of over £1 million.⁶⁹ In practice, the UK's role in the programme was broader than the regional count alone suggests, since many commissions were built through collaborations between UK-based and international partners. What makes the programme illustrative here is not only its scale, but the way it concentrates many of the defining features of this typology in one programme: commissioning, public engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, international partnership and COP-linked activity.

The external evaluation found that *Creative Commissions* helped to 'humanise' climate data, bring empathy and emotion into climate discourse, and connect global climate debates to local

experience. 23 of the 38 projects included youth voice or intergenerational exchange, more than half worked with Indigenous communities, and 42 per cent addressed gender equality.⁷⁰ The programme also illustrates the British Council's cultural relations contribution particularly clearly. It was designed as a collaborative model, and the evaluation treats the value of cultural relations partnerships, knowledge exchange and intersectoral and interdisciplinary networks as central to its legacy. Partners also valued the programme as a space to test ideas, work with new collaborators and reach different audiences, suggesting that its contribution lay not only in the commissions themselves, but in the interdisciplinary and intercultural processes they made possible. Also relevant are gender and intersectional dimensions, with many projects connecting climate issues to wider questions of diversity, social justice and the voices of communities underrepresented in climate debates.

The COP linkage is especially visible here: 21 projects were commissioned in relation to COP26, 10 to COP27 and 7 to COP28, and 14 projects were featured at COPs through screenings, exhibitions, performances or panels. In this sense, *Creative Commissions* has functioned as a way of preparing work for climate diplomacy settings and giving it visibility at key international moments. *Living-Language-Land*⁷¹ is a strong example of how locally grounded cultural

⁶⁹ The Audience Agency. (2025). *Creative Commissions: External evaluation report (activity from 2021 to 2023)*. British Council. Available at: <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Creative%20Commissions%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report%20with%20Foreword.pdf>
<https://arts.britishcouncil.org/resources/creative-commissions-climate-action-evaluation-report>

⁷⁰ Ibidem

⁷¹ <https://living-language-land.org/about/>

knowledge can travel into wider climate discourse: by building a ‘living lexicon’ from minority and endangered languages, it connected language, land and environment and was presented in the COP26 Green Zone.⁷²

At the same time, the programme also shows that some commissions can continue well beyond the summit itself. *Nine Earths*, originally commissioned for COP26, evolved into *Daily Rituals: Four Earths* for the UK/Korea commissions around COP27, which in turn influenced the later *Climate Storytelling Workshops* in the UK/Viet Nam Season. Other projects also travelled further after their initial activation: *The Museum of Plastic*, for example, was taken on tour and featured again at COP27 and COP28. Taken together, these examples suggest that *Creative Commissions* functions as a mechanism for showcasing at COPs, and as a platform for partnership-building, reactivation and longer-term circulation across programmes and contexts.

The evaluation points to meaningful legacy in the form of new knowledge, artistic works and partnerships, but continuation was uneven, as some projects struggled to secure further funding, and monitoring was too inconsistent to support robust comparison across the portfolio. As a spotlight, *Creative Commissions* therefore captures both the promise and the evidence challenge of this typology. It shows how the British Council can use creative commissions to open climate conversations in culturally grounded and internationally connected ways, while also underlining the need for stronger legacy planning and more consistent evidence capture over time.

⁷² Ibidem, The Audience Agency. (2025).

3.2 Heritage protection, adaptation and climate resilience

3.2.1 Global evidence landscape

While the preceding sections have illustrated the breadth and diversity of the CBCA landscape, early discussions at the intersection of culture and climate change were largely focused on the risks that climate change posed to built cultural heritage. As of 2026, research and monitoring systems have been greatly refined and climate change can no longer be considered as a hypothetical risk for cultural heritage: it is a current, measurable driver of damage and, in some cases, irreversible loss. UNESCO estimates that one in six cultural World Heritage sites are currently threatened by climate change.⁷³ This headline statistic is increasingly more concerning when it comes to natural heritage; the IUCN's *World Heritage Outlook 3* found that climate change affected 33 per cent of natural World Heritage sites in 2020, up from 15 per cent in 2014.⁷⁴

Water-related hazards are one of the clearest pathways through which climate change is already impacting heritage places and the communities connected to them. A major joint analysis by the World Resources Institute and UNESCO's World Heritage Centre found that 73 per cent of 1,172 non-marine World Heritage sites are

highly exposed to at least one severe water risk (notably water stress, drought, riverine flooding, or coastal flooding).⁷⁵ Alongside rising sea levels, air pollution is particularly harmful to heritage in large human settlements. Urban heritage faces a distinct risk profile because of its interaction with further stresses such as tourism and urban overcrowding. A 2025 UNESCO assessment of 114 Mediterranean World Heritage cities reported that nearly two-thirds already experience at least one climate-related hazard,⁷⁶ and nearly a fifth report experiencing three or more hazards, underlining the operational need for risk-informed heritage management alongside city-level adaptation planning.

While early engagements between climate change and culture were largely reactive, with cultural heritage predominantly framed as a victim of climate-related impacts, this section aims to demonstrate how heritage is increasingly being recognised as an active resource for climate action: a repository of traditional and local knowledge, a source of social resilience, and a mechanism for climate mitigation through the conservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings. The landmark 2019 ICOMOS report *The Future of Our Pasts* was one of the first comprehensive mappings⁷⁷ highlighting the need for 'a fundamental shift in Policy and profession-

⁷³ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, World Heritage Review No. 100: World Heritage and Climate Change, 2022.

⁷⁴ IUCN, World Heritage Outlook 3, 2020.

⁷⁵ UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2025, July 1). Nearly three-quarters of World Heritage sites are at high risk from water-related hazards. UNESCO. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2788>

⁷⁶ UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2025, July 1). UNESCO launches groundbreaking report on climate change impacts in Mediterranean World Heritage cities. UNESCO. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2789>

⁷⁷ ICOMOS. (2019). The future of our pasts: Engaging cultural heritage in climate action. International Council on Monuments and Sites. <https://civvih.icomos.org/wp-content/uploads/Future-of-Our-Pasts-Report-min.pdf>

al practice to acknowledge the immense power of cultural heritage in raising awareness, developing Adaptation and Mitigation strategies and building Social Inclusion and cohesion in support of climate action.¹ It is this dual character – heritage as exposed asset and heritage as adaptation infrastructure – that strengthens the case for treating *Heritage protection, adaptation and climate resilience* as a distinct CBCA typology: one where the unit of action is the heritage asset and its community, and where success is measured in preparedness, damage mitigation, continuity of practice, and strengthened institutional capability.

Major global interventions (COP26–COP30)

At COP26 in Glasgow (November 2021), cultural heritage had virtually no presence in UNFCCC negotiated texts. Four years (and four COPs) later, heritage holds five dedicated indicators within the Global Goal on Adaptation. The global landscape interventions mapping identifies 23 major interventions during this COP cycle; these are concentrated in international organisations and NGO-led initiatives, with a smaller number of research consortia and formal networks.

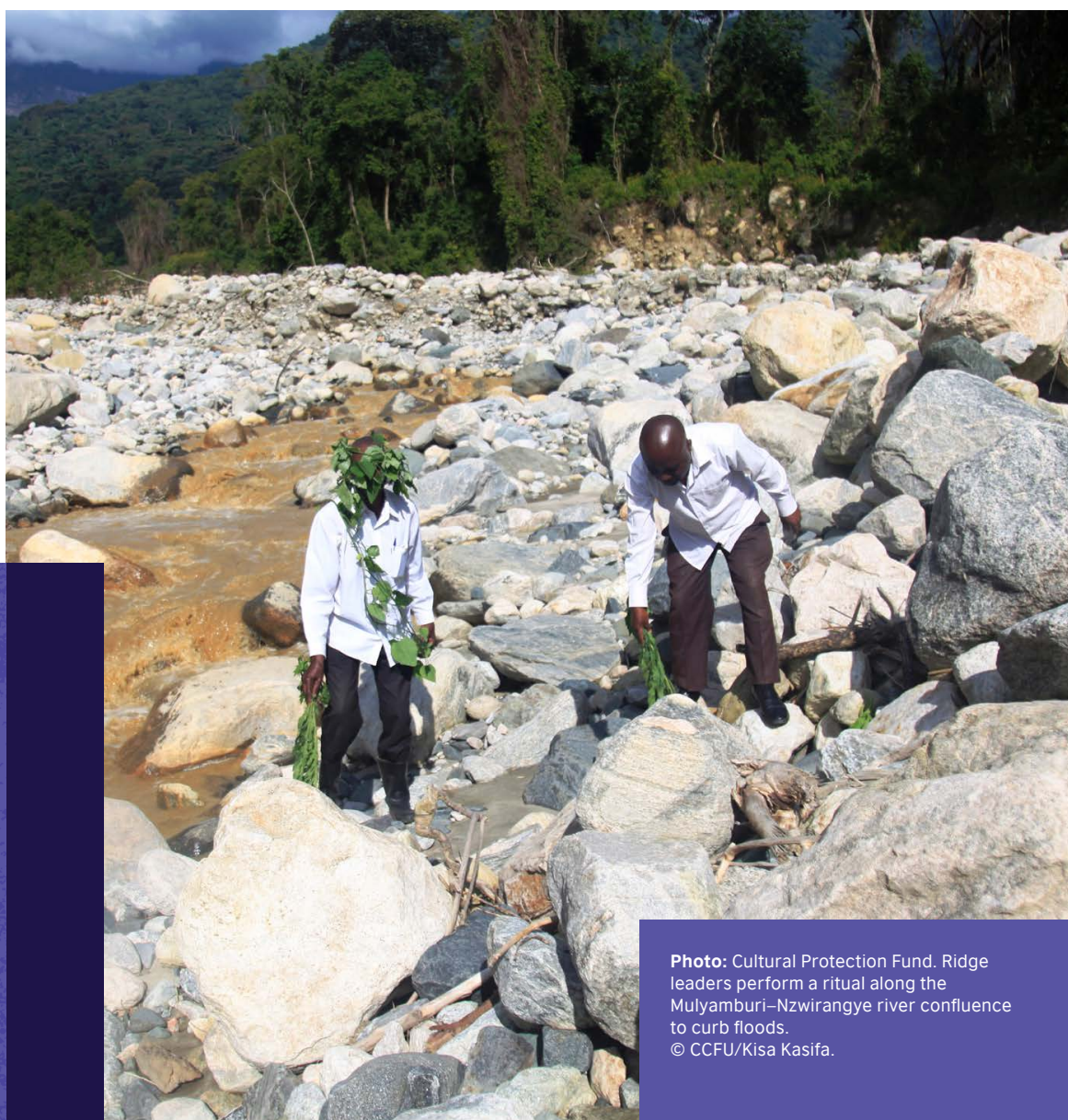


Photo: Cultural Protection Fund. Ridge leaders perform a ritual along the Mulyamburi–Nzwirangye river confluence to curb floods.
© CCFU/Kisa Kasifa.

COP	How cultural heritage entered the negotiations
COP26, Glasgow	The Resilience Hub established a dedicated strand on Cultural Heritage with activities taking place within the Blue Zone.
COP27, Sharm el-Sheikh	The breakthrough began at COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh (November 2022). The Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan noted ‘with grave concern’ that climate change is increasingly leading to ‘devastating economic and non-economic losses, including forced displacement and impacts on cultural heritage’ (paragraph 44, Decision 1/CMA.4). ⁷⁸ This was the first time cultural heritage appeared in a COP cover decision. Separately, the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the Global Goal on Adaptation explicitly listed ‘tangible cultural heritage’ as a thematic area for the framework to be developed. ⁷⁹ The Climate Heritage Network described the outcome as ‘included within a historic agreement, three decades in the making’. ⁸⁰
COP28, Dubai	COP28 in Dubai (December 2023) converted this recognition into a concrete commitment. The UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (Decision 2/CMA.5) included ‘protecting cultural heritage’ as one of seven standalone thematic adaptation targets – Target 9(g) – alongside water, food, health, ecosystems, infrastructure and poverty eradication. ⁸¹ This elevated heritage from an observational reference to an action-oriented target (on equal footing with sectors that had decades of UNFCCC presence). The Union of Concerned Scientists described this as ‘a major step forward’. ⁸² Thanks to continuous positioning by cultural and heritage actors including Climate Heritage Network and Julie’s Bicycle, COP28 also saw the launch of the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action, co-chaired by the UAE and Brazil, and the first High-Level Ministerial Dialogue on CBCA.
COP30, Belém	COP30’s (November 2025) broader heritage outcomes were substantial. Culture was positioned as Objective 19 worded as ‘cultural heritage protection’ within axe 5 titled ‘fostering human and social development’ under the COP30 Action Agenda ⁸³ – the first-time culture appeared in an Action Agenda. ^{84,85} The 59 Belém Adaptation Indicators adopted for measuring progress against the Global Goal on Adaptation included five heritage-specific indicators – covering adaptation measures at heritage sites, digitisation for preservation, emergency preparedness, institutional training, and sustained engagement with Indigenous Peoples and local communities. For the first time in the 33-year history of the UNFCCC, culture and heritage were given measurable indicators in international climate policy. Heritage represented in this way nearly ten per cent of all indicators adopted. Yet, unfortunately cultural heritage, or culture in general did not appear in the overarching COP30 ‘Global Mutirão’ cover outcome. ⁸⁶

⁷⁸ UNFCCC, Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, Decision 1/CMA.4, paragraph 44, 2022.

⁷⁹ UNFCCC, Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the GGA, Decision 3/CMA.4, paragraph 10(b), 2022.

⁸⁰ Climate Heritage Network, Culture Outcomes at COP27, 2022.

⁸¹ UNFCCC, UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience (UFGCR), Decision 2/CMA.5, Target 9(g), 2023.

⁸² Union of Concerned Scientists, COP28 Took Steps Toward Safeguarding Cultural Heritage from Climate Change, 2024.

⁸³ <https://www.heritageadapts.org/post/heritage-cop30>

⁸⁴ UNESCO, Culture at COP30, 2025.

⁸⁵ Europa Nostra, Culture and heritage gain recognition in global climate policy at COP30, 2025.

⁸⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2025, November 21). Global mutirão: Uniting humanity in a global mobilization against climate change (Mutirão decision, Version 21/11/2025 3:00). UNFCCC. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Mutir%C3%A3o_cop30.pdf

	Conclusions
	Heritage was made more visible as a topic, with sessions on diverse issues platformed.
	Heritage is framed as an exposed asset generating loss, and as a legitimate theme for adaptation work - though still largely in tangible terms only and only as subject to loss and damage, not as an active resource of change.
	Heritage becomes a defined adaptation target, now explicitly linked to knowledge systems: opening a pathway for mainstreaming into national planning and monitoring. The importance of the local and Indigenous communities is made concrete, recognising cultural heritage beyond a physical asset suffering from damage, but as a living asset whose relevance lies in the communities that it is meaningful for.
	Global policy now names what ‘adapting cultural heritage to climate threats’ looks like in practical terms - creating a measurable agenda. Most importantly, heritage is now not only intended in its tangible nature but also as intangible resource, placing emphasis on the traditional and Indigenous knowledge that keeps it alive. The task now is to turn this recognition into momentum, bringing clarity and the provision of tangible support for the communities already living with the reality of climate change. Finally, cultural heritage is no more conceived as a passive asset suffering non-economic losses, but it is inscribed under the ‘fostering human and social development’ axe, recognising CH as a resource for human and social development. This includes several Plans to Accelerate Solutions (PAS) linked to heritage, such as ‘Capacity Building for Cultural Heritage Adaptation’ with an initiative led by the Group of Friends to integrate heritage into National Adaptation Plans.

Overall, COP27 to COP30 transformed heritage from a marginal concern into an adaptation target with concrete indicators and initiatives. This is a decisive governance advance; however, it is only the first half of the story. The second half is what implementing organisations did with (and sometimes ahead of) policy: building toolkits, data systems, funding streams, and pilot projects that translate broad recognition into risk-informed action.

Across the numerous mapped interventions, one can find governance and guidance instruments, applied conservation and resilience works, and a lot of research and innovation for methods and technologies.

A defining governance and guidance instrument in this period is UNESCO's updated policy document on Climate Action for World Heritage,⁸⁷ adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties in 2023. The policy document positions climate change as a significant threat to world heritage values and calls for implementation supported by enabling conditions (governance, finance, innovation) and by site-level action across assessing climate risks, adaptation, mitigation, and knowledge-sharing. In operational terms, its significance is that it converts climate threats into an expectation of routine management practice within world heritage systems and explicitly links site management to broader climate frameworks. Interestingly, comma 4 of Annex III ('areas for further focus

regarding knowledge sharing, capacity building and awareness') adds that:

'Mobilising public and political support for climate action inside and outside World Heritage properties is essential. This has to range from local to regional and global approaches and involve a variety of measures: workshops, exhibitions and expositions, media campaigns, audio-visual material and popular publications which link the global phenomenon of climate change to the local and regional contexts'⁸⁸.

This represents a shift from aiming at behavioural outcomes only (adoption of mitigation measures, setting up monitoring systems, implementing protocols within CH sites) to cognitive/affective outcomes, recognising that the power and large visibility of heritage sites shall be used to inform, engage and influence the wider public. The policy document is now being operationalised also through the *Climate Action Toolkit for World Heritage*,⁸⁹ developed jointly by UNESCO and its advisory bodies including ICCROM, ICOMOS, and IUCN, with the first field pilot launched in the West Norwegian Fjords and further testing planned.⁹⁰

In the last five years, CH resilience against climate change has obtained considerable attention specifically in

⁸⁷ UNESCO, updated policy document on climate action for world heritage, 2023

⁸⁸ See paragraph 11 of Decision 29 COM 7Ba (Durban, 2005), by which the World Heritage Committee indicated that 'the results about climate change affecting World Heritage properties [should] reach the public at large, in order to mobilise political support for activities against climate change and to safeguard in this way the livelihood of the poorest people of our planet.'

⁸⁹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2624>

⁹⁰ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2852/>

the realm of research and innovation. New challenges, of course, require new solutions. Earth observation, modelling, and structured assessments, for example, have been increasingly adopted in the CH sector to build risk and monitoring systems. One instance launched in 2021 is the Group on Earth Observations–Urban Heritage Climate Observatory which is designed to make EO assets usable for heritage decision-making and developing methods addressing climate risks in World Heritage cities.⁹¹

The 2025 UNESCO study on Mediterranean World Heritage cities exemplifies how this approach can combine qualitative reporting with EO data and climate models to produce a data-driven risk picture for urban heritage managers and policymakers.⁹² The Belmont Forum’s *Collaborative Research Action on Climate and Cultural Heritage* funded 16 transnational projects worth €14.6 million from a pool of 42 proposals, demonstrating strong demand from the research community.⁹³ In the United Kingdom, the AHRC–DCMS *Cultural Heritage and Climate Change Programme* invested a further £2 million, generating research outputs across 40 partners and 16 ODA countries.⁹⁴ Under Horizon Europe, the

Green Cluster on Cultural Heritage⁹⁵ assembled four complementary research projects – *Triquetra*,⁹⁶ *Thetida*,⁹⁷ *RescueME*⁹⁸ and *STECCI*⁹⁹ – with a combined funding of approximately €15.4 million.

These projects are pioneering new technologies for heritage climate risk assessment, from flash LiDAR sensors for underwater 3D mapping to nanotechnology-based protective coatings and decision support systems with WebGIS integration. Their collective output represents the most concentrated investment in heritage-climate research and development to date in Europe and their shared agenda has been presented in a white paper published in 2025.¹⁰⁰

The EU commitment to climate resilient cultural heritage is also visible with the new European Partnership for Resilient Cultural Heritage.¹⁰¹ The aim of the RCH Partnership is twofold: to strengthen the means of preserving Europe’s cultural heritage and to contribute to climate neutrality in other sectors by bringing forward traditional and innovative practices, techniques and materials resulting from cultural heritage research. Some of the most updated and comprehensive research

91 <https://earthobservations.org/groups/urban-heritage-climate-observatory>

92 UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (2025). Climate change in Mediterranean World Heritage cities. UNESCO. <https://unesco.org.uk/site/assets/files/22557/394251eng.pdf>

93 <https://belmontforum.org/archives/news/cchrecommendations/>

94 UKRI, AHRC-DCMS Cultural Heritage and Climate Change Programme.

95 <https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2024EGUGA..2617228G/abstract>

96 <https://triquetra-project.eu/>

97 <https://thetida.eu/#/home>

98 <https://resilientculturallandscapes.eu/>

99 <https://steccihorizoneu.com/>

100 Green Cluster CH, safeguarding cultural heritage in a changing climate: a perspective from the green cluster on cultural heritage; Dec 2025

101 https://cordis.europa.eu/programme/id/HORIZON_HORIZON-CL2-2025-03-HERITAGE-01

taking stock on the advancement on this topic is 'Methodologies and Strategies for Cultural Heritage Protection Against Climate Changes, Natural and Anthropic Risks'.¹⁰² Topics covered include examples of digital twins, advice on green materials and new methodologies for conservation.

Comparable investments coming from Asia include the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust three-year project, *Cultural Heritage – A Driver of Climate Action for Resilient World Heritage Cities and Towns in Asia and the Pacific*, which combines applied research, capacity-building and peer exchange across World Heritage cities in the region, from which a large collection of case studies are available on the UNESCO website.¹⁰³

Funding for applied conservation works

Beyond policy and research, a third implementation group that can be identified from the desk research is funding for applied conservation works. The World Monuments Fund launched the Climate Heritage¹⁰⁴ initiative in 2024, a major climate-focused investment package (reported as a USD 15m investment)¹⁰⁵ supporting work such as rehabilitating historic water systems, Innovative conservation strategies for historic gardens, and reducing emissions

in Victorian era glasshouses. Similarly, the ALIPH Foundation¹⁰⁶ committed USD 9 million to 22 new projects protecting African cultural heritage from climate change, drawn from nearly 300 applications from 65 countries.¹⁰⁷ Projects range from conserving the earthen Batammariba architecture at Koutammakou (Togo and Benin) to safeguarding ancient manuscripts at Chinguetti (Mauritania) and protecting traditional *macuti* thatched-roof architecture on Mozambique Island. Here the cultural heritage resilience effort against climate change is intimately tied with the need for local skills continuity, blending built CH with local traditional knowledge systems.

Capacity building

Finally, significant efforts have also been traced in capacity-building and coalition-building aiming at generating relational outcomes. Since COP28 and COP30 created clearer policy hooks, coalitions have developed implementation campaigns aimed at scaling local action and connecting local custodians to policy and data. Preserving Legacies founded *Heritage Adapts! 3000 × 2030*¹⁰⁸ campaign commitment to support 3,000 heritage sites and cultural practices implementing adaptive strategies by 2030, together

¹⁰² Mancini, F., Pano, A., & Cenni, S. (Eds.). (2023). Methodologies and strategies for cultural heritage protection and conservation against climate changes, natural and anthropic risks. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-12340-4>

¹⁰³ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/cultural-heritage-driver-climate-action-resilient-world-heritage-cities-towns-asia-and-pacific>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.wmf.org/programs/climate-heritage-initiative>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.wmf.org/press-releases/world-monuments-fund-announces-more-15-million-usd-climate-heritage-solutions-launch>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.aliph-foundation.org/>

¹⁰⁷ PreventionWeb/ALIPH, Africa: Projects to protect heritage from climate change, 2024.

¹⁰⁸ https://climateaction.unfccc.int/assets/documents/44_.pdf

with a community-of-action platform for peer learning and access to data. This is one of the three heritage-centric Plans to Accelerate Solutions¹⁰⁹ were selected at COP30.¹¹⁰ Regional and professional communities of practice are also being built through ‘Preserving Legacies: A Future for Our Past’,¹¹¹ which is advancing an annual ‘Climate Custodian Cohort Program’¹¹² alongside a ‘Community of Action’ initiative. Here, the practical value is not a new tool per se, but an expanded cohort of practitioners who can translate heritage risk into the language of resilience planning and build alliances across different CH sites globally. British Council, alongside AHRC, UNESCO UK and DCMS, are also part of the Resilience Cultural Heritage to Climate Change network funded by Horizon Europe programme of the EU.

The practical point across these research and network interventions is that heritage adaptation increasingly relies on methodological infrastructure (shared approaches to risk assessment, monitoring, etc.) rather than bespoke, site-by-site craft alone. This is consistent with the wider evidence base collected by the British Council’s strategic literature review, emphasising the need for coherent methodologies, reliable quantitative data, and stronger cross-sector coordination.¹¹³

Gender sensitiveness in cultural heritage resilience against climate change

Gender is not a dominant design feature in most heritage adaptation interventions identified during the COP26–COP30 cycle, and it is rarely treated as a core axis for targeting, safety, or measurement within heritage resilience programming. Gender-disaggregated monitoring is not yet a norm in heritage-and-climate practice, but it is included by British Council’s strategic literature review on the topic in the likely areas of interest to emerge in the coming years alongside more involvement of IPLCs and post-colonial notions in general¹¹⁴. The Southeast Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance (SEACHA), for instance, brought traditional knowledge systems from across ASEAN into global climate discourse, publishing *Cultural Wisdom for Climate Action: Learning from Southeast Asia* (2023), co-chairing the Culture@COP28 Working Group, and gathering over 1,500 signatories for *A Global Call to Action*.

Nonetheless, gender is often structurally present in heritage practice even when not named: women are frequently key custodians of intangible heritage skills, maintenance practices, and knowledge transfer. The vulnerability of the Royal Court of Tiébélé in Burkina Faso (where wall painting traditions are carried forward by women) illustrates how climate instability can erode both

109 <https://climateaction.unfccc.int/CopsAndSummits/COP30>

110 <https://www.heritageadapts.org/>

111 <https://www.heritageadapts.org/cohort>

112 <https://www.heritageadapts.org/community>

113 Triple Line. (2023, October). The British Council strategic literature review: Climate change impacts on cultural heritage. British Council. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/british-council-strategic-literature-review-climate-change-impacts-cultural>

114 Ibidem.

material heritage and the gendered labour systems that sustain it.¹¹⁵ This kind of vulnerability is likely widespread but under-measured and under-documented.

A credible ‘gender dimension’ would mean, at minimum, gender-sensitive risk assessment (who bears risk and adaptation labour), gender-disaggregated participation and training metrics, and safeguarding of women’s roles in heritage governance and skills transmission, none of which is yet consistently embedded across the intervention landscape.

Conclusions

A COP-to-COP view shows clear strengths in the last cycle, but also three structural gaps that continue to constrain effectiveness:

- a policy–implementation–finance gap;
- an evidence gap on outcomes;
- uneven geographic and typological coverage, particularly for intangible heritage and ‘everyday’ heritage outside flagship listings.

The most striking achievement of the COP26–COP30 period is the speed and coherence of policy institutionalisation. In less than five years, heritage moved from near-total absence in UNFCCC texts to five measurable indicators within the Global Goal on Adaptation. This was not accidental: it was driven by sustained, coordinated advocacy from a

constellation of actors – ICOMOS, the Climate Heritage Network, UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre, Julie’s Bicycle and a growing coalition of national governments (56 countries and 23 international organisations in the Group of Friends post COP30). The policy infrastructure is real: Target 9(g), the Belém Indicators, three COP30 Acceleration Agenda plans.

A second strength is the acceleration of risk knowledge and technical capacity. UNESCO and partners have produced region-scale diagnostics that are directly usable for prioritisation, and a new suite of toolkits is emerging from the heavy investment in research and innovation to translate global policy into site-level workflows. These research clusters are increasingly consolidating technological capabilities (EO, modelling, digital twins etc.)

These strengths sit alongside persistent constraints. The most significant structural weakness is the disconnect between policy recognition and finance. Heritage now holds measurable indicators within the UNFCCC, but there is no dedicated financing mechanism for heritage-climate adaptation. The Belém decision invites the Global Environment Facility, Green Climate Fund, and Adaptation Fund to support implementation, but this remains aspirational.¹¹⁶ Heritage programmes remain dependent on philanthropic and bilateral funding rather than on the multilateral climate finance architecture. Here the role of the World Monuments Fund’s *Climate Heritage Initiative* and the

¹¹⁵ Agence France-Presse. (2025, August 15). Climate crisis harming world heritage painted houses in Tiébélé in Burkina Faso, say residents. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/aug/15/climate-crisis-harming-world-heritage-painted-houses-tiebele-in-burkina-faso-say-residents>

¹¹⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2025, November 21). Global goal on adaptation (Draft decision -/CMA.7: Matters relating to adaptation; Version 21/11/2025 3:00). UNFCCC. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/gga_cop30_5.pdf

ALIPH Africa programme, or the British Council's *Cultural Protection Fund* become truly vital.

The geographic distribution of interventions remains heavily skewed. Of the 23 interventions mapped, the majority are led by international organisations headquartered in Europe and North America, and the largest research investments (Horizon Europe's Green Cluster, the Belmont Forum action) are European dominated. Evidence of impact is the field's weakest flank. Most interventions mapped can describe outputs (sites assessed, professionals trained, networks formed) but not outcomes (heritage resilience measurably improved, loss averted, adaptation successfully implemented). The British Council review highlights that obstacles include lack of coherent methodologies for reliable data, limited knowledge of the scale and dimension of damage and loss, insufficient long-term monitoring, and low awareness even among professionals and communities.¹¹⁷ COP30's heritage indicators are a step toward shared measurement, but they will require

metadata, baselines, and capacity to avoid becoming 'tick-box' reporting, but most importantly, they remain non-binding, non-sanctioned and thus optional to adopt.

Finally, intangible cultural heritage remains structurally underrepresented. The initial COP27 reference covered only 'tangible cultural heritage'. COP28's Target 9(g) broadened this to include 'cultural practices', and the Belém Indicators specify disaggregation by tangible and intangible elements. But in practice, most funded programmes focus on built heritage and archaeological sites. Living traditions, oral practices, seasonal rituals and place-based knowledge systems – those most vulnerable to climate disruption yet hardest to monitor – receive a fraction of the attention and investment.

In summary, the direction of travel since COP26 is clearly positive in policy terms and increasingly sophisticated in risk knowledge. The limiting factors are conversion into finance and capability, and the field's ability to show evidence of resilience outcomes at scale.

¹¹⁷ Triple Line. (2023, October). The British Council strategic literature review: Climate change impacts on cultural heritage.

3.2.2 The British Council’s contributions in this area

Category	Description
Typology	Heritage protection, adaptation and climate resilience
Typology footprint	2 interventions
Geographic spread	Activity in 17 countries; Regions: MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, UK
Indicative funding (2021–2025)	£9.6 million, based on 34 CBCA-specific projects of the Cultural Protection Fund (within a wider multiyear fund envelope)
Typical intervention delivery mechanisms	Multi-country grant programmes (large/small grants, emergency response); research partnerships and baseline studies; capacity-building and policy-facing knowledge products
British Council’s main role	Funder and knowledge partner (evidence generation, policy alignment, COP-linked narratives)
Typical outcomes	Cognitive outcomes (knowledge, policy awareness, skills); behavioural outcomes (heritage protection practices, community resilience)

Category	Examples
Protection and safeguarding	Funding and enabling cultural heritage and capacity building: <i>Cultural Protection Fund</i>
Research and place-based work	Using research to bridge culture and climate: <i>Rooted in Resilience</i> (with the Ministry of Culture UAE); <i>The British Council Strategic Literature Review: Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage</i>

Within this typology, the British Council’s contribution sits primarily through the *Cultural Protection Fund* (CPF),¹¹⁸ led by British Council in partnership with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. In portfolio terms, this makes heritage protection and resilience one of the more clearly institutionalised areas of the British Council’s CBCA work since 2021. Rather than operating mainly through one-off cultural activations, the organisation works here through a grant-making and partnership

model that supports heritage at risk where climate pressures intersect with conflict, fragility, weak infrastructure, or limited local capacity. Alongside programme delivery, the British Council has also commissioned research to inform CPF practice and broader thinking on cultural heritage protection in the context of climate risk *Rooted in Resilience*¹¹⁹ and the strategic literature review titled *Climate Change Impacts on Cultural Heritage*.¹²⁰

118 <https://cultural-protection-fund.britishcouncil.org/about>

119 British Council & Ministry of Culture UAE. (2025). *Rooted in resilience: How culture shapes climate resilience in the UAE*. British Council.

120 Triple Line. (2023, October). *The British Council strategic literature review: Climate change impacts on cultural heritage*. British Council.

Geographically, the British Council's CBCA within this typology includes climate-related heritage work in MENA, East Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, with projects combining conservation, documentation, digital heritage, training, and community-based work. Taken together, these projects suggest that the British Council's role is not limited to safeguarding assets as such, but extends to strengthening preparedness, continuity of knowledge, and institutional capability in settings where climate risk is already material. Its cultural relations approach creates space for place-based knowledge, community participation and locally grounded partnerships to inform how heritage resilience work can be designed and delivered in the longer-term.

From a cultural relations perspective, the British Council's operating model is especially visible with the CPF. Evidence from *Withstanding Change*¹²¹ suggests that the organisation's contribution extends beyond project funding to facilitating collaboration across institutions, countries and communities. Interviewees highlighted the value of creating trusted spaces for exchange, partnership-building and shared learning, as well as supporting connections between local actors and wider international networks.¹²² The emphasis is therefore not only on protecting heritage, but also on mobilising place-based knowledge, fostering peer learning and strengthening community-led approaches to climate resilience through locally grounded yet internationally connected forms of collaboration.

The strongest emerging outcomes appear to be cognitive and behavioural,

especially where projects aim to equip people and organisations with skills through both the grants portfolio and funded projects but also directly through the delivery of capacity building training (such as bid writing or project management), rather than importing external expertise only. The strategic literature review also insists on how the prioritisation remains heavily weighted towards monuments, archaeological sites and other forms of built heritage instead of intangible culture. This is significant as intangible heritage and place-based cultural practice are among the areas most exposed to climate disruption, yet often least visible in funding and monitoring systems.

The main strengths of the British Council's approach in this typology therefore are, first, the existence of a substantial heritage-focused delivery mechanism; second, a partnership model that supports locally grounded and multi-actor implementation; and third, an ability to connect heritage protection to wider questions of social stability, development, education, and cultural continuity. At the same time, some gaps remain. As in the wider field, the available evidence is stronger on activity, outputs, and delivery structures than on long-term resilience outcomes, avoided loss and damage, or the comparative effectiveness of different intervention types. There is also scope to articulate more clearly how British Council-supported heritage work connects to wider adaptation planning systems and to the measurement frameworks now emerging through the UNFCCC's *Global Goal on Adaptation*.¹²³

121 <https://www.into.org/withstanding-change-project/>

122 Interview with Catherine Leonard (International National Trusts Organisation – INTO), conducted for this study.

123 <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/gga>

COP relevance

During the COP26–COP30 cycle, CPF actions and public communications demonstrate a deliberate evolution from what was mostly a heritage-in-conflict framing towards a combined conflict and climate risk framing. In 2022, the British Council announced £14m in new CPF funding for 17 projects, explicitly including projects protecting heritage at risk from climate change¹²⁴ (including both tangible and intangible heritage), with the announcement made at COP27 in the context of a high-level side event on ‘building adaptation and resilience’ in heritage sites, in partnership with INTO. This marked an important shift in how the fund’s work was publicly positioned, as the fund became increasingly oriented towards response to climate risk, mirroring the foregrounding recognition of climate change risks on cultural heritage within the broader policy trajectory across the COP cycle explained above. This demonstrates timely responsiveness to the evolving policy landscape and how COPs can serve as visibility platforms to show evolving directions of the British Council’s cultural work. CPF projects have also been shown consistently at COP stands and exhibition booths of the British Council in the Blue Zone, and partner organisations represented at various panel discussion and roundtables.

Programme spotlight: Cultural Protection Fund

The *Cultural Protection Fund* is the clearest spotlight programme for this typology because it concentrates the

British Council’s heritage-climate work within a single, substantial mechanism. The fund reported a cumulative delivery of over £56m in grants to 160 projects in 20 countries,¹²⁵ out of which 34 projects - with a combined value of an estimated £9.6 million - were focused specifically on climate-related risks. These projects have mostly been spread across East Africa and the MENA region, with implementation in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Palestine, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Ethiopia. However, more recently, the CPF has expanded its footprint into South Asia, with activity in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh,¹²⁶ indicating a growing interest and need for the protection of both tangible and intangible heritage due to climate-related issues.

Compared to other areas of CBCA interventions, the CPF presents a very strong footprint in contexts where climate risk often overlaps with fragility, conflict, and institutional constraint. What makes the fund analytically significant is not only its scale, but the model through which it operates. The 2024–25 annual report shows CPF delivering 46 projects with 127 partners, with 70 per cent of participating organisations based in target countries, and at least one partner or lead organisation from each project based in the target country as a prerequisite. It also shows a portfolio in which 40 per cent of projects focused on tangible heritage, 30 per cent on intangible heritage, and 30 per cent on both, while nearly half addressed heritage at risk due to climate change. This supports the view that the CPF works less as a narrow

¹²⁴ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/about/press/british-council-cultural-protection-fund-COP>

¹²⁵ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/projects/cultural-protection-fund>

¹²⁶ British Council. (2025). Cultural Protection Fund annual report 2024–2025. British Council https://cultural-protection-fund.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultural_protection_fund_annual_report_2024-2025.pdf p.16

conservation instrument and more as a platform combining safeguarding, documentation, training, local capacity-building and partnership-based delivery.¹²⁷

Two projects help illustrate the fund's main operating mechanisms.

*Withstanding Change: Heritage Amongst Climate Uncertainty*¹²⁸ shows the CPF at its most relational and transnational: led by the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO), it links partners in East Africa and the MENA region with the UK's National Trust connections to restore climate-vulnerable historic buildings, support community engagement, and facilitate cross-border knowledge exchange. Insights from practitioners involved in the initiative highlight how heritage-based approaches can operate at the intersection of culture and climate resilience, while emphasising the importance of locally led delivery models.¹²⁹ In particular, the combination of regional expertise, peer-to-peer exchange and 'twinning' partnerships was seen as helping to avoid top-down approaches and strengthening local ownership and confidence.

EAMENA (Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa): Mitigating Conflict and Climate Change Risks

*Through Digital Heritage, Capacity Building, and Consolidation*¹³⁰ illustrates a complementary mechanism. A digitally enabled model in which Oxford University, the University of Leicester and Durham University work with heritage authorities, NGOs and specialist partners across the region to strengthen documentation, monitoring, skills and policy coordination around sites at risk from conflict and climate change from a large database which brings together data from satellite imagery. Another example can also be seen in Pakistan, where the *Manchar Lake Mohanas - Safeguarding the Last Surviving Houseboat Village from Extinction*¹³¹ project is led by NED University of Engineering and Technology, a Pakistan-based institution, and works with the local community to restore the remaining houseboats of the Mohana people while training young volunteers in restoration techniques. This helps show that the flow of knowledge and practice is not only outward from the UK, but also shaped by institutions and communities working within the target context itself. In that sense, the *Cultural Protection Fund* operates not simply through external support, but through locally based partnerships that recognise local contexts and allow resilience work to be grounded in trusted relationships, situated knowledge and local capacity.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ <https://cultural-protection-fund.britishcouncil.org/projects/heritage-climate-uncertainty>

¹²⁹ Interview with Catherine Leonard (International National Trusts Organisation – INTO), conducted for this study.

¹³⁰ <https://cultural-protection-fund.britishcouncil.org/projects/eamena-conflict-climate>

¹³¹ https://www.neduet.edu.pk/arch_planning/Heritage/webpages/cpf/index.html

3.3 Indigenous knowledge, local culture and community-based adaptation

3.3.1 Global evidence landscape

Indigenous Peoples (IPs) are among the world's greatest sources of cultural diversity. Their cultures, knowledge systems and ways of life have developed over millennia through intimate relationships with their lands, territories and natural environments.¹³² There are over 340 million Indigenous people worldwide, spanning at least 5,000 distinct cultural groups.¹³³ Together, they safeguard some of the planet's most biodiverse and ecologically fragile ecosystems thanks to time-tested knowledge and culturally rooted practices. 36 per cent of above-ground tropical forest carbon lies in Indigenous territories,¹³⁴ and Indigenous-managed lands consistently show lower deforestation rates than comparable areas under conventional conservation.¹³⁵

This effectiveness reflects the nature of Indigenous knowledge systems themselves. As articulated by international Indigenous organisations,¹³⁶ these systems are grounded in long-term observation, intergenerational learning and direct

engagement with environmental, cultural and spiritual systems. They constitute a systematic and evolving way of understanding the world, continuously shaped through lived experience and collective practice. In this sense, Indigenous knowledge is not a static inheritance but a dynamic, adaptive and intergenerational process, closely embedded within cultural practices, governance systems, languages and relationships to the natural world.

Across the world, these traditional knowledge systems manifest in concrete climate-resilient practices. In Mesoamerica, the Maya milpa system rotates crops through forest plots, maintaining biodiversity and soil fertility.¹³⁷ In Australia, Aboriginal communities have practised 'cultural burning' fire management for thousands of years, reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires.¹³⁸ In the Sahel, Indigenous agroforestry systems combine crops with trees to reduce erosion and withstand drought.¹³⁹ In Nepal, Indigenous farmers have developed agroforestry models to withstand floods, drought, landslides and erosion.¹⁴⁰ Natural resources stewardship becomes the operational expression of CBCA.

132 <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/Indigenous-peoples/unpfii-mandated-areas-environment>

133 <https://www.iipfcc.org/who-are-we>

134 <https://rightsandresources.org/carbon-rights-analysis-2018/>

135 Veit, P. G. (2021, October). 9 facts about community land and climate mitigation. World Resources Institute. <https://files.wri.org/d8/s3fs-public/2021-10/9-facts-about-community-land-and-climate-mitigation.pdf>

136 Inuit Circumpolar Council (2021), quoted in ICSM CHC White Paper I: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Diverse Knowledge Systems and Climate Change, p.20. <https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/icc-activities/environment-sustainable-development/Indigenous-knowledge/>

137 <https://mayaforestgardeners.org/farming/milpa-cycle/>

138 <https://wwf.org.au/what-we-do/caring-on-country/cultural-burning/>

139 Ayanlade, A., Ojebisi, O., & Jegede, O. (2023). Harnessing Indigenous knowledge and practices for effective adaptation in the Sahel. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 65, Article 101389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101389>

140 <https://globalebafund.org/project/building-agroforestry-based-adaptation-plans-for-resilient-floodplains-bagar/>

This section argues that the global policy and funding landscape that has developed between COP26 (2021) and COP30 (2025) is best understood through this cultural lens. The financial pledges, the Indigenous-led funds, the land-recognition commitments – these matter as institutional milestones precisely because they create the

enabling conditions under which Indigenous communities can finally deploy their ancestral, intergenerational knowledge-based practices of natural resource stewardship at scale. The section maps this landscape, assesses its gender-sensitivity and identifies strengths and gaps.

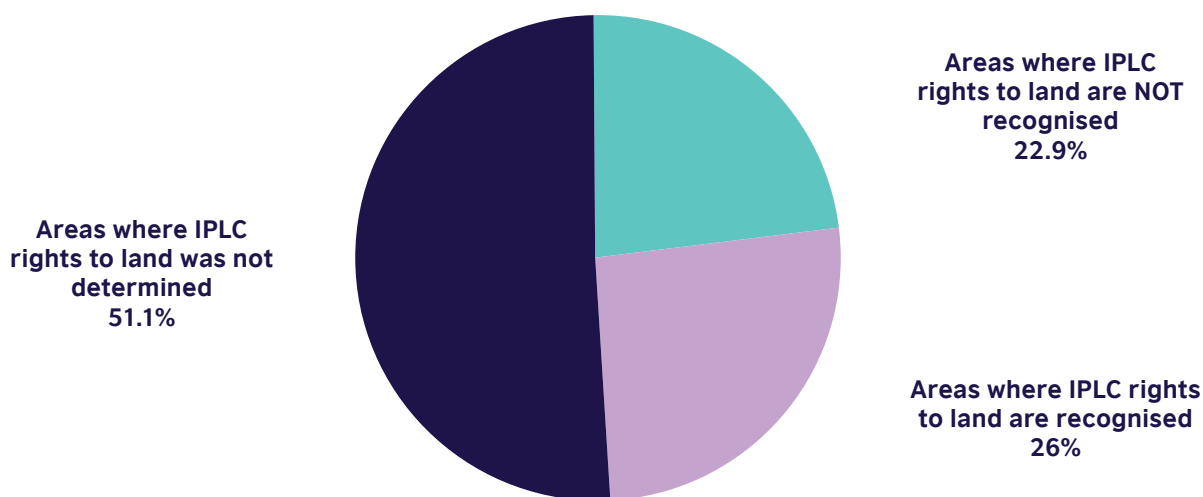


Figure 9. Current state of land recognition for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (2020)¹⁴¹

Despite the proven effectiveness of their stewardship and being *de facto* environmental custodians, Indigenous communities remain *de jure* marginalised in climate finance, decision and policymaking. The International Indigenous Peoples' Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC) was established in 2008 as the official caucus representing Indigenous voices in UNFCCC processes.¹⁴² Yet barriers to accessing climate funds persist. A Rainforest Foundation Norway analysis found that in the decade preceding COP26 (2011–

2020), the amount of funding offered to Indigenous groups was grossly insignificant,¹⁴³ with the majority being channelled to governments, NGOs, UN agencies and multilateral banks. This indirect architecture leads to high transaction costs, short project cycles, and misalignment with Indigenous self-determined priorities or knowledge systems. At COP26 in Glasgow, world leaders belatedly acknowledged that empowering IPs is essential for achieving climate goals. Between 2021 and 2025, global efforts intensified to address this imbalance. The sections below chart these developments.

¹⁴¹ Rights and Resources Initiative. (2020, August). Estimate of the area of land and territories of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendants where their rights have not been recognised (Technical Report 1). Rights and Resources Initiative. <https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Area-Study-Final-1.pdf>

¹⁴² <https://www.iipfcc.org/who-are-we>

¹⁴³ Cannon, J. (2022, November 7). Small share of land rights pledge went to Indigenous groups: Progress report. Mongabay. <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/11/small-share-of-land-rights-pledge-went-to-Indigenous-groups-progress-report>

Major global interventions (COP26-COP30)

COP26 (Glasgow 2021) marked a turning point: the conference saw an unprecedented mobilisation of Indigenous civil society: IPs' representatives constituted the second-largest civil society group present in Glasgow — second only to the oil and gas lobby — with some 150 Indigenous delegates participating in plenary discussions with governments, side panels and roundtables,¹⁴⁴ moreover, Indigenous Peoples Pavilion was hosted inside the Blue Zone for the first time in COP history.¹⁴⁵ But most importantly, donor governments and foundations announced a historic \$1.7 billion Forest Tenure Pledge to support Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in securing land rights and forest guardianship, by building capacity and promoting locally rooted projects.¹⁴⁶ This pledge — the largest to date focused on Indigenous land tenure — was backed by 25 entities, including governments from the United Kingdom, Norway and the United States, as well as major philanthropies. It recognised that strengthening Indigenous land tenure is one of the surest climate solutions as it creates the enabling context for their CBCA.^{147,148} The Forest Tenure Funders Group (FTFG) was formed to coordinate this commitment. By late 2023, the FTFG reported that \$1.86 billion had been

mobilised, reaching the five-year goal two years early.¹⁴⁹ A renewed pledge of \$1.8 billion for 2026–2030 was prepared for COP30,¹⁵⁰ explicitly aiming to boost the share of funding flowing directly to Indigenous-led initiatives, which has been the main advocacy point raised by IPs' voices.

However, the scale of funding alone does not tell the full story. What matters for CBCA is what this money enables. The unprecedented inflow prompted the creation of numerous Indigenous-led funds and coordinating platforms, each designed to ensure that resources reach communities in ways that support — rather than undermine — their traditional governance systems, knowledge practices and cultural priorities. These mechanisms represent a fundamental shift: from Indigenous Peoples as passive beneficiaries of externally designed conservation projects, to Indigenous Peoples as financial intermediaries and decision-makers directing resources towards their own culturally rooted stewardship practices. Hence, the global landscape maps the major instruments that emerged between COP26 and COP30. It should be read not as a catalogue of financial mechanisms, but as evidence of a broader cultural-institutional shift: Indigenous communities worldwide creating the governance architecture

144 <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/states-fail-adequately-address-climate-change-Indigenous-peoples-analysis-cop26-decisions>

145 <https://www.equatorinitiative.org/2024/02/28/Indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-engagement-at-cop-26-and-the-way-forward-2/>

146 Forest Tenure Funders Group. (2022). Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Forest Tenure Pledge: Annual report 2021–2022. <https://www.tenurepledge.org/ftfg-annual-report-2021-full.pdf>

147 <https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/stories/how-Indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-are-shaping-the-future-of-climate-funding/>

148 <https://www.tenurepledge.org/cop-26-pledge>

149 Forest Tenure Funders Group. (2024). Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Forest Tenure Pledge: Annual report 2023–2024. Forest Tenure Funders Group. <https://www.foresttenurefundersgroup.org/ftfg-annual-report-2023-full.pdf>

150 <https://www.tenurepledge.org/cop-30-pledge>

needed to operationalise their traditional knowledge at the scale that the post-Glasgow funding landscape now makes possible.

As the mapping illustrates in granularity, the post-COP26 landscape saw the proliferation of Indigenous-led and hybrid mechanisms. Indigenous coalitions themselves – through the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities (GATC) and others – proactively established platforms like *Shandia* to receive and manage climate funds. Several funds (*Podaali*, the Mesoamerican Territorial Fund, Nusantara, IPAS) are governed and operated by Indigenous Peoples themselves, this represents a proper governance transition, not merely a funding increase.

Geographically, Latin America saw the earliest Indigenous funds, several predating COP26. COP26 spurred scaling up: the Amazon's *Podaali* mechanism expanded with new donor commitments, and the Mesoamerican Fund accelerated to capture Glasgow pledges.¹⁵¹ Asia and Africa historically lagged but made strides by COP28–COP30. The Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund (IPAS) now unites Indigenous organisations across Asia, while in Africa the planned Réseau des Populations Autochtones et Locales pour la Gestion Durable des Écosystèmes Forestiers d'Afrique Centrale Fund (REPALEAC) and smaller initiatives like *Ereto* and *Naapu* address a long-standing funding void. Africa's share of the \$1.7 billion pledge has been low, with donors concentrating on tropical forest basins. New African funds aim to correct this by

targeting pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities whose traditional land-management knowledge has been underserved by climate finance.

Governance models vary. Some mechanisms involve multilateral institutions – for example, COICA's Amazon Fund partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), blending Indigenous governance with bank fiduciary oversight. This brought significant capital but also external requirements.¹⁵² In contrast, most funds (*Podaali*, Nusantara, IPAS, Ruti, etc.) insist on Indigenous self-governance, maintaining Indigenous-majority boards and using community validators for project selection. The *Shandia* platform connects these funds for south-to-south knowledge exchange and capacity building that is not routed through the global north, for instance, and the *Nusantara Fund* launched in Indonesia, hosted a global exchange with peers from Mesoamerica, Amazonia, and Asia (*Podáali*, IPAS, etc.) to share best practices in funds management and foster collaboration.¹⁵³

In parallel, UNFCCC processes showed incremental progress in recognising culture and traditional knowledge within climate frameworks.¹⁵⁴ The Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) became more prominent: its Facilitative Working Group developed a second three-year workplan (2022–24)¹⁵⁵ focusing on integrating Indigenous knowledge in climate adaptation and negotiating a greater say in climate funds.

151 <https://rainforestfoundation.org/a-fund-to-protect-the-rainforests-in-mexico-and-central-america/>

152 <https://www.greenclimate.fund/projects/sustainability-inclusion/ip>

153 <https://www.fordfoundation.org/news-and-stories/stories/how-Indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-are-shaping-the-future-of-climate-funding/>

154 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Global_goal_on_adaptation_1.pdf#page=3

155 <https://lcipp.unfccc.int/node/507>

COP27 affirmed the need for ‘inclusive, locally led action’ and noted the role of Indigenous Peoples in nature-based solutions.¹⁵⁶ The Declaration of the GFCBCA¹⁵⁷ explicitly recognised the devastating impacts of climate change on intangible heritage and its threat to inter-generational transmission of socio-cultural practices, especially for Indigenous cultures. The COP28 Global Goal on Adaptation urged nations to protect cultural heritage by developing adaptive strategies ‘guided by traditional knowledge, Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge and local knowledge systems’ – the culture, traditional knowledge and Indigenous knowledge systems were formally recognised together in a COP adaptation framework.¹⁵⁸

COP30 brought Indigenous cultures to an all-time high in visibility. Key outcomes included:

- The Brazilian government announced the demarcation of ten new Indigenous lands. Indigenous lands in Brazil now cover 117.4 million hectares – approximately 13.8 per cent of the country’s territory – managed by 266 Indigenous cultural groups.¹⁵⁹
- The Forest and Land Tenure Pledge issued a new commitment of \$1.8

billion to support Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant Peoples and local communities in developing climate strategies rooted in their cultures.¹⁶⁰

- Fifteen countries jointly committed to formally recognise and safeguard 160 million hectares of lands held by Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendant communities and local communities by 2030 – the first coordinated, multi-country pledge with measurable, time-bound targets for collective land rights.¹⁶¹
- The Tropical Forest Forever Facility received nearly \$5 billion in pledges, with 20 per cent designated for Indigenous Peoples’ solution, ‘the true stewards of our forests’.¹⁶²
- Brazil and Colombia, with the Rights and Resources Initiative, unveiled the 2026–2030 Acceleration Plan for Afro-descendant Peoples – the first regional framework addressing territorial recognition and climate finance for Afro-descendant communities.¹⁶³

When it comes to biodiversity loss specifically, there is now global recognition of the invaluable role of Indigenous Peoples in stewarding and

¹⁵⁶ Entertainment and Culture Pavilion. (2024). Legacy solutions: Cultural heritage in global climate action. Entertainment and Culture Pavilion. https://www.klimakultur.no/media/smt21qk/legacy-solutions_-_cultural-heritage-in-global-climate-action.pdf

¹⁵⁷ United Arab Emirates & Brazil. (2023, December 8). Emirates declaration on culture-based climate action. https://www.europeanheritagehub.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EmiratesDeclarationonCultureBasedClimateAction__FINAL.pdf

¹⁵⁸ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Global_goal_on_adaptation_1.pdf

¹⁵⁹ <https://cop30.br/en/news-about-cop30/government-of-brazil-advances-in-the-demarcation-of-ten-Indigenous-lands>

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.tenurepledge.org/cop30/>

¹⁶¹ <https://www.wri.org/news/statement-countries-announce-pledges-support-Indigenous-peoples-afro-descendants-and-local>

¹⁶² <https://tfff.earth/wwf-historic-5-billion-tfff-launch-is-the-gamechanger-nature-and-climate-need/>

¹⁶³ <https://rightsandresources.org/blog/governments-of-brazil-and-colombia-launch-plan-to-accelerate-solutions-for-afro-descendant-peoples-at-cop30/>

the need to promote Indigenous Knowledge as critical for transforming global responses to biodiversity loss. Several multilateral environmental agreements and frameworks reinforce this, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), the Paris Agreement, and the Indigenous Peoples Caucus under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The global landscape mapping presents a high-level (non-exhaustive) summary of references to Indigenous Knowledge across the Rio Conventions: the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.

In summary, 2021–2025 witnessed the creation of concrete financing mechanisms to back Indigenous Knowledge-led climate action, coupled with policy steps to elevate Indigenous Knowledge in global climate strategies. The Emirates Declaration at COP28 and the formal integration of cultural heritage into the COP30 Action Agenda under Article 19¹⁶⁴ vindicate the argument of this section: the financial and institutional architecture mapped above only achieves its climate goals when it enables the culturally-rooted practices and knowledge systems that Indigenous communities have been demanding the autonomy to deploy. The funds mapped are, at their core, instruments of cultural agency. Indigenous communities have mobilised all over the world to create direct funding management instruments. They

did so because decades of intermediated, top-down climate finance had systematically bypassed the very knowledge systems and culturally rooted practices that make Indigenous stewardship effective. What the post-Glasgow landscape has produced, therefore, is not simply a new generation of funds — it is an unprecedented attempt by Indigenous Peoples to operationalise CBCA at scale: to channel resources directly towards ancestral land management techniques, intergenerational ecological knowledge, and place-based governance models that conventional conservation has long overlooked.¹⁶⁵

Gender dimensions

Gender considerations have increasingly come to the fore in community-based adaptation involving Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous women hold vital traditional knowledge – from seed selection and crop management to water stewardship and medicinal plant use – and often lead local conservation initiatives. Between COP26 and COP30, several interventions specifically targeted Indigenous women’s empowerment in climate action, acknowledging that effective adaptation must be inclusive and gender sensitive.

In Africa, a notable example is the *Naapu Indigenous Women’s Fund* in Kenya, launched in 2026 by women for women. ‘Naapu’ – meaning ‘help one another’ in the Samburu language – aims to direct resources to Indigenous women who are

¹⁶⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (2025, December 19). Global Climate Action Agenda at COP30: Outcomes report (Final updated version). UNFCCC. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/COP30%20Action%20Agenda_Outcomes%20Report_December_2025.pdf

¹⁶⁵ Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund. (2024). Indigenous-led funds. Indigenous Peoples of Asia Solidarity Fund. <https://ipasfund.org/pdf/Indigenous-LED-FUNDS-1.pdf>

underserved and undocumented in conventional funding.¹⁶⁶ The fund plans to provide small grants and capacity-building to women-led initiatives: from pastoral women adapting livestock practices to climate stress, to women's groups reviving traditional drought-resistant crops. Though new, *Naapu* aligns with the trend of gender-responsive climate finance championed under the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and Indigenous feminist movements. While no further large-scale, explicitly Indigenous women-centred climate instrument was identified in this period, the mapping exercise reveals a clear cross-cutting trend: gender considerations are increasingly embedded within existing mechanisms. Across the majority of instruments reviewed, gender-responsive criteria are integrated into grant allocation and gender equality is framed as a strategic priority. Shandia's annual report specified that of the \$26 million mobilised in 2024–2025, roughly 25 per cent was channelled to women-led projects and another 23 per cent to youth-led projects,¹⁶⁷ showing that this commitment has not been merely rhetoric but operationalised by this global funding architectures.

In Asia, the IPAS Asia Fund has built inclusivity into its core mandate. Gender, disability and youth are explicitly listed among its ten key focus areas.¹⁶⁸ IPAS conducted extensive consultations with women's networks across Asia and committed to simplified grant access for women's groups. In its first grants rollout

in 2023, a significant share of grantees were women-led organisations, focusing on issues like the preservation of matrilineal farming knowledge in South Asia.¹⁶⁹ The IPAS Baseline Survey (Figure 9), conducted with 433 mostly Indigenous-led organisations across Asia, reveals that the three most commonly selected priority issues are: traditional knowledge and innovations (307 organisations); collective rights to lands, territories and resources (300); and the rights of Indigenous women (292).¹⁷⁰ Indigenous communities themselves rank traditional knowledge, land rights and women's rights as their top three priorities is significant for culture-based climate action. It confirms that the protection and revitalisation of intergenerational knowledge systems is a central demand of the communities themselves.

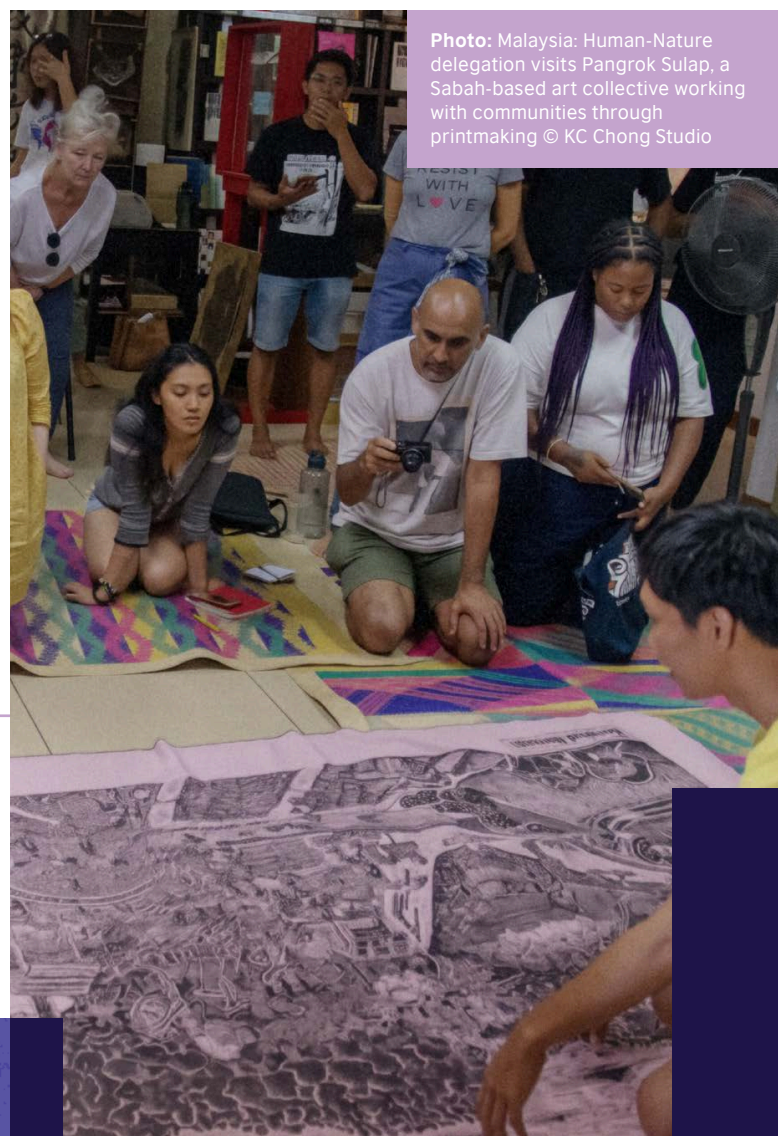


Photo: Malaysia: Human-Nature delegation visits Pangrok Sulap, a Sabah-based art collective working with communities through printmaking © KC Chong Studio

166 <https://www.facebook.com/Indigenouswomenfund/>

167 <https://globalalliance.me/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/shandia-annual-report-2024.pdf>

168 <https://ipasfund.org/pdf/IPAS-Brochure-2025.pdf>

169 <https://ipasfund.org/pdf/Ipas-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>

170 <https://ipasfund.org/pdf/Full-Report-Baseline-Survey.pdf>



Figure 10. IPAS' baseline survey: most selected IPs organisations' priorities

In Latin America, Indigenous women's leadership saw a boost through funds like *Podaali* and *Fondo Amazonia Viva*, which earmark support for women's initiatives. *Podaali* places emphasis on 'women protagonism' and has supported actions led by Indigenous women, including women's cooperatives managing açai forests and craft enterprises that combine income generation with traditional forest stewardship.^{171,172} In Africa, 2023 marked the first Indigenous Women's Forum for Central Africa, co-organised by REPALEAC with Shandia's

support. Indigenous women from across the region highlighted issues including access to land for women (often denied under custom), participation in forest management committees, and funding for women's customary natural resource knowledge.¹⁷³ The outcome was a set of gender principles for REPALEAC's fund, including a dedicated financing window for women-led community forestry projects and a declaration on 'Strengthening and promoting the involvement of Indigenous and local community women of Central Africa and

171 <https://fundopodaali.org.br/protagonismo-das-mulheres-indigenas/>

172 <https://coicamazonia.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/INGLES.pdf>

173 <https://rightsandresources.org/Indigenous-women-forum-brazzaville/>

the Congo Basin in biodiversity conservation and climate resilience.’¹⁷⁴

Despite these steps, gaps remain. The Rights and Resources Initiative and the Women in Global South Alliance published a landmark analysis right before COP30, ‘Is Global Funding Reaching Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Local Community Women?’¹⁷⁵ documenting that climate finance that is both gender-responsive and directly reaches Indigenous women remains extremely small. If the post-COP26 funding architecture intends to repair the historical gap in direct funding to IPLCs, it must also address the gender funding gap and concretely advance the rights of women and girls.

Conclusions

The last five COPs have seen meaningful advances in elevating Indigenous Peoples, their cultures and their knowledge systems within climate adaptation. The Glasgow \$1.7 billion pledge is not merely a paper commitment: it has translated into actual funding streams, new institutions and legal reforms. Countries have passed or enforced laws recognising Indigenous land rights, finally enabling IPs CBCA. Thirteen new Indigenous territories were

recognised in Brazil,¹⁷⁶ 37 land titles secured in Peru,¹⁷⁷ and a historic Indigenous rights bill passed in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2025.¹⁷⁸ During the same year in Colombia, Indigenous Territorial Entities recognised¹⁷⁹ Indigenous people as formal, self-governing entities with processes underway to formalise governance of over almost 18 million hectares, representing the self-determination prerequisite that has been advocated for for decades. These accomplishments allow the employment and recognition of Indigenous Knowledge and culture-based practices related to biodiversity protection and climate change adaption.

Greater inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in climate planning is also evident. National Adaptation Plans in countries such as Argentina,¹⁸⁰ Nepal¹⁸¹ and many more¹⁸² reference Indigenous cultures and knowledge. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) Sixth Assessment in 2022 emphasised that Indigenous and local knowledge are ‘critical’ to climate adaptation and sustainable resource management. This provides scientific validation that Indigenous advocates have leveraged in policy forums.¹⁸³

174 https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/RRG-8055-Brazzaville-Forum-Declaration-English_r1-2.pdf

175 <https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/WIGSA-Report-v2.pdf>

176 <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/12/brazils-lula-approves-13-Indigenous-lands-after-much-delay-promises-more-to-come/>

177 <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/09/record-number-of-Indigenous-land-titles-granted-in-peru-via-innova>

178 <https://rightsandresources.org/blog/victory-for-inclusive-land-governance-in-the-drc-president-promulgates-groundbreaking-land-use-planning-law/>

179 <https://www.regnskog.no/en/news/historic-result-for-Indigenous-local-governments-in-colombia>

180 <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/NAP-Argentina-2023-EN.pdf>

181 Bhattachan, K. B., & Rai, T. B. (2020). Indigenous peoples’ rights in climate action in Nepal. Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) Climate Change Partnership Program. https://web.archive.org/web/20251114090143/https://nefinclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/brifing-paper-24-page_Final-1-1.pdf

182 <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1865488/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

183 <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/03/after-ipcc-climate-report-stresses-Indigenous-local-land-rights-58-times-lets-respond-with-a-concrete-tenure-plan-commentary/>

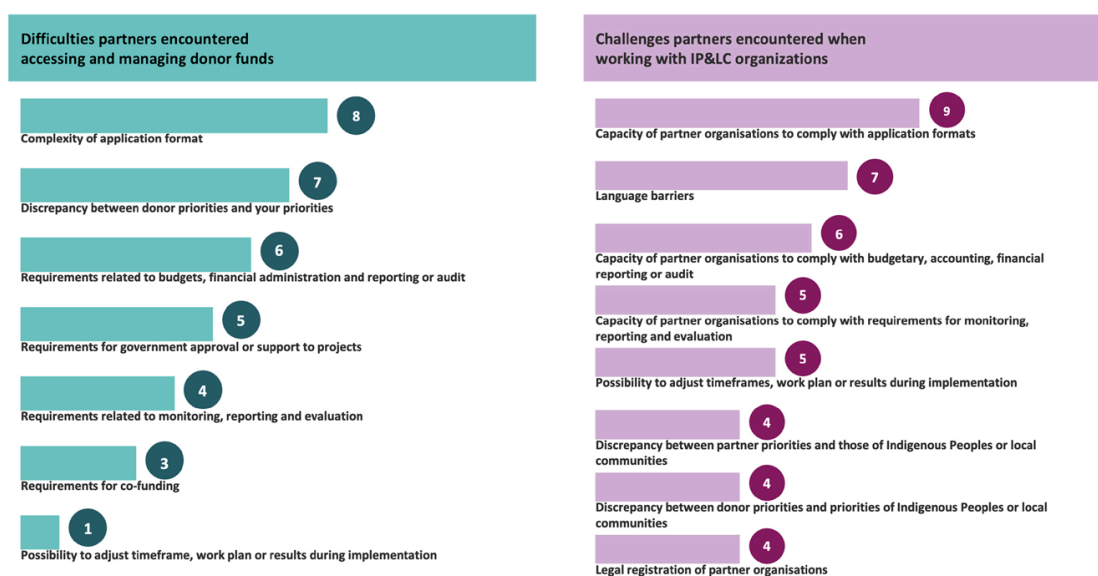


Figure 11. Challenges faced by both IPLCs and funding partners¹⁸⁴

Yet funds alone do not equal transformation. Shandia monitoring data demonstrates that the primary constraint is not total money pledged, but access architecture.¹⁸⁵ The Indigenous organisations surveyed identify the primary barriers as complexity of application formats, discrepancy between donor priorities and community priorities, and financial reporting and audit requirements. These are not capacity deficits alone, but structural incompatibilities between donor bureaucratic design and Indigenous governance systems. Application formats are often not culturally adapted, legal registration requirements contradict customary authority structures, and reporting templates overwhelmingly assume English.

There is also the issue of short-term project cycles. Much climate funding continues to prioritise the delivery of

outcomes within relatively short timeframes, which can sit uneasily alongside the long-term and intergenerational nature of Indigenous stewardship. Communities involved in environmental restoration and adaptation efforts have highlighted that ecological and cultural change often unfolds over much longer periods than conventional funding cycles allow. Similar reflections emerged from interviews conducted for this study, where practitioners noted that prevailing funding structures tend to prioritise activities and outcomes that can be demonstrated and measured within relatively short periods.¹⁸⁶ By contrast, approaches centred on cultural continuity, relationship-building and community-embedded transformation often require sustained engagement over time, with impacts that may not be fully visible or measurable within the duration of a typical project cycle.

¹⁸⁴ <https://globalalliance.me/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Shandia-2023-report-web-version.pdf> p.21

¹⁸⁵ <https://ipasfund.org/pdf/Full-Report-Baseline-Survey.pdf>

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Jen Rae (Centre for Reworlding and Creative Climate), conducted for this study.

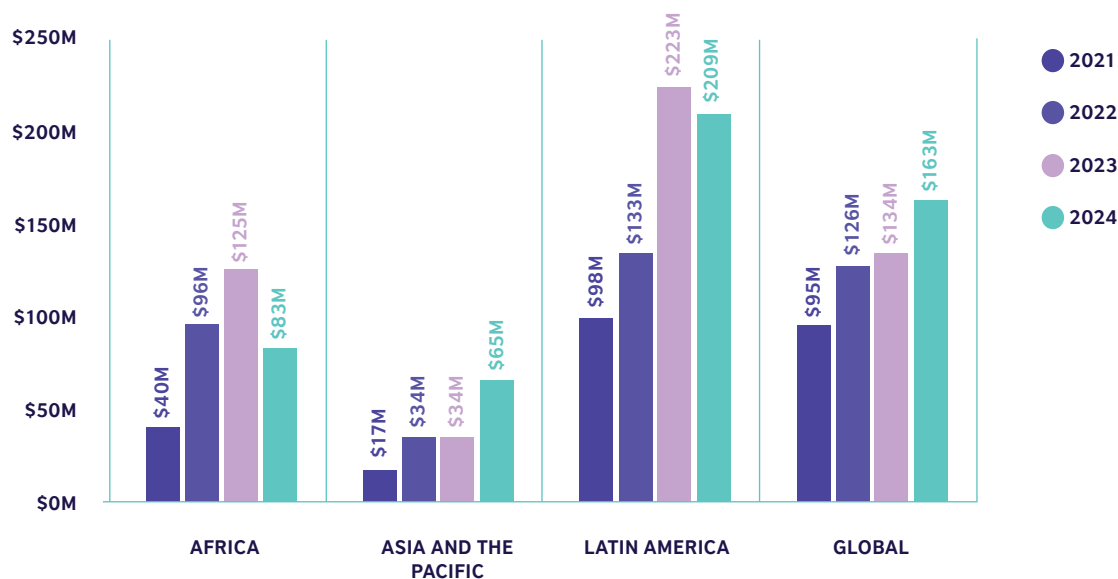


Figure 12. Geographical distribution of FTFG funding (COP26-COP29)¹⁸⁷

In terms of regional discrepancy, Latin America dominates funding flows. Africa and Asia's Indigenous communities remain comparatively underserved. By end of 2024, less than 18 per cent of the \$1.7 billion pledge had gone to Asia and the Pacific, despite the region hosting two-thirds of the world's Indigenous population. Funding directed to Africa decreased in 2024. Climate impacts like droughts, floods and food insecurity are hitting drylands pastoralist and Pacific Indigenous communities hard, yet those groups lack the visibility that rainforest communities have garnered since COP26.

Violence and rights abuses continue to undermine progress. Land and environment defenders – many Indigenous – are killed each year, and many more face intimidation.¹⁸⁸ This is both a human rights crisis and a climate

issue: insecure land rights and violence deter communities from fully engaging in climate projects or asserting their traditional knowledge in natural resource governance.

From the perspective of Indigenous Peoples themselves, one of the biggest gaps is direct participation in decision-making. They have greater presence at UNFCCC meetings now, but still no formal voting power. Nationally, Indigenous representatives are still often excluded from climate policy committees. Where inclusion has happened, it frequently takes the form of advisory consultation that can be easily sidelined.

In conclusion, Indigenous Peoples are advocating for three things to address these gaps. First, direct access to funds through simplified processes, intermediary-free disbursement and unrestricted core funding that trusts communities. Second, true recognition

¹⁸⁷ Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Forest Tenure Pledge Annual Report 2024-2025 <https://www.tenurepledge.org/ftfg-annual-report-2024-full.pdf> p.20

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/sep/09/almost-200-people-killed-last-year-trying-to-defend-the-environment-report-finds-aoe>

of land rights – meaning governments must implement promises to demarcate and title Indigenous lands, since secure tenure underpins any successful culture-based adaptation. Third, inclusive governance – inviting Indigenous Peoples, including women and youth, to co-create climate solutions rather than being passive

beneficiaries. These are the prerequisites of self-determination and relational accountability that IPs around the world require to continue their ancestral, intergenerational and culturally rooted practices of nature guardianship.

3.3.2 The British Council's contributions in this area

Category	Description
Typology	Indigenous knowledge, local culture and community-based adaptation
Typology footprint	3 Interventions
Geographic spread	Focused activity in South Asia and Southeast Asia; Regions: APAC, UK (bilateral exchange)
Typical intervention delivery mechanisms	Capacity-building and grants programmes; fellowships, ethical research exchange and co-creation; community-embedded creative and heritage enterprise support
British Council's main role	Programme funder and delivery partner; convenor of knowledge exchange between communities, researchers and practitioners
Typical outcomes	Cognitive outcomes (recognition of Indigenous knowledge, skills development); relational outcomes (trust, partnerships, ethical collaboration)
Typical outcomes	Cognitive outcomes (awareness, reframing climate issues); affective outcomes (engagement, empathy, motivation); secondary relational outcomes through visibility and exchange

Category	Examples
Grants and capacity building	<i>Funding and enabling Indigenous knowledge, local culture and community-based adaptation: Human Nature Programme; UK/Brasil Season of Culture; In Our Hands</i>

Within this typology, the British Council's contribution is best understood less as direct finance, land-rights support or Indigenous governance intervention, and more as a cultural relations role that creates space for Indigenous

knowledge, local culture and community-based perspectives in climate conversations through knowledge exchange, creative practice and partnership-led collaboration. Indeed, between COP26 and COP30, the

British Council has initiated and supported several programmes that intersect with Indigenous knowledge and community-based adaptation, leveraging arts, education, and intercultural dialogue. Some key British Council interventions in this realm include *In Our Hands*, *Human-Nature* and projects developed as part of the UK/ Brazil Season, in partnership with the Instituto Guimaraes Rosa.¹⁸⁹

*In Our Hands*¹⁹⁰ was a youth-oriented climate and creative entrepreneurship programme, piloted in Nepal in 2020/2021 until 2023. It supported young people, including Indigenous youth, to develop nature-inspired solutions and green livelihoods. For example, in Nepal's 2022 cohort, participants worked on projects such as eco-tourism homestays in Indigenous villages and sustainable crafts based on Indigenous knowledge of bamboo. The programme combined workshops on traditional practices (such as using local clay and dyes) with business skills, underlining how cultural heritage can drive green jobs, resulting into a toolkit.¹⁹¹ *In Our Hands* demonstrated the British Council's ability to identify and empower grassroots innovators, providing seed funding and mentorship to scale up community-based adaptation ideas. *In Our Hands* was thought as part of the British Council's Road to COP programme for COP26, allowing, for instance, some Indigenous youth entrepreneurs to present their solutions at climate forums, gaining visibility that would have been unlikely without the British Council's facilitation.

*Human-Nature*¹⁹² is a three-year programme (2023–2025) led by British Council Malaysia, exploring the intersection of arts, culture and environmental action. *Human-Nature* has been explicitly inclusive of Indigenous perspectives. In March 2023, the British Council organised a *Human-Nature* 'Cultural Exchange' delegation to Borneo, involving UK and Southeast Asian artists, museum curators, environmentalists, and Indigenous leaders.¹⁹³ The *Time of the Rivers* Fellowship (2025) is another flagship action under *Human-Nature*. Co-curated by the British Council with partners Radical Ecology and Borneo Bengkel, this fellowship linked four artists from Malaysia and the UK to explore climate justice through the lens of rivers and displacement. The fellows, including Indigenous creatives, examined two case studies: the resettlement of Indigenous communities by the Bengoh Dam in Sarawak, and historical displacement in the UK by a reservoir project. Through field visits to affected villages in Borneo and to analogous sites in England, the artists engaged with elders, collected oral histories and co-created art pieces that narrate the human cost of 'development' and environmental change. The British Council's cultural relations approach was evident: it forged people-to-people connection and created a safe space for difficult conversations (decolonisation, Indigenous rights), using art as the medium to connect emotionally and politically. By supporting such exchanges, the British Council adds the

189 <https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/en/programmes/arts/ukbrseason>

190 <https://www.britishcouncil.org.np/programmes/climate-change/in-our-hands>

191 <https://crafttoolkit.com/>

192 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/human-nature>

193 https://www.britishcouncil.my/sites/default/files/human-nature_delegation_essays_final.pdf

dimension of storytelling and cultural memory to climate action, which purely technical or finance-focused actors might overlook.

Crafting Futures first began in 2017 with a few parallel craft-focused programmes and was formally established by the British Council's Architecture Design and Fashion team in 2019 as a three-year programme running from 2019 through 2022. Since 2019, the programme, has engaged with artisans and craft specialists in 35 countries; 70 per cent of those engaged are women.¹⁹⁴ It provided education and training opportunities, connected artisans from rural communities with international designers, and increased access to new markets and audiences for Indigenous people's craft products. According to the programme's evaluation, although it was not a central theme of *Crafting Futures* at first, 'environmental sustainability seems to have taken more importance in the years that followed, with many projects integrating sustainability considerations into their workshops and placing the connection between nature-based solutions to climate change and traditional craft (e.g. Grant Scheme, Thailand, Indonesia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan).¹⁹⁵ Similarly, Indigenous People were not necessarily the only target audience for this programme but one of many, some projects, for example in Guyana were precisely targeting Indigenous empowerment through ceramic craft-making in the North Rupununi, or those working with the young designers from Guna Yala, the autonomous Indigenous areas of Panama.¹⁹⁶ Many legacy

programmes have developed as a result of *Crafting Futures* within the Architecture, Design and Fashion portfolio, including *New Landscapes*.

The outcomes emerging from this work appear strongest in the cognitive, relational and practice-based domains. Current materials suggest greater visibility for Indigenous and community-based knowledge, stronger opportunities for dialogue and exchange across knowledge holders, and more careful approaches to collaboration where reciprocity, consent and contextual sensitivity matter. Evidence of longer-term structural outcomes is currently more limited. The main gaps in this typology are therefore less about relevance than about scale, evidence depth and strategic reach: the portfolio footprint is relatively small, the evidence base is stronger on process than on durable adaptation effects. Relative to a wider field increasingly shaped by Indigenous-led finance, land-rights recognition and governance mechanisms, the British Council's role here remains complementary rather than central.

COP relevance

The British Council's visibility at COPs in terms of IPLCs' CBCA is locally rooted rather than global, compared to other intervention typologies. In Nepal for example, where the *In Our Hands* project was piloted, the British Council's Road to COP26 activity included a series of roundtable discussions with women climate leaders, broadcast on national

¹⁹⁴ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/resources/crafting-futures-resources>

¹⁹⁵ The Social Investment Consultancy. (2022, May). Global evaluation report for *Crafting Futures*. British Council. https://arts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Crafting%20Futures%20Global%20Evaluation%20Report_0.pdf

¹⁹⁶ <https://www.britishcouncil.be/british-council-european-development-days-2016>

television and radio, showing how COP-linked work could be used to showcase climate perspectives grounded in local communities.¹⁹⁷ More broadly, interview evidence points to ongoing questions regarding the representation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities within COP-related processes.¹⁹⁸ Interviewees highlighted the importance of creating greater opportunities for community representatives to share their own experiences and perspectives directly, including through participation in both side events and more formal conference spaces. It is therefore reasonable that the British Council, not being an Indigenous-led organisation, nor a representative of any specific local community, has not imposed itself in the spaces dedicated to IPLCs within the climate fora. The *Human-Nature* programme meanwhile, appears all the less COP-centred. It is better understood as a place-based, multi-year knowledge and collaboration programme that developed across the wider COP26–COP30 period rather than around a single summit moment. The exception is at COP30, where several UK-Brazil Season projects were showcased. *The Ocean's Edge / Litoral do Limite*¹⁹⁹ is one of several UK-Brazil Season of Culture projects showcased at COP30. Co-led by Pivô Arte e Pesquisa (Brazil) and Invisible Dust (UK), it brings together artists, scientists and Indigenous thinkers from both countries to address the impacts of climate change, overfishing and pollution on the Atlantic Ocean. Through workshops, residencies and exhibitions at the Bienal das Amazônias in Belém, the

Universidade Federal do Pará and partner venues in Scotland, it places Indigenous and other coastal communities at the centre of a decolonial conversation on ocean futures. Its presentation in Belém during the COP30 summit illustrates how the Season has used the COP platform to amplify Indigenous-led environmental narratives within wider UK/Brazil cultural exchange.

Programme spotlight: Human-Nature

Human-Nature is the clearest spotlight for this typology because it shows British Council working through a model that is distinctly cultural-relational. Florence Lambert, head of British Council's Arts and Creative Industries work in Malaysia, and conceiver of *Human-Nature*, explained during the experts' focus group how Malaysia is one of the 17 mega-diverse countries, whose incommensurable biodiversity intersects an equally abundant ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, and how such a context was extremely fertile to try developing a programme that used arts, as a medium and shared language to climate change. The goal set by the team was that of uncovering new narratives on climate change, that challenge the Western-centric, technocratic narrative by incorporating the richness of perspectives that come from IPLCs of Malaysia. Framed by British Council Malaysia as a knowledge and collaboration programme, it brings together research, artistic exchange

197 <https://www.britishcouncil.org.uk/programmes/climate-change/road-cop26-climate-change-women-leadership-roundtable-discussion>

198 Interview with Jarunee Khongsawasdi (The Siam Society), conducted for this study.

199 <https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/en/events/oceans-edge>

and collaboration around climate adaptation, community knowledge.²⁰⁰ What makes it especially relevant here is that it places people and communities at the centre and aims to build long-lasting, equitable and mutually respectful relationships initiated locally.²⁰¹ At the same time, reflections from practitioners involved in the programme highlight that implementing such an approach presents methodological and ethical challenges, particularly in relation to engagement with Indigenous communities and knowledge systems.²⁰² Early stages of the programme revealed the risks of superficial or tokenistic engagement and the complexity of working across diverse cultural contexts, prompting a reconsideration of initial approaches. In response, the programme shifted its focus towards developing foundational principles for engagement, prioritising learning processes, contextual understanding and locally informed methodologies. This included commissioning dedicated research and the development of a peer-reviewed engagement framework designed by and for Indigenous communities, which informed subsequent phases of the programme. Practitioners emphasised that this iterative approach combining reflection, adaptation and gradual scaling was essential to building more meaningful and respectful forms of collaboration over time.

This approach is reflected in the development of *Aram Bekelala*²⁰³ - meaning 'togetherness' in a local language - emerged from *Human-Nature* as a community engagement guide for working with Indigenous and marginalised communities in the arts. Co-created with Indigenous contributors and with British Council support, the guide compiles best practices (such as how to respectfully integrate Indigenous rituals into workshops, or how to get informed consent for creative projects). The *Aram Bekelala* Guide is now a resource for cultural professionals in Malaysia and beyond, in line with the British Council's role in bridging cultural knowledge with environmental action frameworks.

Reflections from practitioners further emphasise the contribution of Indigenous and local knowledge systems in reshaping approaches to sustainability.²⁰⁴ These perspectives highlight how such knowledge introduces alternative value systems, long-term orientations and holistic understandings of human–nature relationships. They also point to the importance of moving towards models centred on agency, co-creation and sustained engagement, where communities are actively involved in shaping both processes and outcomes, rather than being positioned as participants in externally defined interventions.

²⁰⁰ Partners: Borneo Bengkel, Forever Sabah, Catama Borneo

²⁰¹ McHattie, L.-S., & Teo Boon Ting, W. (2025). *Human-Nature: Relations, resilience & reciprocity*. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/4SXZ-QR47>

²⁰² Interview with Florence Lambert (British Council Malaysia – Human-Nature programme), conducted for this study.

²⁰³ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/resources/community-engagement-guide-aram-bekelala>

²⁰⁴ Interview with Florence Lambert (British Council Malaysia – Human-Nature programme), conducted for this study.

3.4 Networks, partnerships and cultural relations

3.4.1 Global evidence landscape

The landscape of networks, partnerships, and cultural relations actors has become one of the most dynamic in contemporary CBCA, as the global mapping shows. Over the past decade, CBCA has evolved into a diverse ecosystem of transnational alliances, creative networks, community platforms, and institutional partnerships. They help integrate culture into climate governance; they unite creative and heritage sectors behind shared global challenges; they generate public engagement at scale, and they transform climate narratives by elevating plural knowledges and lived experiences.

The mapping identifies 42 initiatives in this typology, showing that networks, partnerships, and cultural relations mechanisms are now an important part of how CBCA is being scaled internationally. This also suggests that the field is organised around several broad types of network and alliances. These include diplomatic and policy coalitions, such as the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action²⁰⁵ and the Climate Heritage Network; practitioner alliances, including the ICOMOS Climate Action Working Group,²⁰⁶ the Heritage Adapts to

Climate Alliance²⁰⁷ and the European Partnership for Resilient Cultural Heritage.²⁰⁸

The interviews conducted for this research suggest that effective partnerships are often characterised by trust, collaboration, reciprocity and a shared commitment to addressing climate challenges. These qualities were consistently highlighted by practitioners as important enablers of long-term engagement and collective action. With this in view, the following sections map how this ecosystem is organised globally, and how regional networks translate cultural relations principles into locally grounded and community-centred climate action. These networks are significant not only because they connect institutions, but also because they create conditions for sustained exchange, mutual learning and collective problem-solving.

The Green Art Lab Alliance (GALA), an international network of cultural organisations, artists and researchers working at the intersection of art, sustainability and socio-ecological transformation, provides a useful example of this approach. Established as a peer-based alliance rather than a formal consortium, GALA operates through long-term collaboration and distributed forms of governance. Insights from interviews conducted for

205 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/uk_viet_nam_season_evaluation_final_report.pdf

206 <https://climateaction.icomos.org/our-partners/>

207 Ibidem.

208 <https://www.heritageresearch-hub.eu/european-partnership-for-resilient-cultural-heritage/>

this study illustrate how informal governance structures and relationship-based approaches can support continuity, adaptability and locally responsive forms of climate engagement beyond the lifespan of individual projects. Interviewees highlighted that GALA's development has relied heavily on investing in relationships and maintaining networks of trust that can support future collaboration and collective action.²⁰⁹ They also noted that the alliance has sought to avoid highly centralised forms of governance by enabling partners to shape activities according to their own contexts, priorities and capacities. This flexibility was seen as supporting both relevance and responsiveness across diverse geographical and cultural settings. These perspectives suggest that partnerships within culture-based climate action can function as more than delivery mechanisms for individual projects. Rather, they can operate as long-term relationship infrastructures that support knowledge exchange, mutual support and collaboration across different contexts. Such approaches may also help address power imbalances by creating conditions in which diverse actors can participate meaningfully and contribute according to their own expertise, experiences and priorities. UNESCO's Field Offices play a critical connective role in operationalising culture-based climate action on the ground. Acting as intermediaries between international norms, national authorities, local governments, and communities, Field Offices enable field-based cultural programmes that strengthen resilience,

risk preparedness, and adaptive capacity in sites, cities, museums, and communities experiencing climate impacts.²¹⁰ Through their proximity to local actors and cultural ecosystems, Field Offices facilitate long-term partnerships with municipalities, Indigenous Peoples, cultural institutions, and civil society, ensuring that climate action is rooted in local knowledge, heritage practices, and social realities.

Within UNESCO's broader networked approach, Field Offices function as relational infrastructures rather than merely administrative outposts. They support participatory planning, resilience and risk-preparedness strategies for cultural sites, and cross-sector collaboration between culture, environment, education, and disaster risk management. At the same time, they sustain policy dialogue with UN Member States, supporting the embedding of cultural perspectives within formal climate adaptation and mitigation policies, including through UNFCCC processes and national climate strategies. Yet the global evidence landscape demonstrates that the impact of cultural networks derives as much from relational and ethical foundations as from formal policy mandates.

Importance of cultural relations in climate diplomacy

Cultural relations have become an essential dimension of climate diplomacy because this approach provides communicative, relational, and knowledge bridging infrastructures that

²⁰⁹ Interview with Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodríguez (Green Art Lab Alliance – GALA), conducted for this study.

²¹⁰ UNESCO. (2023). Culture and climate change. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://www.unesco.org/en/climate-change/culture>

conventional policy processes struggle to generate.

The Climate Heritage Network (CHN) exemplifies this function, describing its mission as helping people ‘imagine and realise low-carbon, just, climate resilient futures through culture.’²¹¹ The network demonstrates the scale at which culture-based civil society can operate in climate governance. As of 2026, CHN comprises over 250 member organisations worldwide, including museums, heritage site managers, Indigenous organisations, NGOs, universities, and government cultural agencies.²¹² CHN members are active across five global regions and multiple thematic working groups, and the Network has historically established a sustained presence at COP processes, contributing to the inclusion of cultural heritage in COP27 decisions on adaptation and loss and damage (ICOM, 2022). This illustrates how cultural networks function as collective advocacy platforms, enabling dispersed actors to intervene coherently in high-level climate policy arenas.

Sector-specific data further demonstrates the mobilisation capacity of cultural civil society networks at national and regional levels. In the United Kingdom, Julie’s Bicycle, works as a boundary organisation²¹³ between culture, policy, and environmental expertise. One expert consulted for this study stressed the deep connection between cultural practice and existential planetary

challenges: because culture shapes how people experience the world, it lies at the root of the climate crisis and must therefore also be at the heart of its solutions.²¹⁴ From this perspective, climate diplomacy that lacks cultural understanding remains incomplete. The same expert also emphasised that progress within intergovernmental arenas often depends on cultural mobilisation on the ground, noting that the way networks, organisations and people are connected is itself a key lever for policy and political change. In practice, this means networks such as Julie’s Bicycle help align cultural institutions, professional associations and advocacy coalitions so they can speak with a coherent voice to policymakers, inform national positions and influence agendas within multilateral processes. This form of cultural mobilisation complements formal diplomacy by grounding abstract commitments in social legitimacy, collective action and sectorwide norms, demonstrating how cultural relations function not as peripheral activities, but as enabling conditions for climate governance and policy transformation.

Interview evidence from the European cultural relations sector suggests that cultural organisations can play an important intermediary role in connecting stakeholders, facilitating knowledge exchange, and supporting capacity building across networks.²¹⁵ While recognising that cultural actors do not always have direct access to major

²¹¹ Climate Heritage Network. (2022). Climate Heritage Network 2022–2024. Action Plan. <https://www.climateheritage.org/actionplan>

²¹² Climate Heritage Network. (2026). About CHN. <https://www.climateheritage.org/>

²¹³ Arts Council England & Julie’s Bicycle. (2025). Culture, climate and environmental responsibility report 2024/25. Arts Council England. <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/environmental-responsibility/culture-climate-and-environmental-responsibility-report-202425>

²¹⁴ Interview with Alison Tickell (Julie’s Bicycle), conducted for this study.

²¹⁵ Interview with Michelle Sun (EUNIC Global Office), conducted for this study.

climate negotiations, interviewees highlighted the value of strengthening diplomatic engagement through artistic and cultural networks. In this view, demonstrating practical examples of culture-based climate action can help advance the agenda and build momentum alongside formal policy processes.

Effective international climate collaborations are most likely to emerge from locally identified needs and priorities rather than from top-down design processes.²¹⁶ Respondents emphasised the importance of building networks around specific shared concerns and fostering relationships gradually through ongoing dialogue and exchange. In this perspective, climate alliances derive their legitimacy and effectiveness from approaches grounded in reciprocity, trust, and mutual care, helping to mitigate power imbalances and avoid purely symbolic forms of engagement.

Taken together, these findings indicate that cultural civil society networks contribute to climate action in three interlinked ways: first, by mobilising large numbers of cultural actors around shared norms and commitments; second, by providing collective channels for engagement with national and international policy processes; and third, by translating cultural practice into durable social and political pressure. Rather than operating at the margins of climate governance, these networks now constitute a critical layer of the climate action ecosystem: one that connects grassroots cultural practice with formal decision-making and international diplomacy.

Mapping key networks

Alongside institutional networks that embed culture within climate governance, creative alliances operate as catalytic spaces of experimentation, shaping the values, narratives, and social imaginaries upon which policy change ultimately depends. For example, the NEMO Working Group on Sustainability and Climate Action in Europe plays a major role in capacity-building for museums, providing guidelines for climate protection in museums and offering structured tools supporting climate-impact assessments, organisational transformation, and public engagement. Ibermuseos' Sustainability Line in Latin America similarly integrates local knowledge, social participation, and climate awareness into museum practice, emphasising sustainable local development and offering region-specific learning spaces such as the Jornada Iberoamericana Museos y Sostenibilidad. This positions the Ibero-American museum field as a regional driver of cultural-climate action aligned with UNESCO MONDIACULT frameworks.

Latin America's cultural-climate networks are characterised by strong links to community participation, decolonial approaches, and heritage rights. Ibermuseos' sustainability programmes support regional actors in aligning museum practice with environmental justice, while ICOM Latin America's climate-focused work especially leading to COP Belém highlights the region's political leadership in linking heritage and climate adaptation. Many Latin American initiatives, including Ibermuseos, prioritise Indigenous leadership and biocultural approaches, aligning with

²¹⁶ Interview with Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodríguez (GALA), conducted for this study.

Ostendorf-Rodríguez's assertion that alliances must respond to specific local priorities and resist extractive or tokenistic dynamics.

Across Africa, cultural civil society networks play a critical role in translating climate policy ambitions into place-based action, particularly where heritage sites and living traditions face acute climate risks. The African World Heritage Fund (AWHF) - a pan-African heritage organisation working closely with networks such as ICOMOS Africa and ICCROM - functions as a key intermediary between international frameworks and local custodians. Through initiatives such as Cultural Heritage Management and Vulnerability and Impact Assessments (CVI Africa), AWHF strengthens local and regional capacity for risk preparedness, climate adaptation, and disaster response, with a strong emphasis on Indigenous knowledge systems and community-centred governance. By embedding climate resilience within heritage management practices, these programmes advance approaches aligned with the Global Goal on Adaptation, while ensuring that climate action is informed by territorial, cultural, and historical specificities.

The Pacific region offers some of the most integrated cultural-ecological climate networks worldwide. SPREP and PIRT coordinate regional collaboration across conservation agencies, governments, and communities, supporting implementation of Pacific frameworks for nature conservation. UNESCO's Weaving Nature with Culture action plan for the Pacific reinforces this integration by placing cultural and heritage considerations central to

regional world-heritage strategies and climate resilience. Together, these networks articulate a Pacific model of climate action rooted in ancestral custodianship, community governance, and land-sea relationality.

Gender dimensions

Gender is not a systematically foregrounded criterion in the governance of cultural-climate networks, but it is closely bound up with the power dynamics these networks are already grappling with. The recurring concern over uneven North-South relations – the disproportionate emotional burden and unequal access to funding and mobility borne by Global South partners – has a strongly gendered character that the literature rarely disaggregates. Relational, care-based and voluntary modes of working, which networks depend on, are also disproportionately carried by women, making burnout and unpaid labour gendered as well as structural risks. Some partnership instruments do name gender explicitly. The British Council's Climate Connection Research Fellowships, for instance, tie research collaboration specifically to community-led climate resilience, gender and local knowledge, linking UK institutions with researchers and partners in the Global South.²¹⁷ However, such examples remain the exception rather than a widely applied principle across the culture-based climate action field.

A credible gender dimension would mean treating gender as a governance question, not only a thematic one: attending to who convenes, who is

217 <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/connections-through-culture>

funded, and who carries the relational labour within partnerships, and building gender-balanced leadership and gender disaggregated participation into how networks are designed and resourced.

The impact of partnerships in climate innovation and public engagement

Networks and partnerships bring distinct forms of value to CBCA that cannot be replicated by individual organisations, however strong. Their primary strength lies in their capacity to generate collective intelligence and shared imaginaries, enabling cultural actors to influence climate policy, innovation, and public understanding in ways that transcend institutional silos. As one expert consulted for this study noted,²¹⁸ cultural actors have a unique capacity to ‘transform climate imaginaries,’ and networks amplify this capacity by assembling diverse practitioners whose combined influence exceeds their individual reach. Partnerships thus become sites where new meanings, narratives, and possibilities emerge, bridging the gap that Tickell describes as ‘the gap in imagination between growth and green growth.’

A second unique contribution is the way that networks mobilise embodied, practice-based forms of climate engagement. The same interviewee emphasised that cultural transformation happens through practice and action rather than through reflection alone, and partnerships offer precisely the relational infrastructure needed for such

action: spaces where experimentation, co-creation and iterative learning can occur. Museums, festivals, residencies, and community-based cultural programmes become shared platforms for public engagement, activating climate literacy in ways that are place-specific yet globally connected.

Networks also bring a third form of added value: they enable narrative transformation at scale. According to one expert from a cultural relations network consulted for this study, the field increasingly relies on storytelling because, while policymakers tend to be most persuaded by quantitative evidence that the sector largely lacks, cultural actors are able to shift narratives, perspectives and fears.²¹⁹ Partnerships multiply these shifts by connecting artists, cultural workers, and communities across borders, allowing new narratives to travel, resonate, and reshape public discourse.

Conclusions

Despite their strengths, the governance of cultural-climate networks faces recurring challenges. Many partnerships must contend with uneven power dynamics, especially between Global North institutions with greater access to funding and Global South actors carrying heavier climate burdens. One expert consulted for this study highlighted this imbalance, pointing to the disproportionate emotional burden placed on partners in the Global South and their unequal access to funding and mobility.²²⁰ Additionally, these networks

²¹⁸ Interview with Alison Tickell (Julie’s Bicycle), conducted for this study.

²¹⁹ Interview with Michelle Sun (EUNIC Global Office), conducted for this study.

²²⁰ Interview with Yasmine Ostendorf-Rodríguez (Green Art Lab Alliance – GALA), conducted for this study.

often operate with limited resources, relying heavily on volunteerism, precarious funding cycles or overstretched institutions. Another interviewee observed that cultural actors are often kept at the margins of formal climate diplomacy, which limits their influence.²²¹ Finally, rapid organisational growth can introduce risks of mission drift, instrumentalisation or extractive collaboration. Several structural gaps remain within

the existing ecosystem. Many networks themselves identify the need to move beyond fragmented, time-limited collaboration toward durable infrastructures of care and coordination. Civil society cultural networks frequently operate through voluntary labour, relational trust, and shared values, which - while enabling responsiveness and experimentation - also expose them to risks of burnout, institutional fatigue, and fragmentation.

3.4.2 British Council's contribution in this area

Category	Description
Typology	Networks, partnerships and cultural relations
Typology footprint	11 interventions
Geographic spread	Activity in 41 countries; Regions: LATAC, North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia, Europe, Wider Europe, MENA, UK
Indicative funding (2021–2025)	Portfolio-level funding delivered through seasonal programmes, collaboration grants, scholarships and fellowships; emphasis on leveraging partnerships rather than standalone CBCA funds
Typical intervention delivery mechanisms	Bilateral and multilateral cultural seasons; international collaboration grants; scholarships, fellowships and professional mobility
British Council's main role	Connector, convenor, knowledge partner and fund manager; COP participation; knowledge partner of the Group of Friends for Culture-Based Climate Action; broker of long-term cultural relations aligned with climate priorities
Typical outcomes	Relational outcomes (partnerships, trust, sustained networks); cognitive outcomes (shared learning, capability building)

Category	Examples
Collaborations and relations building	<i>Working through collaborations and relations building: International Seasons of Culture (UK/Vietnam, UK/Brazil, UK/Pakistan)</i>
Convening, connections and facilitation	<i>Creating connections and platforms for CBCA: The Culture and Environment Roundtable; Cultural Relations Collection series; Making Matters</i>
Fellowships and scholarships	<i>Enabling collaboration and knowledge exchange: EARTH Scholarships; Climate Connection Research Fellowships</i>
Grant programmes	<i>Enabling connections through grants: Connections through Culture grant programme; International Collaboration Grant programme</i>
Portfolio profile	<i>Networks, partnerships and cultural relations</i>

²²¹ Interview with Michelle Sun (EUNIC Global Office), conducted for this study.

Here, the British Council's role lies less in delivering CBCA directly than in creating the relationships, platforms and collaborative conditions through which it can travel, scale and take root across borders through alliances, platforms, and cultural relations mechanisms. Across the current set of interventions, this takes multiple forms, including grant programmes, fellowships, scholarships, workshops, roundtables, bilateral seasons, and knowledge platforms. Taken together, these suggest a role centred on convening, brokerage, exchange, and partnership-building rather than technical implementation alone. As a cultural relations organisation, this typology is also at the centre of the British Council's approach and way of working.

A further layer of the British Council's contribution lies in centrally managed global networks and strategic relationships. These include engagement with global networks and partners such as the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action, EUNIC, UNESCO and the Entertainment and Culture Pavilion. Its strategic relationship with Julie's Bicycle also helps enable activity and exchange across regions.²²² Beyond this global layer, the mapped interventions within the typology show a strong pattern of UK-linked international collaboration, with APAC and Europe as the clearest centres of gravity, alongside engagement across LATAC and MENA.

At the level of mapped programmes, the British Council appears to work through a set of overlapping regional and thematic partnership architectures shaped by context, existing relationships and opportunity windows. The programmes range from research mobility and peer learning to open-call grant-making, digital dialogue formats and season-based cultural platforms, indicating a portfolio built around connection, exchange and collaboration.²²³

This becomes clearer in specific programmes such as *Connections Through Culture Grants*, *Climate Connection Research Fellowships*²²⁴ and *EARTH Scholarships*,²²⁵ as they show how the portfolio also works through mobility, research collaboration and knowledge exchange. In the case of the *Climate Connection Research Fellowships*, this is tied specifically to community-led climate resilience, gender and local knowledge, linking UK institutions with researchers and partners in the Global South. This approach matters because it shows that there is not only about building connections, but also about what those connections make possible: the circulation of locally grounded knowledge across institutions and contexts.²²⁶ The British Council's cultural relations approach is framed as a reciprocal, trust-based and long-term way of working across borders, where value lies not only in outputs but in the relationships, dialogue, mutual understanding, and opportunities

²²² <https://juliesbicycle.org/news/british-council/>

²²³ Annex 1 - British Council Portfolio Mapping. To be downloaded at the dedicated link

²²⁴ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection-research-fellowships>

²²⁵ EARTH Scholarships | British Council

²²⁶ Climate action, community resilience and women's empowerment | British Council

created through collaboration.²²⁷ This is visible in recurring bilateral platforms such as the *International Seasons of Culture*, which are explicitly designed to deepen relationships with partner countries and create new opportunities for international collaboration.²²⁸ A related example is the British Council's long-standing role in organising the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. While this is not treated as a standalone CBCA intervention, it shows how climate-related themes can also be integrated into wider cultural relations platforms, as seen in the exhibition *GBR - Geology of Britannic Repair*, which explored repair, extraction and resilience in the face of climate issues.²²⁹

The strongest visible outcomes in this typology are therefore more within the cognitive and relational domains. This is supported by British Council's research on climate co-operation, emphasising that cultural relations institutions can help create the enabling environment for effective international action by building trust, solidarity, mutuality, and context-sensitive forms of co-operation.²³⁰

COP relevance

Within this typology, COPs function as a recurring platform for mobilisation,

partnership-building, co-delivery of events. This is visible across the set of interventions, where several programmes are linked to COP cycles in different ways. *We Are the Possible*,²³¹ a collaboration between British Council and the University of Exeter is a good example because it demonstrates continuity across COP cycles rather than a single activation. It was originally a creative commission for COP27 in Egypt, and was further developed and showcased at later COPs, and is now established as a recurring partnership programme.²³² That makes it one of the clearest examples of how this typology can use COP not only for visibility, but for reactivating and extending partnerships over time.

COPs can also offer the opportunity for the British Council to contribute to conversations or panel sessions with or through strategic partners such as Julie's Bicycle,²³³ Entertainment and Culture Pavilion²³⁴ and INTO,²³⁵ who have co-organised or participated in CBCA-relevant events at several COPs. They are also an important platform for British Council to involve itself in conversations that are shaping the wider CBCA field.

The British Council's added value in

²²⁷ Karanàsou, F., & Lemoine, E. (2024). Cultural relations in action: A research study on the British Council's International Collaboration Grants programme. British Council. <https://doi.org/10.57884/X9Y4-1792>

²²⁸ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/projects/international-seasons-culture>

²²⁹ British Council. (2025). 2025 GBR – Geology of Britannic Repair. British Council Venice Biennale. <https://venicebiennale.britishcouncil.org/history/2020s/2025-geology-britannic-repair>

²³⁰ Baily, A. (2021, June). Acting together on climate change: Attitudes, values and new approaches to international co-operation. British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/acting_together_on_climate_change_0.pdf

²³¹ <https://greenfutures.exeter.ac.uk/our-impact/we-are-the-possible-landing-page/>

²³² Ibidem.

²³³ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection-cop29>, <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/get-involved/cop27>

²³⁴ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cop28_british_council_programme.pdf

²³⁵ [british-council-cop29-programme.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cop29-programme.pdf)

this area lies not primarily in its presence at COPs, but in its ability to cultivate, sustain and work through long-term partnerships and trusted relationships. Interviewees highlighted the organisation's role in facilitating access to networks, platforms and audiences that may otherwise be difficult for cultural practitioners to reach, particularly within policy-oriented contexts such as COP processes.²³⁶ The organisation's contribution was therefore often described less in terms of direct delivery and more in terms of enabling visibility, connection and participation within wider climate governance and cultural ecosystems.

This approach became particularly visible at COP29, where the British Council adopted a partnership-led model centred on strategic venue collaborations, co-delivered events and knowledge-partnership roles, including its engagement with the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action. Evidence from the COP29 evaluation indicates that this approach contributed to the engagement of 35 partner organisations, including 21 new partnerships, and supported the development of at least six new collaborative projects.²³⁷ These findings suggest that the organisation's contribution to culture-based climate action is often realised through its capacity to convene actors, strengthen networks and create opportunities for collaboration that extend beyond individual events or conference cycles.

Read together, these findings suggest that the relevance of COP for this typology lies in three elements: 1) It offers a high-visibility setting in which culture can enter climate conversations and spaces, 2) it creates a practical framework for convening and cross-border collaboration, 3) and it can help extend partnership arcs beyond the summit itself. At the same time, the evidence also suggests that this value is strongest when COP is treated as part of a longer partnership cycle rather than as a standalone event.

Programme spotlight: UK/Vietnam season

The UK/Vietnam Season 2023 is a useful spotlight for this typology, not because the Season was exclusively CBCA-related, but because its climate-relevant strand shows particularly clearly how British Council works through partnerships, exchange, and relationship-building as a delivery model. Marking 50 years of diplomatic relations between the UK and Vietnam and 30 years of British Council's presence in Vietnam, the Season brought together Arts and Culture, Education and English under the themes of Shared Heritage and Climate and the Environment.²³⁸ Climate-related collaboration was embedded within a wider bilateral cultural relations platform designed to create new partnerships, deepen existing ones and support cross-border exchange.

²³⁶ Interview with Michelle Sun (EUNIC), conducted for this study.

²³⁷ The Social Investment Consultancy (TSIC), British Council's Participation at COP29/COY19 – Impact Evaluation Report, July 2025

²³⁸ Bradley, C., Goodacre, J., Wagner, C., Lugli, F., & Hobson, S. (2024, April). British Council UK Viet Nam Season 2023 evaluation final report. The Audience Agency for the British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/uk_viet_nam_season_evaluation_final_report.pdf

Out of 30 projects, 19 projects focused on climate and the environment, and 14 were arts related. It becomes clear that collaboration was not simply an output of the programme but one of its central operating mechanisms. Across the programme, participants reported strong value in the partnerships formed, including mutual learning, experimentation, aligned vision and greater confidence in working across cultures. This is also reflected in the evaluation data, where 97 per cent of projects stated that they would like to work in the other country again. This is significant because, as one expert consulted for this study noted when reflecting on what makes partnerships work, effective collaboration rests on trust, a shared sense of purpose and a mutual commitment to solidarity.²³⁹

The British Council's role also appears to have extended beyond grant administration into facilitation and local relationship support, which is particularly relevant for this typology. The British Council climate-relevant strand helps illustrate how this worked in practice. Mother Goddesses of the Three Realms, for example, brought together UK and Vietnamese artists, designers and Blue H'Mong craftswomen through residency-based exchange, workshops and public showcasing, linking climate, heritage and sustainable design through

collaborative practice. Climate Storytelling Workshops similarly created a space for shared inquiry around environmental storytelling, immersive media and data-informed creative methods.²⁴⁰ These examples are useful not because they prove long-term climate impact on their own, but because they show how the British Council creates the relational conditions through which climate-relevant co-creation, dialogue and experimentation can take place across borders. The strongest evidenced outcomes of the season are relational and cognitive, where a large portion of participants pointed out that they had developed their professional network, made connections they would not otherwise have made, and became part of a wider intercultural or international network.²⁴¹ At the same time, it also points to an important limitation: follow-on legacy was promising but remains to be entirely realised, and the evidence base was weighted more heavily toward UK lead partners than Vietnamese participants. As a spotlight, it shows British Council's distinctiveness in building trust-based partnerships and enabling cross-border collaboration, while also underlining that the longer-term effects of those relationships are harder to evidence at this stage.

²³⁹ Interview with Alison Tickell (Julie's Bicycle), conducted for this study.

²⁴⁰ https://www.britishcouncil.vn/sites/default/files/ukvietnam_season_brochure.pdf, p.11.

²⁴¹ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/uk_viet_nam_season_evaluation_final_report.pdf, p.44.



3.5 Environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors

3.5.1 Global evidence landscape

This section maps the global landscape of CCS environmental sustainability interventions from COP26 to COP30. It is structured around the major COP milestones, identifies the principal actors and mechanisms across subsectors and regions, assesses the evidence of progress and the structural gaps that remain, and situates the British Council's work within this wider field.

The cultural and creative sectors (CCS) occupy a paradoxical position in the global sustainability transition. As industries, they generate a significant and often underestimated environmental footprint: energy-intensive heritage buildings, large-scale touring circuits, physical production chains, and expanding digital infrastructures collectively produce substantial greenhouse gas emissions. As cultural forces, they hold a unique capacity to model sustainable practices, inspire public action, and make the ecological transition socially meaningful. Understanding environmental sustainability in the CCS therefore requires holding both dimensions simultaneously: the CCS as a sector that must itself decarbonise, and as a set of institutions and practices with distinctive potential to accelerate wider transitions.²⁴² According to co-founder of the Entertainment and Culture

Pavillion²⁴³ Samuel Rubin, culture operates simultaneously as an industry with its own environmental footprint and as a societal force capable of shaping public awareness, values, and behaviour in relation to climate change. Efforts towards a cleaner, greener sector, however, are beginning to align the sector's internal practices with the public values it seeks to cultivate.

Between COP26 and COP30, action on environmental sustainability within the CCS has accelerated substantially. What was, in 2021, largely a voluntary and institutionally patchy set of commitments has evolved, in many contexts, into a structured policy agenda characterised by binding reporting requirements, national-level decarbonisation roadmaps, sector-specific certification schemes, and an expanding suite of measurement tools. This evolution has been driven by a combination of public funding leverage — where arts councils and film funds have used their grant-making power to mandate sustainability action — and bottom-up sector mobilisation, where professional networks, industry bodies, and NGOs have developed shared standards and practices that governments have increasingly formalised.

The geographic distribution of this activity has been uneven. The most developed infrastructure remains concentrated in Northern and Western Europe and, to a growing degree, parts of North America and East Asia. Africa,

²⁴² UNESCO (2025). MONDIACULT 2025: Report and Annexes. Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2026/02/Report%20MONDIACULT%202025%20%26%20Annexes%20Dec.%202025%20FW.pdf>

²⁴³ Entertainment + Culture Pavilion (n.d.). About. Available at: <https://www.entertainmentculturepavilion.org/about>

South and South-East Asia, Latin America, the Pacific, and the MENA region are progressively entering the landscape, but typically with less systemic depth and fewer resources. This asymmetry is one of the most analytically significant findings of the mapping exercise and shapes the recommendations set out in Section 5.

COP26 in November 2021 did not produce specific negotiated commitments on CCS sustainability, but it marked a catalytic moment for the field. Most significantly, it coincided with the introduction of the most structurally consequential CCS sustainability policy instrument yet deployed globally: Arts Council England's mandatory environmental reporting requirements for its National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) as part of its Let's Create 10-year strategy 2020-2030.

From the 2023–26 investment round, the approximately 900 organisations receiving ACE funding were required — as a contractual condition of their investment — to adopt an environmental policy, report annually on their carbon footprint, and demonstrate year-on-year progress.²⁴⁴ The requirement was operationalised through the Arts Council England Environmental Programme, delivered by Julie's Bicycle, which provides funded

organisations with free reporting tools, training, and resources including the flagship *Transforming Energy* and *Leading Resilience* subprogrammes.²⁴⁵ By 2024–25, the joint Arts Council England/Julie's Bicycle annual report documented environmental data submissions from 57% of the portfolio (558 NPOs), one of the most comprehensive sector-level datasets on cultural organisation environmental performance anywhere in the world.²⁴⁶ This model — using funding conditionality rather than exhortation as the driver of institutional change — has become a reference point for arts councils globally.

In 2021, the Theatre Green Book launched in the UK as a free, open-access framework providing practical standards for productions, operations, and buildings across the performing arts.²⁴⁷ Developed by a sector-wide consortium, the Theatre Green Book rapidly became the de facto shared standard for sustainable theatre production in the UK and has since been adopted internationally. Its Japanese adaptation — launched in 2022 by Image Nation Green — extended the model to Asia's major performing arts market.²⁴⁸ The European Theatre Convention (ETC) Sustainable Action Code, also adopted in 2021, committed ETC member

²⁴⁴ Arts Council England, 'Environmental Reporting Requirements for National Portfolio Organisations' (2023–2026). Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/environmental-responsibility>

²⁴⁵ Julie's Bicycle, 'Arts Council England Environmental Programme'. Available at: <https://julesbicycle.org/what-we-do/creative-climate-programmes/arts-council-england/>. Subprogrammes include Transforming Energy (reducing energy use in buildings) and Leading Resilience (supporting creative leadership in adapting to climate impacts).

²⁴⁶ Arts Council England / Julie's Bicycle, 'Culture, Climate and Environmental Responsibility: Annual Report 2024–25' (2025). Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/environmental-responsibility/culture-climate-and-environmental-responsibility-report-202425>. The report documents self-reported environmental data submitted by 57% of the portfolio (558 NPOs).

²⁴⁷ Theatre Green Book (2021–present). Available at: <https://theatregreenbook.com/>. The resource provides a framework for planning, best practice guidance, a measurement system and shared standards for the performing arts sector globally.

²⁴⁸ Image Nation Green, 'Theatre Green Book Japan Implementation' (2022–present). Available at: <https://www.imagenationgreen.org/theatregreenbookjp/en>

theatres to achieving climate neutrality by 2030, creating the policy framework within which the EU certification pilot would subsequently be developed.²⁴⁹

In the visual art market, the Gallery Climate Coalition (GCC) — founded in London in 2020 and now an international membership charity with members in around 60 countries — launched its commitment for members to reduce emissions by 50% by 2030, alongside a free, publicly accessible carbon calculator that has since become a standard tool for galleries, art fair organisers, and logistics providers worldwide.²⁵⁰ In the live events space, A Greener Future (AGF) — the UK organisation formerly A Greener Festival, whose certification scheme has run since 2007 — provides audited sustainability certification for festivals, events, venues and tours, combining self-assessment, on-site visits by independent assessors and a post-event report.²⁵¹ In the gaming sector, the UN Environment Programme's *Playing for the Planet Alliance* secured net-zero and emissions reduction commitments from major video game studios, publishing annual impact reports and running the *Green Game Jam*.²⁵²

Alongside certification and reporting frameworks, practical infrastructure initiatives have begun to emerge that address one of the most persistent barriers to sustainable production:

access to clean energy on location. In Canada, Creative British Columbia's *Reel Green* initiative launched a grid power access map identifying film-friendly electrical infrastructure across the province of British Columbia. By enabling production teams to locate nearby grid connections and reduce reliance on diesel generators, the tool provides a practical mechanism for lowering emissions during location shooting and illustrates how shared data infrastructure can support more sustainable production planning across the screen sector for entire regions, as mentioned by Rubin.

Between COP26 and COP27: European policy architecture

The period between COP26 and COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, November 2022) saw the construction of a denser European-level policy architecture for CCS sustainability, as multiple national governments and public funders moved from strategy to formal obligation. In France, the Ministry of Culture launched the Plan de Sobriété Énergétique for the cultural sector in 2022, introducing energy caps, reduced heating targets, and efficiency retrofit requirements across publicly owned museums and theatres.²⁵³ Italy simultaneously embedded ecological transition in culture as a formal strand of its National Recovery and Resilience Plan

²⁴⁹ European Theatre Convention, 'ETC Sustainable Action Code for Theatres' (2021). Available at: <https://www.europantheatre.eu/about-sustainable-theatre>

²⁵⁰ Gallery Climate Coalition, '50% Reduction Commitment' (2021–present). Available at: <https://galleryclimatecoalition.org/what-we-do>. The GCC Carbon Calculator is available at: <https://measure.galleryclimatecoalition.org/>

²⁵¹ A Greener Future (AGF), 'Greener Festival Certification' (2021–present). Available at: <https://www.agreenerfuture.com/greener-festival-certification>

²⁵² UN Environment Programme, 'Playing for the Planet Alliance' (2021–present). Available at: <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/education-environment/what-we-do/playing-planet>

²⁵³ Ministry of Culture (France), 'Plan de Sobriété Énergétique – Cultural Sector' (2022–present). Available at: <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/thematiques/transition-ecologique/sobriete-energetique-conseils-et-bonnes-pratiques-pour-les-etablissement-culturels>

(PNRR), directing funds to energy efficiency upgrades, green procurement reform, and digitalisation in museums, archives, and heritage sites.²⁵⁴ Sweden embedded sustainability criteria formally into its national arts grant application framework,²⁵⁵ and the Netherlands' Creative Industries Fund NL required all applicants to outline environmental mitigation strategies as a condition of project support.²⁵⁶

In the screen industry, two significant national funding policy instruments took effect. Germany's Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media mandated Green Shooting Ecological Standards for all productions receiving funding from the German Federal Film Fund in 2023, requiring CO₂ calculator use, minimum ecological standards, and audited reporting.²⁵⁷ Austria's Film Institute introduced a 5% funding bonus for productions complying with independently verified green criteria - an incentive-based complement to Germany's regulatory approach.²⁵⁸ Such instruments have helped to establish a German-speaking European model for audiovisual sector decarbonisation through public funding levers that several

other national film funds would go on to reference.²⁵⁹

The music sector saw the Finnish Jazz Federation's Carbon-Neutral Touring Roadmap 2030 - covering carbon audits, touring redesign, and a published reduction plan - providing one of the first sector-specific touring decarbonisation models in Europe.²⁶⁰ In 2022, both Sweden and the Netherlands, and subsequently Denmark (from 2023) and Finland's Heritage Agency (from 2022), formalised sustainability in their respective cultural funding and institutional management frameworks.^{261,262}

At the EU level, the European Commission published a study on Greening the Creative Europe Programme in 2023, providing recommendations and monitoring guidance for programme managers and beneficiaries across the EU's flagship cultural funding instrument. The same year saw the launch of the Eurocities Lille Call to Action for Low-Carbon and More Inclusive Culture, through which 60 European

²⁵⁴ Ministry of Culture (Italy), 'Ecological Transition Plan for Culture (PNRR)' (2022–present). Available at: <https://pnrr.cultura.gov.it/>

²⁵⁵ Swedish Arts Council, 'Climate and Environment Strategy' (2022–present). Available at: <https://www.kulturradet.se/en/our-grants/programme-for-artistic-freedom/guiding-principles/>

²⁵⁶ Creative Industries Fund NL, 'Sustainability Policy' (2022–present). Available at: <https://dutchculture.nl/en/location/creative-industries-fund-nl>

²⁵⁷ Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media (Germany), 'Green Shooting Ecological Standards – DFFF' (2023–present). Available at: <https://www.ffa.de/download.php?f=ffaeeb9c2d8cdbac9e3f05f9b0ce3dc7.pdf>

²⁵⁸ Austrian Film Institute, 'Green Bonus' (2022–present). Available at: <https://www.filminstitut.at/en/funding/green-filming/>

²⁵⁹ European Film Agency Directors Association (EFAD) (n.d.). EFAD Members' Sustainability Initiatives. Available at: <https://www.europeanfilmagencies.eu/working-groups/efad-members-sustainability-initiatives>

²⁶⁰ Finnish Jazz Federation, 'Carbon-Neutral Touring Roadmap 2030' (2022–2030). Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/policy-monitoring-platform/roadmap-jazz-federations-carbon-neutral-touring-2030>

²⁶¹ Ministry of Culture (Denmark), 'Denmark Culture Climate Action Framework' (2023–present). Available at: <https://kulturensanalyseinstitut.dk/viden/groen-baeredygtighed/>

²⁶² Finnish Heritage Agency, 'Sustainable Development Programme' (2022–present). Available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/news/the-finnish-heritage-agency-to-lead-a-project-in-northern-europe-dedicated-to-safeguarding-living-heritage-and-sustainable-development-13345>

cities committed to embedding culture as a lever for sustainable urban development. A report published in 2026 catalogued 100 concrete initiatives implemented by signatory cities across the network's 16 shared goals, demonstrating that urban cultural governance was becoming a significant site of CCS sustainability action alongside national arts funding frameworks.²⁶³

Taken together, these initiatives signal a broader shift from voluntary sustainability commitments toward measurable and governable environmental accountability within the CCS. Carbon calculators, sustainability indicators, and reporting frameworks are increasingly being used not only as internal management tools but also as knowledge-sharing tools across the sector, enabling peers in the field to embed best-practices together through shared efforts, as well as mechanisms through which funders, public authorities, and sector networks can track progress, benchmark performance, and integrate environmental considerations into funding and governance systems. Interviewees also emphasised the importance of strengthening the legitimacy and uptake of such metrics so that environmental accountability can be more effectively embedded in policy and compliance frameworks.²⁶⁴

COP27 to COP28: certification, standards and expanding geography

The period between COP27 and COP28 (Dubai, December 2023) saw the maturation of sector-specific certification and standards infrastructure, and the first significant expansion of CCS sustainability action beyond Europe and North America.

In the performing arts, the Theatre Green Book EU Certification Pilot, developed by the European Theatre Convention, launched in 2024 with a structured certification scheme adapted from the UK Theatre Green Book, providing stepwise production standards, carbon tracking, and a pilot cohort of participating European theatres working towards net-zero production.²⁶⁵ In Germany, the Federal Academy for Cultural Education ran the SIN (Start in die Nachhaltigkeit) programme in 2023–24, offering free advisory support to publicly funded cultural institutions on climate strategy development and governance reform.²⁶⁶

Beyond Europe, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) Korea's Museum Carbon Project began implementing energy-efficient systems and institutional sustainability targets.²⁶⁷ In South Korea's screen industry, the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) issued guidance on sustainable set construction covering material reuse, energy-efficient

²⁶³ Eurocities, 'Lille Call to Action for Low-Carbon and More Inclusive Culture' (2022). Available at: <https://eurocities.eu/latest/100-initiatives-60-cities-one-commitment-low-carbon-and-inclusive-culture-in-action/>. The 2026 report documents 100 initiatives implemented across 60 signatory cities towards the 16 goals of the common framework.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Alison Tickell (Julie's Bicycle), conducted for this study.

²⁶⁵ European Theatre Convention / Theatre Green Book, 'Theatre Green Book EU Certification Pilot' (2024–present). Available at: <https://www.europeantheatre.eu/self-certification>

²⁶⁶ Federal Academy for Cultural Education (Germany), 'SIN – Start in die Nachhaltigkeit' (2023–2024). Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/policy-monitoring-platform/sin-start-die-nachhaltigkeit-fur-kulturinstitutionen-advice-cultural-institutions-start-engaging>

²⁶⁷ National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, 'Museum Carbon Project' (2025–present). Available at: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/483833/performing-arts-2022-museum-carbon-project/>

lighting, and waste reduction systems.²⁶⁸ In Latin America, Mexico's IMCINE integrated sustainability standards into national film production support,²⁶⁹ and Brazil's ANCINE incorporated sustainability criteria into audiovisual production policies addressing waste, transport, and energy.²⁷⁰ Chile's Natural History Museum, Valparaíso, was the first to document and quantify its carbon footprint in 2024, establishing sustainability standards across state museums.²⁷¹

In the Oceania region, Screen Australia formalised mandatory carbon measurement and environmental reporting for funded screen productions,²⁷² while Greenlit Aotearoa in New Zealand developed one of the world's first dedicated carbon calculators for national screen industry productions.²⁷³ In Africa, the Heritage Management Organisation completed a renewable energy installation project at a national museum in Lagos, Nigeria, reducing operational energy costs and carbon emissions²⁷⁴ — one of the few documented CCS sustainability

infrastructure projects on the continent in this period. The South African national arts council also introduced a climate framework embedding sustainability criteria into its funding mechanisms.²⁷⁵

COP29 (Baku, 2024) and the consolidation of measurement infrastructure

The period leading to COP29 in Baku (November 2024) was characterised by the proliferation of measurement tools and assessment frameworks for CCS sustainability — filling a critical gap that had constrained data-driven policy in the earlier period.

The Bizot Group / National Museum Directors Council's Guiding Principles for Reducing Museums' Carbon Footprint, published in 2023, provided operational principles for lower-energy climate control and lower-carbon logistics specifically for large international museums, and were adopted by several major national collections.²⁷⁶ The CreaSus Consortium²⁷⁷ — an EU-funded (Creative

²⁶⁸ Korean Film Council, Ko-pick: Sustainable Filmmaking: Eco-Friendly Filming Sites and Green Production. Available at: https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/ko_pick.jsp?blbdComCd=601029&mode=VIEW&seq=117

²⁶⁹ IMCINE (Mexican Film Institute), Lineamientos de Operación del Programa Fomento al Cine Mexicano (FOCINE) 2026. Available at: <https://www.imcine.gob.mx/produccion-sustentable/>

²⁷⁰ ANCINE (Brazilian Film Agency), Plano de Diretrizes e Metas do Audiovisual Brasileiro (2025-2034). Available at: <https://ancine.gov.br/pt-br/sustentabilidade>

²⁷¹ Valparaíso Natural History Museum: First museum to quantify its carbon footprint in Chile. Available at: <https://www.patrimoniocultural.gob.cl/noticias/museo-de-historia-natural-de-valparaiso-primer-museo-en-cuantificar-su-huella-de-carbono>

²⁷² Screen Australia, 'Sustainability Framework' (2021–present). Available at: <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/6ca416d1-c92d-44fa-8530-d899b84199f4/COVID-Safe-Sustainability-Guidelines.pdf>

²⁷³ Sustainable Screen Aotearoa, Carbon Calculator (2021–present). Available at: <https://greenlit.org.nz/>

²⁷⁴ Heritage Management Organisation, 'Sustainable Energy for National Museum' (Nigeria). Available at: <https://heritagemanagement.org/projects/p2/sustainable-energy-for-national-museum/>

²⁷⁵ National Arts Council South Africa, ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLAN 2024/25 Financial Year. Available at: <https://www.nac.org.za/climate-framework>

²⁷⁶ Bizot Group / National Museum Directors Council, 'Guiding Principles for Reducing Museums' Carbon Footprint' (2023). Available at: https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/media/uk_museum_cop/bizot_handbook_1_adopting_the_bizot_green_guidelines.pdf

²⁷⁷ <https://creasus.eu/>

Europe) partnership coordinated by Fundación Banco Santander in Spain, with partners across Belgium, Greece, Ireland and Italy — published a comprehensive Sustainability Assessment Model for Cultural and Creative Sector Institutions in 2024, providing an ESG-structured dashboard of indicators enabling cultural organisations to benchmark themselves across environmental, social, and governance dimensions.²⁷⁸ In parallel, researchers at the Universities of Lausanne (UNIL) and Applied Sciences Zurich (ZHAW) under the Culture for the Planet initiative developed a framework of 34 Key Sustainability Indicators (KSIs) tested with arts and cultural organisations worldwide, a modular, progressive framework designed to support both organisational self-assessment and funder benchmarking.²⁷⁹

At the EU level, DG CONNECT announced the development of a Common Carbon Emissions Calculator for the European Audiovisual Sector in 2025, a shared methodology and web application providing interoperable footprint calculation across national screen industries, complementing existing national tools such as the German, Austrian, and French calculators.²⁸⁰

In terms of geographic reach, 2023–24 saw a notable diversification. Flanders launched a policy effort for promoting cultural institutions to voluntarily hit climate targets and engage in circular processes within the sector,²⁸¹ while Ireland's Arts Council embedded climate action formally in its funding frameworks,²⁸² and Canada Council for the Arts published its Climate Action Framework.²⁸³

Beyond the Global North, two significant interventions emerged from the fashion industry, a notably pollutant subsector of the broader cultural and creative sectors. The International Finance Corporation announced a \$100 million sustainability-linked financing package with EPIC Group to reduce energy and water use in textile manufacturing across Bangladesh and India, targeting a 65% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions per garment by 2030.²⁸⁴ Furthermore, in December of that year, governments across Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean launched the 'Integrated Programme on Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals from Supply Chains' – an initiative promoting regenerative design and resource-efficient production in the fashion sector, notable for its explicit integration of Indigenous knowledge and its commitment to

²⁷⁸ CreaSus Consortium, 'Sustainability Assessment Model for Cultural and Creative Sector Institutions' (2024). Available at: <https://creasus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Deliverable-2.1-Sustainability-assessment-model-for-CCSIs.pdf>

²⁷⁹ Culture for the Planet (UNIL / ZHAW), 'Assessing and Monitoring Sustainability in Cultural Organisations – Framework of 34 Key Sustainability Indicators' (research 2024–25, report 2026). Available at: https://cimam.org/news-archive/assessing-and-monitoring-sustainability-in-cultural-organisations_news/

²⁸⁰ DG CONNECT (European Commission), 'A Common Carbon Emissions Calculator for the European Audiovisual Sector' (2025). Available at: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/common-carbon-emissions-calculator-european-audiovisual-sector-towards-environmentally-conscious>

²⁸¹ Frans Masereel Centrum. Flemish Cultural Policy Document (2024–2029). Available at: <https://publicaties.vlaanderen.be/view-file/70838>

²⁸² Arts Council Ireland, 'Climate Action Roadmap (2025–present)'. Available at: <https://artscouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Climate-Action-Roadmap-2025-Arts-Council.pdf>

²⁸³ Canada Council for the Arts, 'Climate Action Framework' (2023–present). Available at: <https://canadacouncil.ca/about/governance/strategic-plans>

²⁸⁴ <https://www.ifc.org/en/pressroom/2024/ifc-and-epic-group-partner-to-support-sustainable-textile-manufacturing-in-bangladesh-and-india>

cooperation within and amongst nations across the Global South, as opposed to turning to and relying on Northern frameworks of production.²⁸⁵

COP30 (Belém, 2025): deepening and diversification

By COP30, the landscape of CCS environmental sustainability had deepened considerably, with action documented across an expanded range of geographies, subsectors, and intervention types.

In the performing arts, the ETC Theatre Green Book EU Certification Pilot had moved beyond its initial cohort, with participating theatres publishing progress reports across the pilot framework's three certification levels. Julie's Bicycle continued to expand its Rethinking International Touring programme - working with artists, agents, and presenters to redesign touring circuits around carbon reduction - addressing one of the most structurally difficult emissions sources in the CCS.²⁸⁶ The Ki Culture guides on energy and waste management continued to circulate as practical reference tools for museum and heritage professionals globally.²⁸⁷

New government instruments were documented in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The Philippines' National Commission for Culture and the Arts launched a Green Cultural Events Framework applying environmental criteria to publicly funded festivals, and Thailand's Ministry of Culture introduced

a national certification scheme for sustainable cultural venue operations. Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy integrated climate standards into new creative hub development. In the MENA region, the UAE Ministry of Culture initiated sustainability integration in new cultural infrastructure projects, contextualised by the country's co-chairmanship of the GFCBCA process launched at COP28 and its joint research report with the British Council *Rooted in Resilience*.

Gender dimensions

Gender equality has not yet emerged as a systematically foregrounded dimension of CCS environmental sustainability policy. The dominant framing of interventions, focused on institutional decarbonisation, emissions reporting, and supply-chain management, has tended to adopt a gender-neutral technical register that does not explicitly interrogate the differentiated position of women and men within cultural labour markets, or the gendered distribution of the costs and benefits of sustainability transitions.

This represents a significant gap. Women are disproportionately represented in precarious, informal, and lower-paid roles within the CCS - roles most exposed to the transition costs of sustainability requirements, such as compliance reporting, new equipment investment, and redesigned production processes. Sustainability-related restructuring in fashion, event production, and screen industries has the potential to deepen

²⁸⁵ <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/new-initiative-aims-reduce-environmental-impact-fashion-construction>

²⁸⁶ Julie's Bicycle, 'Rethinking International Touring with Environmental Responsibility' (since 2022). Available at: <https://julesbicycle.org/what-we-do/creative-climate-programmes/international-touring-environmental-responsibility/>

²⁸⁷ Ki Culture, 'Energy Guide' (2021). Available at: <https://www.kiculture.org/ki-books/>. See also Ki Culture, 'Waste and Materials Guide' (2021), same series.

existing inequalities if distributional impacts are not considered at programme design stage.

Across the CCS sustainability interventions reviewed for this typology, gender considerations appear occasionally in programme documentation - most often in the form of general references to inclusivity or diversity - but are rarely operationalised through specific mechanisms such as gender-disaggregated targets, participation quotas, or tailored support for women-led organisations. The intersection of gender and CCS sustainability therefore represents a largely underdeveloped analytical and programmatic space. At sector level, this points to the need to build gender-disaggregated data into CCS sustainability programmes from the design stage, and to assess the distributional effects of sustainability transitions on a predominantly female and precariously employed cultural workforce rather than assuming them to be neutral.

Conclusions

The COP26–COP30 period represents a genuine step-change in the institutionalisation of environmental sustainability within the CCS. Five broad achievements stand out from the mapping exercise.

First, the shift from voluntary aspiration to binding obligation in key funding contexts is the most structurally significant development of the period. Arts Council England's mandatory reporting requirements for 900+ NPOs, Germany's federal film fund ecological

standards, Austria's green bonus mechanism, Sweden's and Norway's arts council sustainability criteria, and Canada Council's climate framework all represent the use of public funding power as a lever for mandatory institutional change - a qualitatively different form of intervention from voluntary pledges or sector guidelines. Where these mechanisms are in place, evidence of institutional change is measurable: the ACE/Julie's Bicycle annual report provides a documented, year-on-year dataset tracking progress across hundreds of organisations' initiatives.²⁸⁸

Second, the proliferation of sector-specific tools and measurement frameworks has substantially reduced the barrier to entry for cultural organisations wanting to measure and reduce their environmental footprint. The Theatre Green Book, the GCC Carbon Calculator, Ki Culture's guides, the CreaSus model, the Culture for the Planet KSI framework, and the Tools for Action museums resources collectively constitute a dense ecosystem of accessible sustainability infrastructure that did not exist at this scale before 2021.

Third, the geographic reach of CCS sustainability action has expanded considerably. The mapping covers interventions in Africa (Nigeria, South Africa, Botswana, Tanzania, Morocco), Asia (Japan, South Korea, India, Nepal, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand), Latin America (Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Costa Rica, Jamaica), North America (Canada), and the Gulf (UAE) - as well as extensive European coverage. While the depth and systemic character of these interventions vary enormously,

²⁸⁸ Arts Council England and Julie's Bicycle (2025). Culture, Climate and Environmental Responsibility Report 2024/25. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/developing-creativity-and-culture/environmental-responsibility/culture-climate-and-environmental-responsibility-report-202425>

the geographic spread represents a real broadening from the near-exclusively European and Anglophone landscape of 2021.

Fourth, the audiovisual sector has developed the most advanced and internationally convergent sustainability infrastructure of any CCS subsector. National-level film fund green standards now exist in Germany, Austria, France, UK, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Chile; across the EU, production standards are growing more climate-oriented with the Theatre Green Book's EU Certification pilot, a supranational initiative with a comparative potential impact.

Fifth, the Eurocities network's 100-initiative report provides one of the rare pieces of evidence demonstrating that formal CCS sustainability commitments at city level are translating into concrete operational actions — not just remaining at the level of declarations.

Despite these advances, four structural challenges constrain the field's development.

Geographic asymmetry in depth and resourcing. While the geographic reach has broadened, the depth of intervention varies enormously. Europe and North America have dense ecosystems of binding requirements, measurement tools, certification schemes, and capacity-building programmes. Africa, South and South-East Asia, and the Caribbean typically have single policy documents or guidelines without the implementation infrastructure (tools,

training, technical support, funding) needed to make them effective. The African interventions in the mapping are almost exclusively government documentation with limited evidence of implementation at scale. This asymmetry risks reproducing global inequalities within what is increasingly framed as a universal sustainability agenda.

Concentration in screen and performing arts; gaps in other subsectors. The audiovisual, live events, and theatre sectors have developed by far the most systematic sustainability frameworks. The visual arts (beyond the GCC), heritage institutions, music (beyond the Finnish Jazz Federation model), digital creative industries (beyond gaming), design, and fashion remain comparatively less systematically addressed. Fashion is a particularly notable gap given that it accounts for an estimated 2-8% of global CO₂ emissions, far outweighing most other CCS subsectors. With that said, efforts such as the IFC's \$100m financing with EPIC Group, targeting a 65% cut per garment by 2030 across Bangladesh and India²⁸⁹ is a step in the right direction, propelled further by the existence of advocacy groups such as Fashion Revolution, who have campaigned for a slower, cleaner fashion industry for over ten years.²⁹⁰

Limited evidence of impact at sector or system level. Most interventions in the mapping are documented through policy instruments, programme descriptions, or initial rollout reports rather than through independent evaluations or longitudinal outcome data. The ACE/Julie's Bicycle annual

²⁸⁹ <https://www.ifc.org/en/pressroom/2024/ifc-and-epic-group-partner-to-support-sustainable-textile-manufacturing-in-bangladesh-and-india>

²⁹⁰ Fashion Revolution, About. <https://www.fashionrevolution.org/>

reports represent an important exception in providing year-on-year sector-level data, but they cover only England. The absence of internationally comparable, independently verified data on CCS emissions and emissions reduction trajectories makes it very difficult to assess whether the considerable activity of this period is translating into meaningful aggregate progress. Many initiatives remain documented primarily through project-level case studies rather than robust audience or behavioural datasets. As a result, the evidence base for understanding how cultural environmental sustainability interventions influence broader social or institutional change remains uneven and requires further development.

Small organisations left behind.

Compliance-based reporting requirements, carbon calculators, and decarbonisation plans all carry real costs in staff time and organisational capacity that are manageable for large national institutions but prohibitive for community arts organisations, small festivals, independent creative enterprises, and practitioners in low-income contexts. The risk of a two-tier transition (large and well-resourced institutions leading while smaller organisations fall behind) is a structural pattern visible in the current landscape and not yet adequately addressed by any national-level intervention.

Beyond structural challenges, the mapping exercise identifies several specific gaps:

- No dedicated international fund for CCS sustainability in the Global South has been established in this period. Unlike the Indigenous Peoples climate finance landscape, which saw the

creation of multiple dedicated instruments between COP26 and COP30, no comparable mechanism has emerged for cultural sector decarbonisation outside the Global North.

- The music sector, despite being one of the most emissions-intensive CCS subsectors due to touring and live events, has produced only isolated national instruments (the Finnish Jazz Federation roadmap being a notable exception). Despite crucial and sector-changing efforts in the live music domain such as Massive Attack's 2024 Act 1.5 Climate Action Accelerator event, the 'greenest show of its size ever staged', a sector-wide equivalent of the Theatre Green Book for music has not materialised. Also, UK initiatives such as Vision for Sustainable Events (formerly Vision: 2025) have built sector-wide pledges and roadmaps for live events, but a production standard equivalent to the Theatre Green Book for the music sector has not materialised.
- Digital emissions from cultural consumption like streaming, online exhibitions, virtual events are the fastest-growing component of the CCS's carbon footprint but remain the least addressed by existing sustainability frameworks. The EU Common Calculator for audiovisual (2025) represents the first serious attempt at a shared methodology, but it is limited to screen production rather than consumption.
- Gender-responsive CCS sustainability programming is largely absent from the research findings. This is a structural gap given the highly gendered nature of cultural labour markets and the likelihood that transition costs will fall disproportionately on women workers.

3.5.2 British Council’s contribution in this area

Category	Description
Typology	Environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors
Typology footprint	4 interventions
Geographic spread	Activity in 20 countries; Regions: LATAC, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, UK
Indicative funding (2021–2025)	Delivered through programme-based funding combining grants, mentoring and RandD support; £350,000 (Circular Culture), £240,000 (New Landscapes)
Typical intervention delivery mechanisms	Grants and mentoring for SMEs and cultural organisations; applied RandD, toolkits and sustainability frameworks; knowledge exchange between cultural and academic partners
British Council’s main role	Funder and enabler of sector transition; bridge between creative practice, academia and sustainability expertise
Typical outcomes	Cognitive outcomes (skills, sustainability literacy); behavioural outcomes (changes in organisational practice, production models)

Category	Examples
Grants, skills and practice support	Funding and enabling sustainable practices: <i>Cultura Circular</i> ; <i>Climate Futures: South Asia</i> ; <i>New Landscapes</i> , <i>Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform (Tier 2)</i>
Research	Research on culture and sustainable practices: <i>Mapping trends and best practice in climate action and sustainability in the arts</i>

The British Council’s work intersects with CCS environmental sustainability primarily through its Americas Fund for Sustainable Festivals programme *Cultura Circular*, its research and knowledge partnerships, and its broader Climate Connection framework.

The programme supports participating festivals in reducing waste, localising

supply chains, adopting renewable energy, and measuring their environmental footprint. An independent evaluation by BOP Consulting (2024) developed a replicable monitoring and evaluation framework for the programme.²⁹¹ This work is analytically significant within the global landscape because it represents one of the very few documented CCS sustainability

²⁹¹ BOP Consulting. (2024, November). Monitoring and evaluation of Circular Culture, the British Council Americas Fund for the Development of Sustainable Festivals: Final report. British Council. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cultura_circular_-_reporte_bop.pdf

programmes operating with a Global South focus and an explicitly evidence-based methodology. The British Council has also contributed to the knowledge infrastructure of the field through its 2020 research report *The Missing Pillar*,²⁹² a report that argues for culture to be recognised as a core dimension of sustainable development and shows how arts and culture contribute to the SDGs. Other examples include the 2021 report, *Culture: The missing link to climate action*,²⁹³ written in partnership with Julie's Bicycle, as well as the 2023 mapping of trends and best practice in climate action and sustainability in UK arts written in partnership with University of the Arts London.²⁹⁴

Three further programmes contribute to this typology. *Climate Futures: South Asia* was an artist-led grants and mentorship programme supporting creative responses to the climate crisis and more sustainable practice across the arts sectors of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the UK, combining grants of up to £15,000 with mentoring and knowledge exchange between South Asia and the UK. Also, *New Landscapes*, delivered with the University of the Arts London's Fashion, Textiles and Technology Institute, was an international catalyst grant scheme that, between 2021 and 2025, funded and mentored research-and-development partnerships between SMEs in the UK and ten other countries across South

Asia and Africa to develop sustainable fashion, textiles and technology. Still, the most directly relevant programme is the Anhar: Culture and Climate Platform (Tier 2), run with Art Jameel across the MENA region. The programme awarded cultural organisations grants of up to £10,000 to develop and implement carbon-and waste-reduction strategies, including space refits and renewable energy investments.

Within the global landscape mapped in this section, the British Council appears as a relevant actor in CCS sustainability, particularly in contexts where regulatory or funding-leverage models developed by European public funders may not transfer directly. Through programmes such as *Cultura Circular*,²⁹⁵ it demonstrates a capacity-building and convening role that may be especially useful in under-served regions, including by connecting cultural actors, funders and public institutions around shared sustainability objectives. The British Council's Americas sustainable festivals work is clearly aligned with this broader field and appears to be opening routes into policy dialogue. This includes ongoing work with the Ministry of Culture in Colombia on biocultural indicators as part of Colombia's national strategy,²⁹⁶ as well as the 2025 partnership with Festival Cervantino in Mexico, where the UK was guest country of honour.²⁹⁷ This presence sought to embed climate and sustainability themes

292 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_missing_pillar.pdf

293 Julie's Bicycle. (2021, October). *Culture: The missing link to climate action* (Summary report). The Climate Connection, British Council. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate-connection-report.pdf>

294 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/mapping_climate_action_and_sustainability_in_the_arts.pdf

295 Circular Culture: Funding, Arts, and Sustainability

296 <https://www.mincultura.gov.co/noticias/Paginas/biodiversidades-bioculturas-y-sostenibilidad-en-dialogo-conozca-el-tercer-informe-cuatrienal-de-colombia-ante-la-unesco.aspx>

297 <https://film.britishcouncil.org/blog/ukfilm-at-festival-cervantino-mexico>

through performances by Dumbworld and Irish National Opera,²⁹⁸ Michael Pinsky's Pollution Pods installation,²⁹⁹ and a conference with Julie's Bicycle on Culture at the Heart of Climate Action.³⁰⁰

COP relevance

Within this typology, the interrelation between the British Council's activities and COPs was particularly visible at COP28,³⁰¹ where public-facing activities were combined with presenting the UAL mapping study³⁰² as well as presenting continued support for Cultura Circular beyond COP28.³⁰³ In this sense, COP28 helped position environmental sustainability in the cultural and creative sectors as part of a wider culture-and-climate agenda, while also giving the British Council a platform to surface practice, evidence, and partnerships.³⁰⁴ This strand also continued at COP30, where the British Council programme showcased festivals supported through Cultura Circular.³⁰⁵ These included Festival Outros Nativos, an independent music festival that celebrates the creative power of Amazonian peripheries and positions itself as a platform for artistic expression, civic education and local cultural diversity.³⁰⁶ For this typology, the value of COP lies

less in direct programme delivery than in its function as a policy-facing amplifier and convening moment. It allows the British Council to place culture-sector sustainability within wider climate discussions, showcase emerging practice and research, and connect partners across policy, cultural and educational spaces.

Programme spotlight: Cultura Circular

Cultura Circular is the spotlight programme for this typology because it captures the defining features of the British Council's contribution to Environmental sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors. Established in 2021 as the British Council Americas Fund for the Development of Sustainable Festivals, it operates across the LATAC region by combining festival grants, UK partnership and sustainability training.³⁰⁷ In practical terms, the programme uses cultural exchange and capacity building to help festivals test how environmental sustainability can be embedded into festival programming, management and international collaboration.³⁰⁸ From the outset, the programme was designed as more than a funding mechanism. In its first year, it partnered

298 https://festivalcervantino.gob.mx/upload/actividades/programa_mano/programa-mano-dumbworld-250925.pdf

299 <https://festivalcervantino.gob.mx/actividad/1301/pollution-pods?lan=en>

300 <https://www.culture-connect.net/events/2025climatemexico>

301 TSIC – COP28 evaluation report

302 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/mapping_climate_action_and_sustainability_in_the_arts.pdf

303 <https://web.archive.org/web/20240924083748/https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/get-involved/journey-to-cop28>

304 https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/cop28_british_council_programme.pdf

305 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/get-involved/climate-connection-cop30>

306 <https://www.britishcouncil.org.br/en/events/outros-nativos>

307 Circular Culture - Evaluation - 2024, p. 15

308 Ibidem

with Edinburgh Napier University to deliver a short training programme for festival managers and produce a related publication. It has since evolved into a broader platform for strengthening sustainability practices, artistic exchange and professional learning across festival ecosystems.³⁰⁹ It is a clear expression of the British Council's cultural relations approach, combining partnership-building, professional exchange and applied learning across contexts where environmentally sustainable infrastructure is still uneven. 109 festivals had participated as of November 2024, and a further 33 festivals were selected for 2025 edition.³¹⁰

What makes *Cultura Circular* an interesting spotlight is that it appears to move beyond awareness-raising. Its model links funding, training and international exchange in a way that helps festivals not only engage with sustainability as a concept but begin embedding it in planning and operations. The programme also incorporates a modest but explicit gender and intersectional dimension, as it recognises collaborations addressing gender issues and includes representation of minority groups, including gender, among the selection criteria.³¹¹ Interest in the programme is also notable, having grown exponentially. Applications rose from 192 in 2021–22 to 1,004 in 2022–23 and

1,082 in 2023–24, suggesting that *Cultura Circular* responded to a clear demand for practical sustainability support within festival ecosystems³¹². The evaluation links this growth both to wider awareness of climate change and to targeted outreach by the programme itself.³¹³ Participating festivals have been concentrated particularly in music, followed by film and visual arts, which suggests that the model has found strongest resonance in live and event-based cultural sectors where environmental practices are especially visible and operationally immediate.³¹⁴

Among the outcomes of the programme, the evaluation points to improved understanding of sustainable practices, stronger confidence in applying them, while also underlining the importance of new connections with UK artists and practitioners.³¹⁵ The British Council's partnership with Julie's Bicycle is relevant here too, because of their involvement in training and networking sessions, as well individual mentoring. This is also where the cultural relations dimension becomes most visible. At the same time, the available evidence should be read proportionately. It is strongest on early practice change, capacity and relationship-building, rather than on deeper structural transformation across the sector.³¹⁶

Cultura Circular therefore works well not because it demonstrates immediate

³⁰⁹ Ibidem

³¹⁰ Circular Culture: Funding, Arts, and Sustainability

³¹¹ https://americas.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/terms_and_conditions_2025-26_cc_eng_0.pdf

³¹² Circular Culture - Evaluation - 2024, p. 18

³¹³ Ibidem

³¹⁴ Ibidem p. 19

³¹⁵ Ibidem p. 27

³¹⁶ Ibidem

sector-wide change, but because it shows clearly how the British Council uses its place-based knowledge, network, reach and partnerships to

deliver a programme that supports practical change on the ground while contributing to a wider sustainability transition in the cultural sector.

3.6 Evidence systems, MEL innovations and cultural indicators for climate action

3.6.1 Global evidence landscape

The global evidence landscape for Evidence Systems, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) innovations, and cultural indicators for climate action has matured significantly since 2020. Yet it remains fragmented, uneven in methodological rigor, and marked by the absence of a shared global measurement architecture capable of capturing culture's full contribution to climate adaptation, resilience, and mitigation.

The initiatives mapped for this typology confirm that evidence systems emerge sector-by-sector (e.g., museums, performing arts, audiovisual, heritage conservation) rather than from an overarching cultural-climate framework. The evidence base is not a standalone universe but is distributed across practice domains, resulting in an ecosystem shaped by plural centres of authority and non-interoperable tools and datasets.

This fragmentation aligns with interview evidence suggesting that the relevance

of culture and creativity is not yet consistently recognised across climate governance communities, including scientific, technical and policy spheres.³¹⁷

Taken together, the global landscape reveals both an expanding political recognition of culture's role in climate action and a limited methodological embedding of culture within formal climate monitoring and reporting systems.

Data gaps on CCS climate impacts and contributions

The most persistent gap across the Creative and Cultural Sectors is that virtually no existing evidence system captures CCS contributions in the terms that climate policy considers legible. UNFCCC adaptation and transparency frameworks (including the UAE–Belém indicator process) are constructed around quantifiable, often techno-economic metrics, and this creates an immediate epistemic mismatch: cultural contributions tend to be qualitative, behavioural, relational, and place-based, which current Measurement, Reporting

³¹⁷ Interview with Patrick Towell (The Audience Agency), conducted for this study.

and Verification (MRV)³¹⁸ architectures are not designed to register.

This misalignment is most clearly visible in the UNFCCC's technical work for the cultural heritage target under the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).³¹⁹ The expert group tasked with developing indicators reviewed 282 submissions from Parties and observers, many of which were duplicates, inconsistently formulated across languages, or too general to function as climate-relevant indicators. The group ultimately confirmed that no formal, globally standardised indicators currently exist to track adaptation measures for cultural heritage in a measurable way, because the submissions lacked methodological detail, metadata, and clear links to adaptation outcomes. As a result, the cultural-heritage indicators adopted in Belém take the form of high-level, qualitative components rather than fully operationalised metrics. Specifically, the five indicators associated with GGA Target 9(g) on cultural heritage focus on whether countries have:

1. Assessed climate risks and impacts affecting tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
2. Established adaptation strategies or plans for cultural heritage, including within national or sub-national adaptation frameworks;

3. Implemented adaptation and resilience measures for cultural heritage sites and practices;
4. Strengthened preparedness, training, and capacity-building, including for heritage custodians and institutions; and
5. Enhanced community engagement and knowledge transmission, including Indigenous and local knowledge systems and, in some cases, digitisation for resilience.

These categories function as conceptual buckets, signalling political recognition of culture within the GGA but offering only an initial scaffold for measurement; turning them into usable indicators will require substantial post Belém refinement and national level methodological development. Moreover, across SB60–SB62³²⁰ two competing pressures emerged, the need to demonstrate transversal cultural contributions (including in relation to water, food, health, cities, biodiversity, livelihoods) while also articulating culture as a distinct policy area with its own objectives and indicators, as reflected in broader discussions around culture-related global development frameworks. Interview evidence reflected this tension, highlighting the challenge of demonstrating both the cross-cutting value of culture and its

³¹⁸ Measurement, Reporting and Verification. A core architecture of the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement used to track mitigation, emissions, and compliance. Those are traditional, mitigation-oriented frameworks that dominated climate governance for the past 25 years, specifically before adaptation became politically elevated (COP 28 onwards). These systems were designed primarily for emissions accounting, highly standardised quantitative metrics, and a centralised logic to ensure comparability across all Parties.

³¹⁹ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/9%28g%29_Cultural_heritage_and_knowledge.pdf

³²⁰ SB60–SB62 are the UNFCCC's 60th–62nd technical Subsidiary Body sessions — the formal venues where Parties and experts advance the methodological and scientific work needed to implement the Paris Agreement. Between SB60 (2024) and SB62 (2025), these sessions hosted the core technical work of the UAE–Belém Work Programme: consolidating the thousands of adaptation indicator submissions, reviewing metadata, assessing measurability, and preparing the indicator list that will be negotiated at COP30.

intrinsic importance.³²¹ This dual positioning complicates indicator development and creates a risk that culture may either be reduced to an instrumental function or become insufficiently integrated into wider climate frameworks.

The initiatives mapped for this typology confirm that evidence systems emerge sector-by-sector (e.g., museums, performing arts, audiovisual, heritage conservation) rather than from an overarching cultural-climate framework. The evidence base is not a standalone universe but is distributed across practice domains, resulting in an ecosystem shaped by plural centres of authority and non-interoperable tools and datasets.

This fragmentation aligns with interview evidence suggesting that the relevance of culture and creativity is not yet consistently recognised across scientific, technical, business and policy communities involved in climate governance.³²² Interviewees also noted that existing systems remain better adapted to certain forms of evidence than to qualitative, contextual, Indigenous or community-derived knowledge, which can face barriers to recognition within formal climate processes.³²³ More broadly, cultural actors were perceived as having limited routes into climate negotiations and decision-making structures.

These gaps are not only technical but structural: CCS climate impacts occur through behaviour change, cultural norms, community resilience, heritage-

based adaptation practices, and knowledge transmission, none of which have globally recognised indicators to address climate change, despite their growing policy relevance.

Emerging cultural indicators linked to SDGs and climate policy

Despite these gaps, the global evidence landscape is entering a formative moment in which multiple indicator systems are converging on culture as a relevant domain for sustainable development and adaptation.

UNESCO's *Culture|2030 Indicators* initiative has now been implemented in 28 countries and 29 cities, producing one of the only globally comparable cultural indicator sets. Although not climate-specific, the framework demonstrates that cultural data can be systematised, standardised, and integrated into national reporting architectures, helping to make culture statistically legible as part of the 2030 Agenda.

The emergence of the 2025 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS) strengthens this infrastructure by offering updated classifications and a more coherent basis for future culture-climate indicators.

The clearest policy opening is the UAE–Belém Work Programme (2023–2025). It formalises culture, via the cultural heritage target, within the UNFCCC's core adaptation architecture and mandates development of GGA-aligned

³²¹ Interview with Mahnaz Anwar Fancy (UAE Ministry of Culture), conducted for this study.

³²² Interview with Patrick Towell (The Audience Agency), conducted for this study.

³²³ Interview with Anwar Fancy (UAE Ministry of Culture), conducted for this study.

indicators for all thematic targets, including culture.

Meanwhile, the Non-Economic Losses (NELs)³²⁴ agenda is amplifying the importance of cultural heritage, identity, knowledge, and sense of place as climate-relevant dimensions of loss and damage. UNFCCC's 2024 NELs report³²⁵ explicitly frames cultural heritage loss as a major non-economic vulnerability area, reinforcing the urgency of developing measurement approaches alongside adaptation indicators. Together, these developments signal that global indicator architectures are moving toward culture but lack methodological solidity and have not yet integrated CCS evidence systems.

Innovations in MEL: participatory methods, digital platforms, mixed-methods evaluation

Globally, MEL innovation is expanding more rapidly than indicator development, offering pathways the cultural sector could align with. UNFCCC's 2025 *Insight to Action: Strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Systems for Adaptation* report³²⁶ explicitly recognises that effective adaptation MEL must draw on multiple knowledge systems, incorporate qualitative and contextual insights, and be flexible and purpose-driven, integrating Indigenous values into adaptation assessment.

This validates the cultural sector's

long-standing strengths: participatory practice, community-centred evaluation, narrative methods, and local knowledge capture, precisely the domains Fancy highlights as essential for adaptation, where universality is neither possible nor desirable.

The Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Communication and Education (MECCE)³²⁷ provides the clearest example of a mature digital evidence infrastructure built around cultural processes (education, communication, engagement). Led by an international research partnership of more than 100 scholars and agencies and hosted by the University of Saskatchewan, MECCE was established to address a longstanding gap in climate governance: the lack of systematic, comparable, and quality-focused evidence on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) across countries and regions. MECCE's global climate change education platform offers:

- 14 global indicators,
- multi-country profiles,
- a UN-recognised SDG 4.7.1b indicator on greening curriculum,
- tools for relationship-view and mixed data visualisation.

These make MECCE an exemplar of how non-physical, behavioural, and communicative outcomes can be rendered measurable through well-designed mixed-methods systems.

324 <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/constituted-bodies/WIMExCom/NELs>

325 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Informal%20Summary%20Report_MEL_final.pdf

326 Ibidem

327 <https://mecce.ca/>

Recent IISD³²⁸ and NAP Global Network³²⁹ analyses show that national MEL systems increasingly require integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence, but most countries lack dedicated financing, timelines, or data infrastructure for climate MEL.

This produces an important analytical implication: The cultural sector's methodological repertoire is better aligned with emerging MEL demands than with legacy MRV systems. Yet without integration into national adaptation planning processes, these methods remain policy-invisible - a point emphasised by one expert consulted for this study,³³⁰ who notes that cultural actors must 'break into' national climate governance structures, not only attend COP side events.

Gender dimensions

Of all six typologies, evidence and MEL is where gender can most readily be operationalised, because gender disaggregation is already a recognised requirement of credible monitoring. Yet culture-climate MEL has not consistently taken it up. The indicator architectures emerging from the UNFCCC – including the Belém Adaptation Indicators and the Global Goal on Adaptation – increasingly expect disaggregation, but the cultural indicators and mixed-methods systems mapped here rarely capture the gendered distribution of participation, access or outcomes. This is a notable gap given the typology's purpose. Systems such as MECCE demonstrate

that non-physical, behavioural and communicative outcomes can be rendered measurable through well-designed mixed methods; the same methodological strength could make gendered cultural participation and benefit visible, but this is not yet a standard feature of the indicators in use. A credible gender dimension would mean embedding gender-disaggregated metrics into cultural climate indicators by default, designing MEL frameworks that surface differentiated participation and outcomes, and ensuring that the “interoperable, nationally relevant evidence pipelines” this typology calls for carry gender data through to national adaptation reporting rather than leaving it out at the point of aggregation.

Conclusions

Across all sources mapped, the global evidence landscape is best understood as a moment of structural re-alignment: climate governance is shifting from techno-mitigation dominance toward a recognition of human, social, cultural, and knowledge-based dimensions of adaptation, but indicator and MEL infrastructures have not yet caught up. This transition exposes four systemic tensions:

- 1. Evidence legibility vs. evidence relevance:** CCS contributions are highly relevant but remain illegible to climate reporting systems.
- 2. Quantification vs. Contextuality:** Climate policy still privileges

³²⁸ Njuguna, Lucy; Uri, Ike; and Beauchamp, Emilie. (2024). National Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Systems for Climate Change Adaptation: A Comparative Analysis of Nine Countries. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Available at: <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2024-07/monitoring-evaluation-learning-systems-adaptation.pdf>

³²⁹ NAP Global Network. (2025). How Countries Are Advancing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Across Their National Adaptation Plan Processes. Published 27 November 2025. Available at: <https://napglobalnetwork.org/2025/11/countries-advancing-mel-nap-processes/>

³³⁰ Interview with Mahnaz Fancy (UAE Ministry of Culture), conducted for this study.

quantification; cultural adaptation is inherently contextual and qualitative.

3. Transversality vs. Distinctiveness:

Culture is both cross-cutting and a domain in its own right, complicating indicator architectures.

4. Global frameworks vs. national entry points:

Global structures (UNFCCC, UNESCO) create openings, but real influence requires embedding CCS evidence within national and local adaptation ecosystems. It is precisely to address this translation gap that the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action was established: as an informal coalition of states and non-state actors committed to moving culture from global acknowledgment to national-level implementation.

According to the experts interviewed, without structural integration into national climate institutions and therefore global systems, even sophisticated cultural MEL will remain politically marginal. This landscape therefore demands a strategic shift: from creating more tools or projects to building interoperable, nationally relevant evidence pipelines that align cultural data with climate governance mechanisms already in motion.

Photo: UK-Brazil Season 25-26.
Immersive artistic residency,
Ubatuba, São Paulo, Brazil
© Melanie Mattieu



3.6.2 British Council's contribution in this area

Category	Description
Typology	Evidence systems, MEL innovations and cultural indicators for climate action
Typology footprint	2 primary interventions (with additional secondary evidence components embedded across other typologies)
Geographic spread	Regions: UK, MENA (notably UAE)
Indicative funding (2021–2025)	<i>Funding delivered through commissioned research and scoping studies within wider programme envelopes (e.g. British Council research budgets and co-commissioned studies)</i>
Typical intervention delivery mechanisms	<i>Commissioned research and mapping studies; national and sectoral baselines and landscape analyses; policy-facing evidence reports and strategic scoping exercises; knowledge products designed to inform programme design and external policy dialogue (including COP-linked agendas)</i>
British Council's main role	<i>Knowledge partner and commissioner of evidence; agenda-setter linking culture-based evidence to climate policy debates; internal and external evidence broker (informing both BC strategy and partner ecosystems)</i>
Typical outcomes	<i>Cognitive outcomes (knowledge generation, shared understanding, conceptual clarity); structural/systemic outcomes (improved evidence base for decision-making, policy influence, programme design)</i>

Category	Examples ³³¹
Mapping studies, evaluations and research	Mapping best practice in climate/sustainability in the arts in Wider Europe (BOP Consulting); Mapping trends and best practice in climate action and sustainability in the arts; COP evaluation reports (TSIC); Human–Nature Relations

Unlike other typologies in the portfolio, *Evidence systems, MEL innovations and cultural indicators for climate action* function as an enabling backbone rather than a direct delivery stream. These initiatives focus on generating, structuring and translating knowledge to strengthen the legibility, credibility and policy relevance of CBCA. By commissioning baselines, mappings and analytical research, the British

Council supports the institutionalisation of CBCA across its own programming and within partner ecosystems, linking cultural practice to climate governance, policy dialogue and COP-related agendas and networks. The primary value of this typology lies not in scale or geographic reach, but in its contribution to conceptual clarity, strategic alignment and longer-term systemic change.

³³¹ Some of these are not treated as standalone interventions, or are mapped under other typologies, but are included here as evidence of the British Council's contribution to this typology within the wider CBCA field.

Taken together, this suggests four connected roles for the British Council: evidence producer; evaluator and learning organisation; knowledge broker; and cultural relations research partner.³³² First, the British Council acts as an evidence producer. Reports such as *Culture: The Missing Link to Climate Action*,³³³ *The Missing Foundation*,³³⁴ the UAL mapping study, and the strategic literature review on climate change impacts on cultural heritage do more than document activity.^{335,336} They help frame the field, identify gaps, and strengthen the case for culture in climate and sustainable development debates. This legitimising role was also reflected in interviews, where one expert noted that British Council research helps lend legitimacy to important work in the field.³³⁷ *The Missing Foundation* is especially important here, as it explicitly challenges the organisation to rethink how programmes are designed, framed and evaluated against wider development frameworks.

Second, the British Council appears relatively strong as an evaluator and learning organisation. It is not only commissioning research on the field but also evaluating its own programmes. This includes evaluations for programmes such as Circular Culture and Creative Commissions, which brought together project-level evidence and called for a more unified monitoring and evaluation approach.³³⁸ More broadly, *The Missing*

Foundation notes that all the British Council cultural programmes reviewed had been evaluated, even if the rigour and alignment of those frameworks varied.³³⁹ This points to a clear strength in testing, evaluating and learning from practice.

Third, the British Council operates as a knowledge broker and evidence translator, helping to connect research, practice and policy. Through its international presence and extensive network of partnerships, the organisation has the capacity to support the circulation of evidence across programmes, sectors and geographies, and to connect research findings with wider strategic and policy discussions. Interviewees also highlighted the potential value of such intermediary functions in strengthening understanding of the contribution that culture can make to climate action, including by supporting evidence generation, knowledge exchange and the development of more informed narratives within the field.

Finally, this contribution is shaped by the British Council's cultural relations approach. In this typology, this is visible less through public-facing activation than through the way evidence is produced and mobilised: through partnership-led commissioning, consultation, reciprocal exchange and internationally connected knowledge

³³² Annex 1 - British Council Portfolio Mapping. To be downloaded at the dedicated link.

³³³ <https://www.britishcouncil.id/sites/default/files/climate-connection-report.pdf>

³³⁴ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_missing_foundation_report_0.pdf

³³⁵ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/mapping_climate_action_and_sustainability_in_the_arts.pdf

³³⁶ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_change_impacts_on_cultural_heritage_report.pdf

³³⁷ Interview with Alison Tickell (Julie's Bicycle), conducted for this study.

³³⁸ <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/index.php/resources/creative-commissions-climate-action-evaluation-report>

³³⁹ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_missing_foundation_report_0.pdf

work. Studies such as *Rooted in Resilience* show the British Council acting as a co-commissioning and convening partner in research intended to inform policy and practice in the UAE and use this research model to inspire other contexts. Interviewees highlighted that cultural relations organisations can be particularly effective in fostering collaboration across sectors, disciplines and geographies, helping to connect actors who might not otherwise engage with one another.³⁴⁰ In this sense, the British Council's contribution extends beyond evidence generation itself to supporting the relationships, networks and institutional connections through which evidence can be interpreted, shared and applied. Its partnerships with national institutions, non-profit organisations, universities, consultancies, locally rooted organisations and independent researchers also provide access to diverse forms of knowledge and expertise that may be less readily accessible through more conventional policy or research channels.

In outcome terms, this typology is likely to generate cognitive, relational outcomes. Near-term outcomes include stronger shared understanding of what to measure, improved MEL literacy and greater demand for evidence. Mid-term outcomes include more routine evaluation commissioning and stronger knowledge partnerships or collaborations. Longer-term value could lie in indicators, baselines and evidence frameworks becoming embedded in programme design, funder practice or

governance systems. At the same time, British Council's own evidence suggests that this remains a developing area: its strength lies in producing and commissioning research and evaluation, while its weaker area is ensuring that these efforts add up to a more standardised and comparable evidence architecture across the wider climate and arts portfolio.^{341 342}

COP relevance

The COP linkage in this typology appears differently than in more public-facing areas, but it is still material. Here, the value of COP lies less in showcasing stand-alone projects and more in using moments of international climate attention to place research, evidence and policy framing into wider climate conversations. This has been visible across various COP cycles. In the lead-up to COP26, its partnership with Julie's Bicycle used roundtables,³⁴³ policy analysis and survey work to build an evidence base that then informed for the event *Culture: The Missing Link*.³⁴⁴ At COP28, the British Council used its pavilion and side events not only to showcase arts and education activity, but also to platform research opportunities, including Climate Connection Research Fellowships, EARTH Scholarships and wider climate research on the arts and cultural heritage. By COP29, this had evolved into more explicit evidence- and policy-facing activity, including participation in the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action ministerial meeting, and

³⁴⁰ Interview with Matt Rabagliati (UNESCO), conducted for this study.

³⁴¹ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_missing_foundation_report_0.pdf

³⁴² https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/climate_change_strategy_2024-25_progress_report.pdf

³⁴³ <https://www.britishcouncil.id/en/report-culture-and-environment-roundtable>

³⁴⁴ British Council's Participation at COP28/COY19 - impact evaluation report, p 49

COP-linked programming that brought research-backed perspectives into formal and semi-formal climate spaces.³⁴⁵ The same logic continues into COP30, where the British Council frames its role not only in terms of events and exhibitions, but also in sharing research and participating in high-level discussions on the role of arts, culture and education in addressing climate change.

This approach also suggests a subtle change across the COP cycles. Broadly, around COP26, the emphasis was on strengthening cooperation and helping lay foundations for future collaboration on climate change; by COP30, British Council describes its arts and culture role more explicitly in terms of supporting policy work, platforming diverse voices, and contributing to research and evidence.³⁴⁶

Spotlight programme: Rooted In Resilience (Research)

Rooted in Resilience is a strong spotlight for this typology because it shows the British Council contributing not only through evaluation or reflection on existing activity, but through the co-production of a policy-relevant evidence base at national level. Co-commissioned by the UAE Ministry of Culture and the British Council, and conducted by Greenbox Ltd, the study is presented as the first national baseline assessment of CBCA in the UAE. It is therefore more

than a single programme report: it is an attempt to define, map and structure an emerging field at national level.^{347,348}

Its distinctiveness also lies in the institutional and geographic setting. It is a nationally led study developed with a government counterpart in a region where climate exposure is acute and where the UAE has become a visible actor in culture-climate landscape through COP28 and the wider CBCA agenda.³⁴⁹

The British Council frames the research as nationally led and as something that could inform and be adapted by ministries and countries more widely. That makes it important not only as evidence generation, but as a possible model for embedding CBCA research in governance and policy discussion.³⁵⁰ The report moves beyond description and asks what would be required for a more coherent evidence infrastructure for CBCA. Its diagnosis is that CBCA is already visible across the UAE, but remains fragmented, unevenly recognised and weakly embedded in formal systems. The report identifies governance fragmentation, the absence of shared metrics and evaluation systems, and inclusion gaps as major barriers to scale. One of its clearest findings is that only 31 per cent of organisations collect data beyond attendance, while no shared frameworks exist to measure behavioural change, resilience outcomes or cultural vulnerability.

In that sense, *Rooted in Resilience* is analytically valuable because it seeks to

³⁴⁵ Ibidem

³⁴⁶ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/get-involved/climate-connection-cop30>

³⁴⁷ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/rooted_in_resilience_research.pdf

³⁴⁸ <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/rooted-in-resilience>

³⁴⁹ https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/rooted_in_resilience_research.pdf

³⁵⁰ Ibidem

translate cultural activity and cultural-sector contributions into terms that are meaningful for policy development and decision-making. Rather than focusing solely on documenting cultural initiatives, the study aims to build a stronger evidence base that can inform climate governance and policy discussions. Interview evidence further suggests that one of the objectives of the research was to raise awareness among policymakers and other decision-makers of the relevance of cultural approaches to climate action, helping to frame culture as a legitimate area of consideration within broader climate policy agendas.³⁵¹ Its methodology combines survey data, interviews, embedded fieldwork, and iterative consultation, producing a multi-layered baseline designed to inform both national policy and wider international

dialogue. This makes it a strong illustration of the British Council's role in this typology: working through partnership, consultation and evidence translation to help not only to define what CBCA is, but how it can be evidenced and communicated. Fancy also underlined that 'culture alone can't figure it out' and that progress depends on 'dialogue, shared language, shared methodologies' being worked out at national level. At the same time, as a baseline, it is stronger in diagnosis than in demonstrating long-term institutional change. It was also featured at UNESCO MONDIACULT 2025,³⁵² highlighting its significance and relevance as a cultural policy framing report. Rooted in Resilience captures both the ambition and the unfinished work of evidence systems in CBCA.

³⁵¹ Interview with Mahnaz Fancy (UAE Ministry of Culture), conducted for this study.

³⁵² <https://www.britishcouncil.org/climate-connection/rooted-in-resilience>

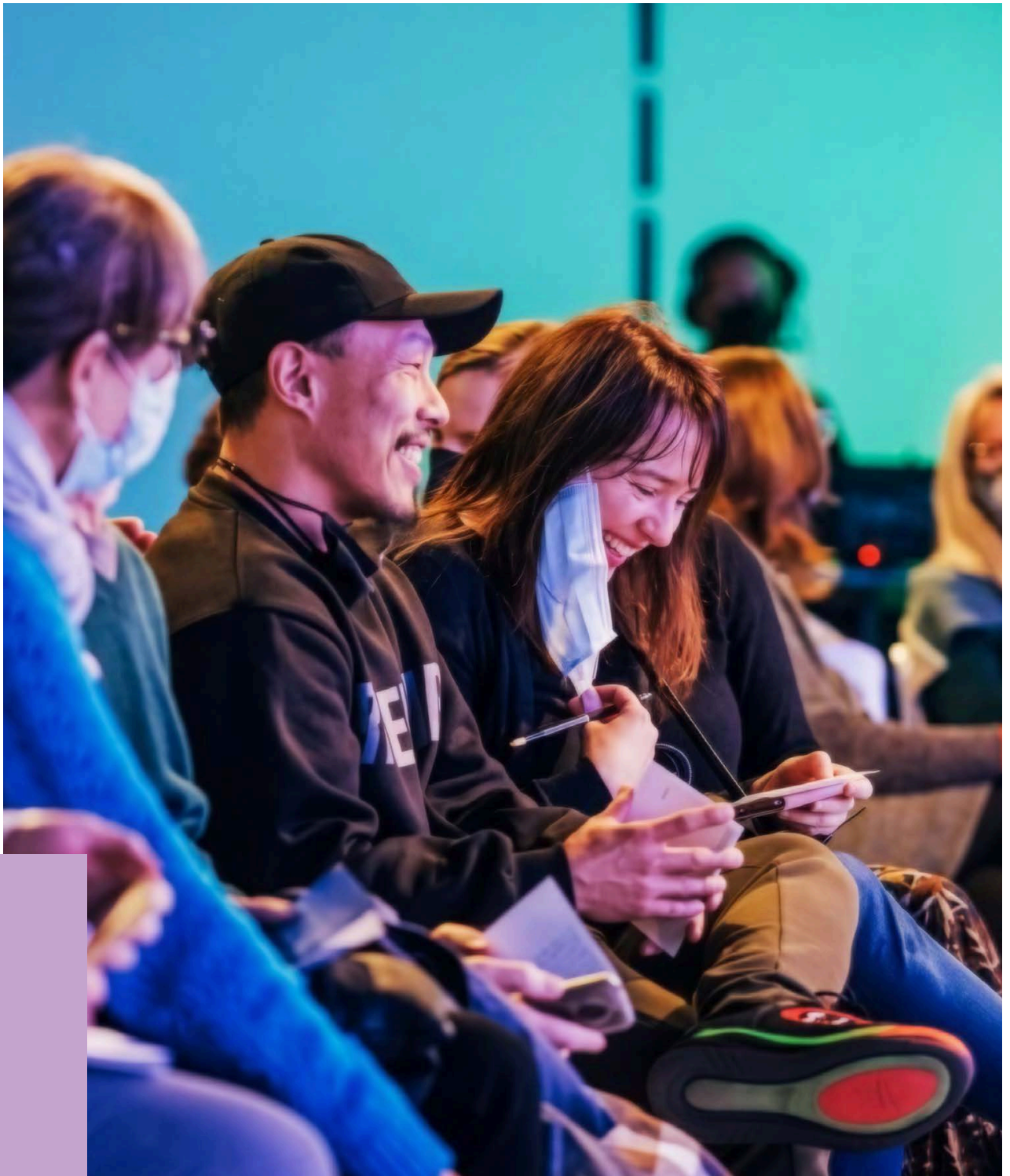


Photo: COP26 Creative Commissions, Living Language Land presentation at COP26 Green Zone on 3rd November 2021, Glasgow, Scotland © Gaëlle Beri

4. Cross-cutting synthesis

Culture-Based Climate Action

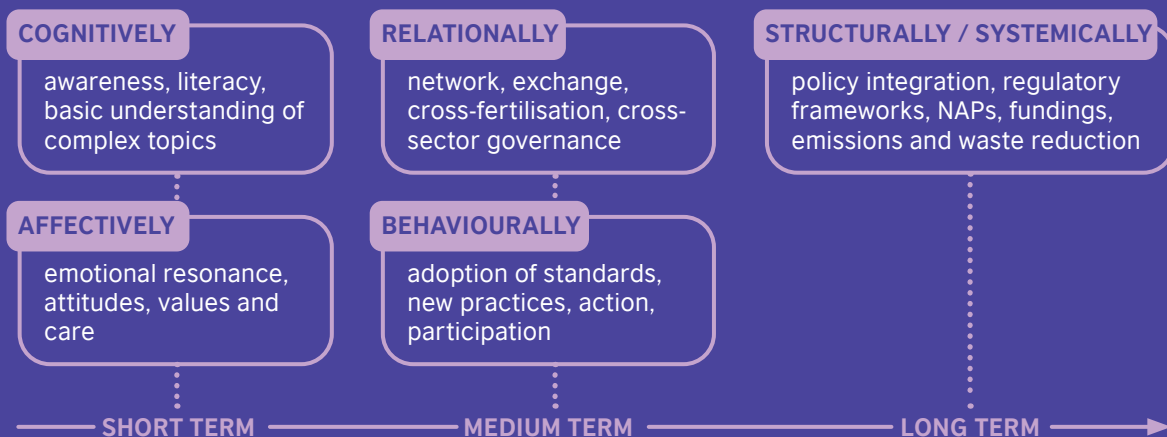
Mapping the global evidence from COP26 to COP30

DEFINING AN EMERGING PHENOMENON:

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS NOT ONLY ENVIRONMENTAL, BUT ALSO A CULTURAL ONE.

CBCA refers to the ways in which culture contributes to climate mitigation, adaptation, resilience-building and behavioural change. By recognising culture as both a foundational resource and an active driver of innovation, this approach empowers communities to contextualise climate risks and mobilise effective, collective solutions.

HOW DOES CULTURE CONTRIBUTE TO CLIMATE ACTION?



THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE BRITISH COUNCIL IN CBCA (2021-2025)



~£19 MILLION INVESTED
in embedding climate in the cultural action



28 CBCA PROGRAMMES
80% of which included an explicit gender or intersectional dimension



82 COUNTRIES INVOLVED
in projects related to culture and environmental sustainability

WHAT SHAPE DOES THIS CONTRIBUTION TAKE?

CREATIVE CLIMATE ACTION, ENGAGEMENT AND IMAGINATION

Art and storytelling make climate change tangible and emotional, building awareness and public engagement at scale by connecting artists, scientists and communities.

- Whereas cultural projects, exhibitions, movies and such have proven to raise awareness, direct effects on behaviour are rarer to be captured.

- It is called the “awareness-action gap”

HERITAGE PROTECTION, ADAPTATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Protecting heritage means protecting identity and know-how. Culture is now part of climate adaptation planning, but intangible traditions still receive less attention than monuments.

5

cultural-heritage indicators adopted at COP30

1/6

World Heritage sites still threatened by climate change

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, LOCAL CULTURE AND COMMUNITY-BASED ADAPTATION

Indigenous knowledge is among the most effective forms of local adaptation. Funding is growing, but rarely reaches communities directly, and some regions remain underserved.

3.6

billion \$ pledged to IP-led climate finance but...

1%

of climate finance reached IPLCs directly.

NETWORKS, PARTNERSHIPS AND CULTURAL RELATIONS

Networks and alliances help culture-based climate action cross borders and reach policy spaces, through trust-based, long-term partnerships that share knowledge and scale good practice.

56

countries have joined the Group of Friends of CBCA

30

countries had reps. at the 1st Culture Global Stocktake on Climate

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTORS

Cultural and creative sectors are cutting their own footprint through green standards, training and mandatory reporting. Progress tends to move unevenly within subsectors rather than at a coordinated level.

- Funding conditions can really drive change: Arts Council England requires its ~900 funded organisations to report their carbon footprint.

- TV is the most advanced subsector, with national green standards for film funding in 10 countries.

EVIDENCE SYSTEMS, MEL INNOVATIONS AND CULTURAL INDICATORS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Measuring culture's climate contribution is improving but fragmented. Evidence is strong on awareness and relationships, weak on long-term behavioural and policy change.

28

countries where UNESCO's Culture|2030 Indicators have been implemented.



Photo: UK delegate to Malaysia, Alysha Nelson experimenting with AV at Think & Tink, a Kuching-based creative hub © KC Chong Studio

5. Recommendations (2026–2030)

The recommendations set out below are drawn from the analytical work that underpins this study, alongside which, five main gaps have been identified: the evidence gap, the finance gap, the under-representation of intangible heritage and cultural practices, the limited embedding of gender and intersectionality, and the geographical imbalance of activity and infrastructure. The recommendations thus attempt to tackle these gaps. The stakeholder consultations and regional workshops conducted for the study were then used to test, refine and prioritise these directions, and in some cases to surface

priorities, from individual professional experiences, that the desk review alone would not have captured.

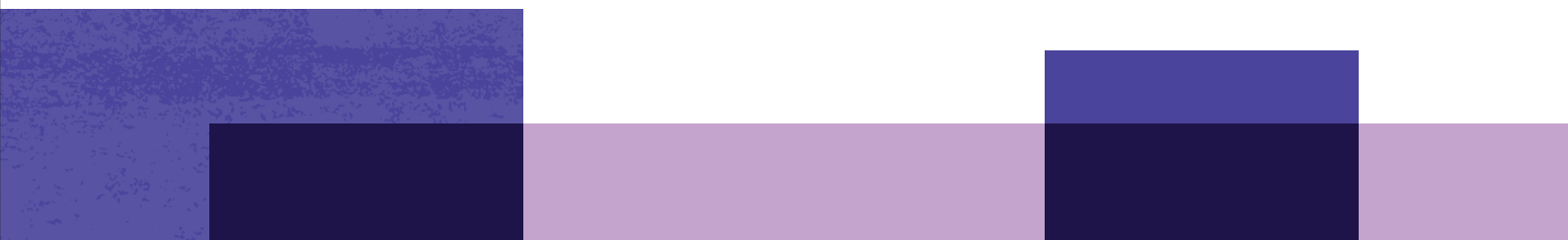
The recommendations are addressed mostly to the wider cultural field, since the conditions they describe apply across the sector rather than to any single organisation. Short notes on the implications for the British Council specifically, given its role as a cultural relations organisation and intermediary, complement each, when relevant. Nonetheless, they are intended as wide strategic directions rather than exhaustive operational guidance.

5.1 Global priorities and strategic recommendations

5.1.1 Move from short project cycles to long-term cultural infrastructure for climate action

Across the landscape, the most durable culture-based climate work depends on relationships and institutions that outlast

individual funding cycles. Short, project-based funding rewards speed and decipherability of results over the slow, relational work on which cultural and ecological continuity depend. Therefore this study advocates to move beyond fragmented, time-limited collaboration towards durable infrastructures of coordination and care. The direction for the field is therefore to mainstream climate considerations into existing cultural programmes, funding structures



and partnerships rather than expanding stand-alone climate initiatives, so that climate becomes a design criterion across the cultural value chain rather than a separate vertical.³⁵³ Evidence from successive COP cycles supports this: where support is sustained across several years, partnerships mature from grant relationships into shared strategy, and programmes scale accordingly. For the British Council, this points to embedding climate across its cultural, education and English programmes through the kind of mainstreaming approach already used for equality, diversity and inclusion, building on the Climate Change Strategy 2024–2026 and their ongoing refresh for the period to 2030, alongside long-running programmes such as the Cultural Protection Fund, the International Seasons of Culture and The Climate Connection. The aim is to give its existing cultural relations infrastructure a durable climate dimension.

Mazzucato³⁵⁴ argues that strengthening cultural ecosystems requires a shift away from short-term, project-based funding towards longer-term and more predictable investment models that enable cultural organisations to plan strategically, retain expertise, and sustain the relationships on which cultural and community engagement depend. She further contends that assessment frameworks should move beyond output-based indicators, such as audience numbers or ticket sales, and instead recognise the broader and

longer-term social, civic, and public value generated by arts and culture through their systemic impacts.

5.1.2 Close the climate finance gap for culture

The most consistent structural weakness identified across the analysis is the disconnect between growing policy recognition of culture and access to sustained, dedicated climate finance. Culture now holds measurable indicators within the Global Goal on Adaptation, yet, the Culture Global Stocktake,³⁵⁵ a global participatory assessment of culture's contribution to climate action, '*Notes with concern that finance directed toward culture-based climate action remains extremely limited, despite the role of the cultural ecosystem in delivering mitigation, adaptation, capacity-building competencies and responses to loss and damage*',³⁵⁶ with programmes remaining largely dependent on philanthropic and bilateral funding. Moreover, the growing Indigenous-led finance architecture, described in the dedicated section, where direct-access funds and platforms have begun to channel resources to communities on their own terms, importantly shows that the design of access, and not only the volume of money pledged, determines whether finance reaches culturally grounded action. The recommendation, directed to funding bodies and relevant authorities,

³⁵³ Culture Global Stocktake for Climate Action Marrakech (2026) Available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/13IWmCBrisngAWpiTt7hEW_ZvT4QUNDtI/view, paragraphs 32 and 135.

³⁵⁴ Mazzucato, M. (2026). Climate change and culture: Reimagining an inclusive, sustainable and creative future (IIPP Policy Brief No. 36). UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, University College London. https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/sites/bartlett/files/2026-06/260623_UCLIIPP_PVAC-Climate-Culture_Layout-v4.pdf, p.35

³⁵⁵ <https://www.cultureglobalstocktake.com/>

³⁵⁶ Culture Global Stocktake for Climate Action, paragraphs 84 to 91 and 104

is to recognise culture and cultural heritage as eligible dimensions of climate finance, to establish dedicated funding windows and simpler access routes, and to fund the preparatory and relational work, such as coordination, translation and community engagement, that culture-based action requires.

5.1.3 Build a shared evidence and MEL architecture that makes culture legible to climate policy

Culture-based climate action risks remaining marginal for as long as it cannot generate evidence that climate policy systems recognise. The report highlighted, specifically in section 3.6, the integration gap between cultural activity and climate governance: cultural contributions are largely qualitative, relational and place-based, while the measurement, reporting and verification systems used in climate policy are built around quantifiable metrics. The direction recommended for the operators in the field is to converge towards light, quantitative, comparable evidence frameworks that capture awareness, behavioural and relational change without flattening their qualitative aspect, drawing on existing infrastructure such as the MECCE project and UNESCO's Culture|2030 indicators discussed in section 3.6. The 2025–2030 Nationally Determined Contribution cycle is an especially practical window for institutional change and for state parties to develop the

baselines, indicators, and reporting tools required by the Belém heritage indicators under Target 9(g). This creates demand for organisations that can connect policy, practice and evidence across different national contexts. The British Council's country networks with its large geographical scope and good MEL practices, position it to play a convening role at scale.

This goes beyond the recommendation of standardised methodologies, sector-wide benchmarks and transparent reporting, monitoring and evaluation systems to measure, aggregate and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, waste, resource use, and the impacts of emerging technologies, across the cultural and creative industries; and, notes the absence of a unified global dataset and that existing approaches remain fragmented and unevenly distributed across regions and subsectors. Moving from the need of the sector to merely document the negative impact to shedding light on the positive one it creates too.

5.1.4 Strengthen cultural rights as a normative foundation of culture-based climate action

Protecting culture as an asset does not directly imply protecting people's rights to participate in culture-based climate responses. The latest UN report by the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, Alexandra Xanthaki,

‘Nature conservation and cultural rights’³⁵⁷ stresses this point very lucidly. Explicitly integrating a cultural rights-based approach into any form of climate action is vital. All programme principles shall ensure that participation, non-discrimination, and community agency are operationalised in programme design, partnerships and evaluation. A rights-based frame also gives the field a coherent way to address two of the gaps identified along this study: gender inequalities and wider intersectionality, including the experiences and participation of marginalised and under-represented groups, which remain rarely embedded as core design or measurement dimensions, despite their evident relevance:

*‘Intersectional discrimination particularly affects women involved in conservation. Ipili women in the Porgera Valley, for example, have reported that they are excluded from high-level decision-making processes regarding land and water use, the conservation of medicinal plants and resource extraction, while male leaders are formally consulted’*³⁵⁸

Anchoring CBCA in cultural, intersectional, rights can align British Council action, and all other operators in the field, with existing international legal frameworks already ratified by many partner countries, providing a shared normative baseline across regions. The most recent example of such is the MONDIACULT 2025 outcome document,³⁵⁹ adopted by more than 160

Ministers of Culture in Barcelona in October 2025. Three elements of the document are particularly relevant to this recommendation:

1. It reaffirms the right to participate in cultural life as a core human right and calls on states to ensure access to, enjoyment of and benefit from culture and cultural heritage, including in situations of crisis and transformation. Crucially, this recognition is embedded within a broader commitment to sustainable development, peace and climate resilience, reinforcing the argument that climate action that overlooks cultural rights risks undermining both effectiveness and legitimacy.
2. MONDIACULT 2025 advances the political objective of positioning culture as a standalone goal in the post-2030 development agenda, explicitly stating that culture is both a driver and an enabler of sustainable development. This strengthens the normative case for treating culture-based climate action not as ancillary communication or awareness-raising, but as part of the structural conditions for just transition, behavioural change and long-term climate resilience.
3. It grounds future cultural policy in an ethical, human rights-based and people-centred approach, with explicit reference to participation, equity, diversity and the recognition of Indigenous Peoples, minorities and

³⁵⁷ UN, Nature conservation and cultural rights, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/49>

³⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 13

³⁵⁹ UNESCO. (2025). MONDIACULT 2025 outcome document: Culture ministers’ commitment. https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2025/09/EN_MONDIACULT_Outcome_Document%20Final%2027.09.25.pdf

local communities. This aligns directly with the principles articulated in UNDRIP and the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on cultural rights, reinforcing participation and consent as minimum standards for climate action affecting cultural life and heritage.

5.1.5 Bridge the cultural and climate sectors via shared vocabulary and climate-culture literacy

The study, across the themes of the various sections, points to a general absence of shared vocabulary between cultural and environmental sectors, lack of exchange and cross-fertilisation of knowledge and decision-making, especially at ministerial level, with very few governments creating multidisciplinary cabinets to address the climate challenges through a cultural perspective, and not only a technocratic one.³⁶⁰

The constraint is asymmetric, cultural practitioners increasingly have routes into climate and carbon literacy: accredited provision for the cultural sector already exists and is maturing, including the Carbon Literacy Project's³⁶¹ ready-made courses for museums, theatres, heritage

organisations, libraries and archives or leadership programmes such as Julie's Bicycle's Changemakers Programme³⁶² (former Creative Climate Leadership). What remains under-served is the opposite direction, and the connection between the two. Climate, environment and conservation professionals, and the policymakers who convene them, often lack the confidence and frame of reference to work with cultural actors, audiences and knowledge systems, and the two communities still meet only at the edges of formal climate processes: culture is described as relegated to the 'fringes' of negotiation, and senior climate figures still needing to be persuaded that it is relevant at all.³⁶³

5.1.6 Leverage COPs to institutionalise culture as a pillar of global climate governance

Recent gains in recognising culture within climate processes are real but fragile. Culture is now formally present in the Global Goal on Adaptation, in the COP30 Action Agenda and in a growing Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action, yet the field still risks fragmentation, with multiple actors bringing culture into COP spaces without shared framing or coordination. The envisioned direction for the field is to continue to use COP platforms, and the

³⁶⁰ A good example coming from Argentina's Gabinete Nacional de Cambio Climático (GNCC) with focal point from Dirección Nacional de Innovación Cultural

³⁶¹ The Carbon Literacy Project, cultural-sector courses (carbonliteracy.com/culture/), including the Museums Toolkit (funded by Arts Council England) and the six Culture Shareable Courses. Available at: <https://carbonliteracy.com/culture/>

³⁶² <https://juliesbicycle.org/what-we-do/creative-climate-people/>. See also Chapter 3.1 on Julie's Bicycle's Creative Climate Leadership programme, which has trained more than 150 cultural professionals.

³⁶³ Section 3.1, interviews with Gunjan Nanda and Samuel Rubin, on the severed link between culture and climate policy and Ministries of Culture rarely being invited to COP; Section 3.4, interview with Michelle Sun, on culture being relegated to the 'fringes' of formal diplomacy; Section 3.6, interview with Patrick Towell.

wider UNFCCC architecture, as strategic moments to move culture from scattered visibility and side events towards coordinated agendas and recognised institutional entry points across adaptation, loss and damage, and just transition. This includes supporting proposals for a more permanent home for culture in climate governance, such as a Joint Work or dialogue on culture-based climate action, and ensuring that culture is reflected in the second Global Stocktake.³⁶⁴ The British Council, with its established role as a convener and as a knowledge partner of the Group of Friends positions it to help coordinate, beyond adding to the proliferation of cultural initiatives at COPs, working with others to present a coherent agenda and to sustain engagement between conferences without treating each COP as an endpoint.

5.1.7 Position creative imagination as foundational to climate action, not as an add-on

Arts and culture make alternative futures thinkable, desirable and politically durable.³⁶⁵ Section 3.1 of this report also elaborates on the consistent effects on knowledge and awareness by climate communication but its weaker effects on attitudes and action, the so-called awareness–action gap. What can make the difference is the capacity to imagine alternative futures and to reframe people’s relationship with nature, which is where artistic and cultural practice can contribute the most. The direction

recommended for the field is to treat creative imagination as an integral element in programme development from the outset, rather than appending them as messaging or awareness tools once priorities are set. Reduced to dissemination, culture loses its innovative and transformative potential. For the British Council, this reinforces a strength it already demonstrates through programmes such as Creative Commissions and suggests embedding creative and imaginative approaches early in the design of climate-related programmes. Finally, section 3.1 warmly invites organisations such as the British Council to actively invite artists to attend climate fora, standardised protocols and language of such environments can result extremely unfamiliar and cause a cognitive distance between the two worlds that can be bridged to unleash the artists’ creativity and power of imagination.

5.1.8 Sustain the intergenerational transmission of culture-based climate knowledge, especially under conditions of displacement

Intergenerationality is a keyword across the whole report, especially in section 3.3. The continuity of traditional climate knowledge depends on the relationships and occasions through which it passes

³⁶⁴ Culture Global Stocktake for Climate Action, paragraphs 188 to 191

³⁶⁵ https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/sites/bartlett/files/2026-06/260623_UCLIPP_PVAC-Climate-Culture_Layout-v4.pdf, p.35

between generations. The mapping found that intangible heritage and living knowledge systems remain systematically underrepresented relative to built heritage and tangible assets, and that coverage becomes even more vital in the regions where this knowledge is most exposed due to displacement and large migration flow, including the Pacific's small islands countries. Climate-driven displacement sharpens the risk: separation from ancestral lands breaks the link between place, practice and knowledge, and narrows the spaces for intergenerational exchange. International climate policy now recognises this as a non-economic loss,³⁶⁶ and the Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility (2023) addresses it directly, committing to protect the cultural values, heritage and traditional knowledge of Pacific peoples across displacement, migration and planned relocation.³⁶⁷

The wider sector should therefore recognise and treat intergenerational transmission as a core dimension of culture-based climate action: supporting sustained exchange between elder knowledge-holders and younger practitioners rather than segmenting by age cohort in project designs, mobilising living heritage such as oral traditions, navigation, food and water practices and customary governance as a practical adaptation

resource,³⁶⁸ and embedding knowledge continuity within migration, relocation and 'right to stay' strategies. Because women and elders are most often the primary holders of this knowledge, programme design should attend to who carries it and who risks being excluded from its transmission.

5.1.9 Extend recognition and protection to community-grounded and living heritage beyond formal international listing

Recognition, funding and protection of cultural heritage in climate policy remain concentrated on formally designated, built and tangible assets, and above all on World Heritage sites. The research, the conversations with global experts, and the workshops found that intangible and built heritage outside flagship listings is structurally underrepresented, especially living traditions, oral practices, seasonal rituals and place-based knowledge systems which are among the most exposed to climate disruption, yet they receive a fraction of the attention and investment directed to monuments and archaeological sites. This typological gap compounds a geographic one, since heritage-climate

³⁶⁶ UNFCCC, Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, 'Non-economic losses'. <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/constituted-bodies/WIMExCom/NELs>

³⁶⁷ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2023), Pacific Regional Framework on Climate Mobility <https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/Pacific%20Regional%20Framework%20on%20Climate%20Mobility.pdf>

³⁶⁸ See good examples from UNESCO <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-supports-pacific-sids-strengthen-resilience-through-living-heritage-emergencies-0>

interventions and the largest research investments are led predominantly from Europe and North America.

The sector should therefore broaden the unit of recognition, protection and finance beyond formal designation. In practice, this means treating community-defined heritage, living traditions and place-based knowledge as legitimate objects of climate adaptation in their own right; developing funding routes for heritage that World Heritage status does not reach; and ensuring that national instruments such as Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans account for community and intangible heritage alongside the officially listed monuments. The frameworks now exist to enable this, since Target 9(g) and the Belém Indicators name intangible heritage and traditional, Indigenous and local knowledge explicitly. It is impossible to advocate for intangible heritage without advocating for an intersectional approach because women and elders are frequently the primary custodians of intangible heritage skills and their transmission, recognition and protection measures should be designed to safeguard these roles and to make visible the labour that sustains them.

Photo: *Mother Goddess of the Three Realms* project by Kilomet109 and Wax Atelier, UK/Viet Nam Season 2023
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Photo: D-Fuse presented *Nine Earths* at IKLECTIK, London, 2023. Supported by UK/Viet Nam Season © Alastair Fyfe Photography

6. Conclusion

Five years on from COP26, the evidence is clear: CBCA is not an add-on to climate policy but a necessary enabling condition for effective and just climate action. Across creative practices, heritage systems, Indigenous knowledge, community-based adaptation and sectoral transformation, culture shapes how climate risks are understood, how futures are imagined, and how collective responses become socially legitimate and durable. CBCA contributes where purely technical or economic approaches fall short: by mobilising values, emotions, identities, knowledge systems and relationships that underpin long-term behavioural, institutional and systemic change. As climate impacts intensify, the cultural dimensions of adaptation, resilience and transformation become not optional but foundational.

Within the broader climate landscape, CBCA occupies a distinctive position alongside scientific, financial and policy-driven approaches. It does not replace these functions, but complements them by shaping the conditions under which they can be implemented effectively. Culture operates through relational, cognitive and affective pathways: enabling dialogue across sectors and geographies, supporting locally grounded and context-sensitive

responses, and strengthening the legitimacy and durability of climate action. In this sense, CBCA contributes upstream of and alongside more technical interventions, helping to translate global commitments into socially meaningful and locally embedded forms of action.

At the same time, there are clear limits to what cultural approaches alone can achieve. Culture cannot decarbonise economies, mobilise climate finance at the scale required, or resolve structural inequalities in vulnerability and exposure to climate risk in isolation. Its role is most effective when understood in complementarity with other actors and systems, including climate science, finance, governance and development. A clear articulation of this complementary role is essential to avoid both overclaiming and underestimating the value of CBCA within the wider climate ecosystem.

Within this landscape, the British Council is well positioned to contribute to global practice not by replicating technical climate functions, but by strengthening the relational, cultural and human infrastructures on which climate action ultimately depends. Its distinctive value lies in cultural relations. Cultural relations, as a mode of international

engagement, works through long-term, people-centred exchange rather than transactional aid; it relies on trust, reciprocity and mutual learning rather than top-down delivery; and it builds shared understanding across difference rather than imposing single solutions. This is not a substitute for the work of climate scientists, financiers, multilateral negotiators, development agencies, or humanitarian responders. The British Council neither designs climate policy, deploys climate finance at scale, nor delivers technical adaptation infrastructure – and should not seek to do what is beyond its mandate. Its contribution sits upstream of and alongside these efforts: shaping the relationships, narratives and conditions that allow technical, financial and political responses to take root and endure across diverse cultural contexts.

The period leading to COP31 and beyond represents a critical transition point for CBCA. With culture and heritage now formally embedded to some extent in global climate frameworks, the central challenge shifts from visibility to implementation, financing and accountability. The next phase will require moving beyond symbolic inclusion towards demonstrable, measurable contribution to adaptation, resilience and transformation at scale and across different contexts.

To support this transition, several priorities emerge from the analysis. First, there is a need to strengthen the

evidence base, particularly in relation to behavioural, institutional and longer-term outcomes, through more coherent and comparable monitoring, evaluation and learning systems. Second, improving access to climate finance for cultural and community-based approaches remains a key challenge, requiring better alignment between policy recognition and funding mechanisms. Third, deeper integration of cross-cutting dimensions such as gender, cultural rights and intersectionality, including the participation and representation of marginalised and under-represented groups is essential to ensure that CBCA contributes to equitable and inclusive climate responses. Finally, sustained investment in partnerships, knowledge exchange and capacity-building is needed to enable CBCA to scale, travel across contexts and engage more effectively with climate governance systems.

If the period following COP26 marked a decisive shift in recognising the role of culture within climate discourse, the coming decade will determine whether this recognition translates into systemic impact. The continued development of CBCA will depend on its ability to demonstrate value in practice, strengthen its evidence base, and operate in effective complementarity with other dimensions of climate action. In doing so, culture has the potential to become a durable pillar of climate adaptation, resilience and transformation within the broader sustainable development agenda.



Photo: An oceanographer from the University of São Paulo presents their work to a group of artists. Ubatuba, Brazil
© Melanie Mattieu

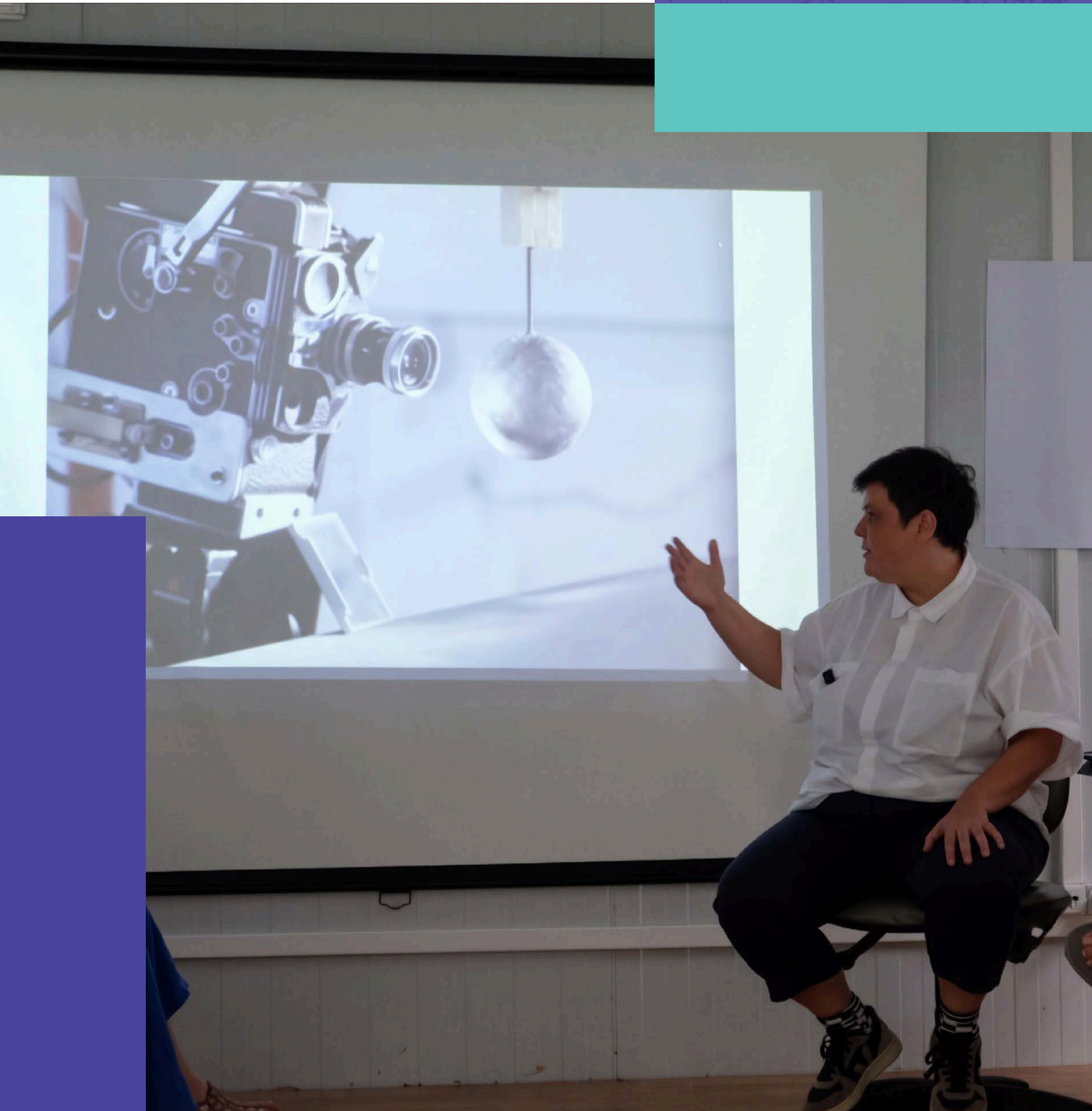




Photo: D-Fuse presented *Nine Earths* at IKLECTIK, London, 2023. Supported by UK/Viet Nam Season © Alastair Fyfe Photography

Acknowledgements

The British Council and KEA European Affairs would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the individuals and organisations who generously shared their time, expertise, and insights in support of this work. Their diverse perspectives, professional commitment, and willingness to engage critically across contexts and regions were invaluable to the development of this initiative. We are deeply appreciative of their contributions and collaboration, without which this work would not have been possible.

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Patrick Towell (The Audience Agency)

Pedro Gabriel Ferreira (People's Palace Projects / Queen Mary University of London)

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