**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE  
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Expert meeting on** **safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and climate change**

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**Online**

**Policy frameworks for living heritage in the climate emergency**

#### POLICY FRAMEWORKS

This document surveys the landscape of relevant policy frameworks that aim to address both climate change and intangible cultural heritage or knowledge systems. Working from the perspective of the 2003 Convention, the goal is to identify institutions, policies and individuals with significant engagement and expertise, along with any initiatives that model effective integration of climate change and intangible cultural heritage. Neither field – climate change or intangible cultural heritage – is addressed in the other’s foundational frameworks or conventions. Almost all the work of integration listed here has taken place over the past ten years.

Attention to climate change and emergencies in heritage frameworks and literature is addressed first in Section 1, before reviewing references to culture, heritage and intangible cultural heritage in climate change and emergency frameworks and literature in Section 2. Section 3 then addresses the integration of climate change and intangible cultural heritage in other fields, including cultural rights and human rights, development and biodiversity frameworks. This review is not exhaustive but can be considered indicative of the range of stakeholders with overlapping interests in climate change and intangible cultural heritage or knowledge systems. Website links to key individual institutions, policies, workshops and publications are provided as sources at the end of each section.

#### 1. Climate Change and Emergency in Cultural Heritage Frameworks

Climate change is not addressed in foundational heritage frameworks, which mostly predate the emergence of climate change institutions and instruments. Nevertheless, important initiatives developed during the past two decades have contributed to a growing awareness amongst heritage frameworks of the need to address the challenges of climate change, and to harness the positive contributions of heritage to climate change adaptations.

Recent statements from the cultural sector have called for renewed focus on the relationship between climate change and intangible cultural heritage. The final declaration of MONDIACULT 2022 called for ‘the protection of cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, as well as cultural expressions, notably in times of crisis, including extreme climate events and natural hazards’ and the integration of ‘cultural heritage and creativity into international discussions on climate change, given its multidimensional impact on the safeguarding of all forms of cultural heritage and expressions and acknowledging the role of culture for climate action, notably through traditional and indigenous knowledge systems’. The Seoul Visionfor the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace (UNESCO 2023a) has identified ‘the central role that living heritage can play in tackling the global environmental challenges facing our lives and the planet, in not only providing time-tested solutions but in shaping and reaffirming our relationship to the natural world’, and proposed the ‘integration of living heritage safeguarding into national plans and strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, applying community-based approaches’. The Spirit of Naples Call for Action (UNESCO 2023b) has called on stakeholders to ‘raise awareness of the importance of leveraging the interconnectedness of nature and culture to promote environmental sustainability and address the impact of climate change, fostering innovative, community-based and culturally grounded responses to challenges facing heritage sites, such as disaster risks and biodiversity loss, with a view to safeguarding indigenous, local adaptation and mitigation practices and know-hows’. The Emirates Declaration on Cultural-based Climate Action (Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action at the UNFCCC 2023) acknowledges ‘culture’s unparalleled capacity for enabling a powerfully inclusive response to create the systemic change needed to tackle the climate crisis’, and commits stakeholders ‘to expedite the integration of attention to culture, values, and diverse knowledge systems into our climate action and, simultaneously, to mainstream climate action across our policy agendas and actions related to cultural heritage, arts, and creative industries’.

#### 1.1 UNESCO policies and initiatives on climate change and emergency

From at least 2005, in response to growing awareness of the challenges of climate change, UNESCO has taken a global lead in promoting the conversation between cultural heritage, climate change and emergency.[[1]](#endnote-2) This orientation is reflected in initiatives undertaken through the World Heritage Convention (1.2 below) and the 2003 Convention (1.3 below), as well as by UNESCO’s Category 2 centres and advisory bodies (1.4 below).[[2]](#endnote-3)

Key cross-sectoral structures within UNESCO that are relevant to climate change and intangible cultural heritage include: the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) programme, established in 2002, which administers a substantial programme on climate change and the Climate Frontlines global forum; Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which is UNESCO’s education sector response to climate change and other major global challenges; and the Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit, established in 2014 within UNESCO’s Culture Sector.

The principal UNESCO cross-sectoral instruments, funds and initiatives that directly address the intersection of climate change, emergencies and intangible cultural heritage include: the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) program (2011); the Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF) (2015) [[3]](#endnote-4); the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) intersectoral platform (2016); the Addendum to the Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO’s Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict, Concerning Emergencies Associated with Disasters Caused by Natural and Human-Induced Hazards (2017); the Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change (2017); the Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples (2018); the Strategy for Action on Climate Change or SACC (2017), and its IOS evaluation in 2021; the Flexible Mechanism for Climate Change Impacts on Cultural and Natural Heritage (2020); and the MONDIACULT 2022 World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (2022).

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#### 1.2 1972 World Heritage Convention and advisory body policies and initiatives on climate change and emergency

The 1972 World Heritage Convention (hereafter the ‘1972 Convention’) predates the emergence of climate change and disaster management as well-defined challenges and fields of enquiry (see 1.1 above). Consequently, there is no reference to either climate change or emergencies in the text of the 1972 Convention, and only limited reference to natural hazard disasters.[[4]](#endnote-5) Nevertheless, work under the 1972 Convention has since pioneered the discussion and development of instruments and mechanisms addressing the relationship between climate change and cultural heritage, framed largely in terms of impacts to tangible heritage.[[5]](#endnote-6)

Discussion of the impact of climate change on World Heritage properties began as early as 2005, followed by a series of meetings during 2006-2007 that generated a number of reports, strategies and publications on the topic. This initial process culminated in the 2007 adoption by the General Assembly of the 1972 Convention of the Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties.[[6]](#endnote-7) Amongst the mechanisms available to support these initiatives are the List of World Heritage in Danger, and access to the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund.

Although the 2006 report on Predicting and Managing the Effects of Climate Change on World Heritage called for the involvement of local communities, and a ‘strong focus… on local knowledge systems and the way that they understand and adapt to changes in climate’,[[7]](#endnote-8) subsequent statements such as the 2007 Policy Document did not address local knowledge systems, and none of these early materials made reference to either intangible cultural heritage or the 2003 Convention.[[8]](#endnote-9) Similarly, the 2014 Practical Guide referred briefly to local communities and Indigenous peoples, but not to either intangible cultural heritage or the 2003 Convention.[[9]](#endnote-10)

The 2023 Updated Policy on Climate Action for World Heritage is a significant revision of the 2008 Policy Document and reflects the current state of relevant policy for the 1972 Convention. The drafting process has consisted of online consultation from 2019, and four meetings of a Technical Advisory Group in 2020, followed by an extensive process of review by the World Heritage Committee, an Open-ended Working Group, and a Panel of Experts.[[10]](#endnote-11) The Updated Policy represents a considerable advance on engagement with diverse knowledge systems and Indigenous peoples and local communities, but contains just one specific reference to intangible cultural heritage.[[11]](#endnote-12)

World Heritage engagement with climate change provides an instructive model of process, with an intensive round of meetings quickly and efficiently generating substantial policy and other instruments.

The limited integration of intangible cultural heritage in World Heritage activities is indicative of a broad lack of engagement with local or Indigenous perspectives prior to the 2023 Updated Policy.[[12]](#endnote-13) This absence of reference to intangible cultural heritage has been remedied to some extent by World Heritage engagement in the recent collaborative International Co-Sponsored Meeting on Culture, Heritage and Climate Change (ICSM CHC) process (see section 3.4 below), which highlights the value of cross-sectoral and cross-institutional collaboration in generating positions and policy relating to climate change. In 2023, the 1972 and 2003 Conventions jointly hosted the UNESCO Conference on Cultural Hertiage in the 21st Century in Naples, issuing a Call for Action entitled ‘The Spirit of Naples’ which reaffirms the indivisibility of natural heritage and tangible and intangible cultural forms of heritage.

The World Heritage Advisory Bodies have also launched and engaged several initiatives addressing the relationship between intangible cultural heritage, emergencies, and climate change. Examples from the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) include: the First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (FAR) Programme; the Sustainability and Built Heritage Programme; the World Heritage Leadership (WHL) Programme; and the Net Zero: Heritage for Climate Action initiative. Similarly, two working groups under the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) have substantially engaged with local knowledge systems and climate change. These are the Climate Action Working Group (formerly the Climate Change and Heritage Working Group or CCHWG), which produced The Future of Our Pasts: Engaging Cultural Heritage in Climate Action (2019); and the Working Group on Indigenous Heritage. The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICOMOS-ICORP) coordinates ICOMOS projects and focuses on disaster risk reduction initiatives.

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#### 1.3 2003 Convention policies and initiatives on climate change and emergencies

As the only heritage convention tasked not just with respecting and engaging intangible cultural heritage, including local knowledge systems, but also with understanding and safeguarding them as systems, the 2003 Convention plays a leading role globally in the development and promotion of policy and other initiatives that integrate intangible cultural heritage, climate change and emergencies. The 2003 Convention’s breadth of interests positions it well to work between scientific and local knowledge systems, and between multiple academic disciplines to address climate change. However, this will also require particular clarity in communicating about the scope and contribution of the 2003 Convention, a central challenge in addressing the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and climate change.

Throughout discussions leading up to the adoption of the 2003 Convention, and in the text of the Convention itself, the primary threat posed to intangible cultural heritage viability and transmission was understood to be unrestrained globalization and social transformation, with little or no reference to environmental transformation, natural hazards or climate change.[[13]](#endnote-14) While the 2003 Convention text does not refer directly to climate change, Article 11 requires each State Party to ‘take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory’ and to ‘identify and define the various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant nongovernmental organizations.’

All three of the 2003 Convention lists (List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding; Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity; Register of Good Safeguarding Practices) are also of direct relevance to planning for climate change adaptation. The 2003 Convention offers a range of technical and financial assistance to States Parties in the event of emergencies, including emergency International Assistance under the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, the listing mechanisms, which offer an opportunity to raise international awareness of intangible cultural heritage under risk, capacity development under the global capacity-building programme, and access to UNESCO’s Heritage Emergency Fund, which is a funding mechanism under the Culture sector.[[14]](#endnote-15)

The 2003 Convention has gradually broadened the scope of its understanding of threats to the viability of intangible cultural heritage to include conflict, natural and human-induced hazards, epidemics, and climate change, gathered under the broad label of ‘emergencies’.[[15]](#endnote-16) In 2016, States Parties to the Convention adopted a specific chapter of the Operational Directives on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development at the national level, which included direct references to the roles and risks of intangible cultural heritage in the context of disasters, emergencies and climate change.[[16]](#endnote-17)

Nomination files submitted by States Parties to the listing mechanisms of the Convention offer a potential source of information on measures being undertaken to address climate change and disaster risk at national level. Lixinski (2022) found that f the 76 intangible cultural heritage elements on the Urgent Safeguarding List, 23 cite some form of environmental degradation (including natural hazards and climate change) as one of the threatening factors, although only 4 mention disasters at all, focusing solely on the role of intangible cultural heritage in general community resilience with limited to no reference to the direct uses of intangible cultural heritage in disaster response.[[17]](#endnote-18) Periodic reports submitted by States Parties offer an additional source of information, particularly regarding Indicator 13.2, relating to policies and/or legal and administrative measures for environmental sustainability that integrate intangible cultural heritage safeguarding. Initial analyses of periodic reports under the first cycle of the reformed periodic reporting mechanism in Latin America and the Caribbean (2021) and Europe (2022) have yielded some examples of policies at national level that integrate intangible cultural heritage and disaster risk and climate change.

Responding to decisions from successive Committee Meetings since 2016, the Living Heritage Entity has commissioned desktop reports on ‘Safeguarding and Mobilising Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Context of Natural Hazards’ (2017), as well as operational projects on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in disaster contexts.[[18]](#endnote-19) In 2020, the General Assembly adopted the Operational Principles and Modalities for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies, which sets out the basic tenets of the 2003 Convention’s approach to emergencies in general and provides a template for addressing climate change in line with the principles of the 2003 Convention.[[19]](#endnote-20) While the Operational Principles and Modalities provide guidance to stakeholders at all levels on best practice regarding fundamental approaches to the safeguarding and mobilising intangible cultural heritage in the context of emergencies, they do not provide tools or operational details.[[20]](#endnote-21) Training materials on implementing the Operational Principles and Modalities in the context of disasters have been developed and delivered in the Philippines and Honduras during 2021, and as part of a project on ‘Capacity Building for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies in Small Island Developing States in the Pacific and the Caribbean, 2022-2025’, with a focus on climate-related hazards. The Secretariat of the 2003 Convention has also commissioned research and implemented operational projects looking at the roles and risks to intangible cultural heritage in the context of conflict and forced displacement, notably with the desktop report on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Displaced Syrians (2017) and the capacity-building project on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Conflict-Related Situations, Including Forced Displacement (2021-2023). UNESCO also convened a Regional Online Conference on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage for Biodiversity Conservation, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction in Eastern Africa in 2021.

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#### 1.4 UNESCO Category 2 Centre initiatives on climate change and emergency

UNESCO Category 2 Centres under the auspices of UNESCO form ‘an institutional architecture’ that plays a significant bridging role in interpreting the 2003 Convention for wider networks of stakeholders, and extending the reach of intangible cultural heritage insights to programmes and projects relating to climate change and emergency.[[21]](#endnote-22) UNESCO Category 2 Centres which have addressed the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and climate change include the following:[[22]](#endnote-23)

* International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (IRCI). This Japan-based Centre has launched a series of research projects, workshops and publications on Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding and Disaster Risk Management in the Asia-Pacific Region, Emergency Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Conflict-Affected Countries in Asia, and Intangible Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Cities and Communities. IRCI has launched a new research programme on intangible cultural heritage and climate change in 2024.
* Intangible Cultural Heritage Centre for Asia-Pacific (ICHCAP). This Republic of Korea-based Centre focuses on education and communication, producing publications and brochures, and a magazine, the ICH Courier, with regular coverage of intangible cultural heritage and climate change and other emergency issues for the Asia-Pacific region.
* International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (CRIHAP). This China-based Centre offers training programmes and workshops on climate change, emergencies and intangible cultural heritage safeguarding.
* Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Latin America (CRESPIAL). This Peru-based Centre addresses capacity building for safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Latin America, with recent projects on ‘Climate Change and Ethical Challenges’, and indigenous peoples, climate change and food security.
* Regional Research Centre for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in West and Central Asia (TICHCT). This Iran-based Centre organized a ‘Sub-regional Expert Meeting on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and Building resilience to Climate Change and Its Impacts in Western and Central Asia, with a special focus on the role of non-governmental actors’ 18-19 October 2023, with the support of ICHCAP, as the first step in a research programme on ICH policy in response to climate change. [[23]](#endnote-24)
* In 2023, the Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe (Bulgaria) hosted a meeting of Category 2 centres at which the different centres agreed to collaborate on a number of topics, including climate change.[[24]](#endnote-25)

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#### 1.5 Other heritage frameworks

There are multiple international, regional and national heritage frameworks, not directly associated with the United Nations, that address climate change and / or emergency. A comprehensive survey of frameworks in this category is not attempted here, but some of the range of examples is indicated.

The International National Trusts Organisation (INTO), which is the peak international body for National Heritage Trusts, has issued a series of declarations and recommendations on climate change between 2009 and 2017, with a balance of attention paid to intangible cultural heritage and creative industries. The 2021 INTO publication, “Putting the Local into Global Heritage: balancing conservation, tourism, development, and community interests at the sites of the world’s National Trusts” focuses on the needs of communities at heritage sites in the context of climate change and other emergencies.

Funding agencies that support heritage and craft in the context of emergencies include Blue Shield International, the ALIPH Foundation, the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative, and the Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development ; the Cultural Emergency Response (CER) is now an entity independent of the Prince Claus Fund, specialising in culture and emergency and promoting a decentralised CER Regional Hub Network to optimise responses at a local level. While the overwhelming emphasis at each of these institutions and initiatives has been on the preservation of cultural property, there is increasing acknowledgement in each case of the need to address the intangible cultural heritage and livelihoods of communities. CERF Plus and its Craft Emergency Relief Fund are unusual in their focus on artists and their livelihoods in the context of emergencies.

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#### 2. Intangible Cultural Heritage in Climate Change and Emergency Frameworks

While intangible cultural heritage is seldom addressed directly in either climate change or emergency / disaster risk reduction frameworks, United Nations institutions that address climate change and emergencies are increasingly aware of the importance of local and Indigenous knowledge. A similar awareness is also evident in non-United Nations climate change and emergency institutions and initiatives.

#### 2.1 United Nations policies and initiatives on intangible cultural heritage in contexts of climate change and emergency

The three principal United Nations institutions that focus on climate change are: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement, and sponsors the regular Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings; and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) is the lead United Nations agency for the assessment of hazard risk and coordination of disaster risk reduction.

As the primary body charged with reporting on climate change, established by UNEP and WMP in 1988, the IPCC has produced a series of six Assessment Reports between 1990 and 2023. The early Assessment Reports (AR) made little mention of local or alternative knowledge systems, but there has been a marked increase in references to Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledge, in particular, between AR5 (2013-14) and AR6 (2021-23).[[25]](#endnote-26) Two special reports of the IPCC, the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC) and the Special Report on Climate Change and Land (SRCCL), both published in 2019, also show evidence of increasing interest in local knowledge systems.

The UNFCCC, drafted in 1992, made an early commitment to incorporating the perspectives of local communities and Indigenous peoples through a series of initiatives, including: the Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation to climate change established at COP11 in 2005; and later through the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change (IIPFCC), established in 2008, and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) and its Facilitative Working Group. Starting with the introduction of an increased emphasis on alternative strategies for adaptation at COP16 in 2010, as set out in the Cancun Agreements, and running through the Paris Agreement of COP21, greater value has become attached to the role of local knowledge systems.[[26]](#endnote-27) UNFCCC best practice is described in a technical paper on “Best Practices and Available Tools for the Use of Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge and Practices for Adaptation, and the Application of Gender-Sensitive Approaches and Tools for Understanding and Assessing Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change” (2013).

The WMO, established in 1950, promotes international cooperation on atmospheric science, climatology, hydrology and geophysics. The WMO has not had the same breadth of engagement with local knowledge systems as the IPCC or UNFCCC, but recently hosted a Workshop on Blending Climate Information with Indigenous and Local Knowledge (2023), features a designated Task Team on Indigenous and Local Knowledge and has engaged substantively with UNESCO LINKS initiatives in Africa and the Caribbean.

The UNDRR reports on the implementation of the current Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR, 2015-2030) and its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework (HFA, 2005-2015). The Sendai Framework introduced a significant increase in attention to culture and local knowledge systems, largely through a focus on community-based approaches to disaster management and disaster risk reduction. Key initiatives under the Sendai Framework have included the UNDRR’s Call to Action at COP27, which prioritised inclusive local action and community engagement, finance for non-governmental stakeholders, and climate justice for all: ‘Local and indigenous knowledge and experiences are critical to identify solutions that work best to avoid maladaptation, worsened inequalities, and unsustainable programming. People are affected differently by disasters so we must empower and include local actors, especially community-based organizations, in the development and implementation of national and local strategies to effectively avert, minimize and address losses and damages.’[[27]](#endnote-28)

There has been a dramatic increase over the past two years in UNDRR outputs and publications on traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems, including: the guide “Words into Action: Using Traditional and Indigenous Knowledges for Disaster Risk Reduction” (2022); numerous reports appended to the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022: Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future (GAR); and the thematic papers supporting the Mid-Term Review of the SFDRR (2023). UNDRR also convenes ARISE: Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies, a public-private facility for financing resilience initiatives, and hosts PreventionWeb, the most comprehensive global knowledge-sharing platform for disaster risk reduction and resilience.

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#### 2.2 Other policies and initiatives on intangible cultural heritage in contexts of climate change and emergency

A range of other institutions and initiatives focused primarily on climate change and emergencies, positioned either outside the United Nations or in collaboration with United Nations agencies, also engage with local knowledge systems and cultural heritage. These include: the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), a multi-donor partnership housed within the World Bank, which supports disaster management and climate change adaptation; weADAPT, a knowledge exchange focused on climate change adaptation solutions and best practice; and the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction (GNDR), which coordinates a network of more than 1500 civil society organisations in 129 countries that are focused on community resilience in the context of disasters, and directly supports individual NGOs such as Indonesia’s Resilience Development Initiative.

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#### 3. Integration of Climate Change and Intangible Cultural Heritage in Other Frameworks

#### 3.1 Other Institutions and Facilities

The intersection between climate change and intangible cultural heritage is addressed by an important additional range of United Nations and other institutions, instruments and initiatives operating either within rights-based, gender, development, environment, conservation and biodiversity frameworks; or as independent programmes by Member States; or as individual researchers and research institutions; or through innovative cross-sectoral collaborations.

#### a) Rights-based frameworks

Rights-based institutions and instruments have a particularly important role to play in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change. A very large number of relevant frameworks range from the broad remit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) through to Indigenous rights, environmental justice and intellectual property platforms.[[28]](#endnote-29) Of particular relevance are institutions such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) which engages directly with the challenge of climate change for Indigenous peoples, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which recognisesthat ‘respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment’. The OHCHR has had a focus on Indigenous people and climate change since at least 2008, but more recently the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights has issued important thematic and country visit reports from 2016 that directly engage with rights to intangible cultural heritage in the context of climate change, most notably the 2020 report on climate change, culture and cultural rights. Also of note is the 2019 report on Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Knowledge in the Context of the UNFCCC by the Centre for Environmental Law (CIEL). Instruments relating to the displacement of communities include the 1951 Refugee Convention and all subsequent instruments that address displacement, whether through conflict, food insecurity, or climate change.

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**b) Gender frameworks**

A focus on gender is increasingly mainstreamed throughout most of the frameworks discussed in this document but deserves particular attention at the intersection of climate change and intangible cultural heritage. UN Women has led action on the relationship between gender equality and climate justice, with a major 2023 report on “Feminist climate justice: a framework for action” establishing a basis for advocacy in this area. The 2022 meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) issuing a statement on “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”, which ‘emphasizes the importance of the work of the scientific community in support of strengthening the global response to climate change, environmental degradation and disasters and respecting and protecting the traditional and ancestral knowledge, including of indigenous peoples’. UNDP has also addressed the gender equality-climate justice nexus, making the case that climate change is not gender neutral, and that the compounding of existing inequalities risks undoing decades of development progress. The role of women as environmental managers and their specific vulnerabilities in circumstances of environmental change has been the focus of attention by UNEP, which published a major review, the Global Gender and Environment Outlook (GGEO), in 2018. IUCN has developed the Advancing Gender in the Environment (AGENT) initiative, in partnership with USAID, to recognise women as agents of change and acknowledge the diverse knowledge and capacities of all genders. The initiative has specifically addressed the issue of climate degradation and gender-based violence, and has reviewed gender considerations in the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report. UNDRR has recently published a Gender Action Plan (2024) to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

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#### c) Development frameworks

Development frameworks have begun to address the nexus between climate change, poverty alleviation and the development of local capacity, although their contributions to programmes on climate change and local knowledge systems usually involve collaboration with agencies in other sectors. Key agencies in this sector include: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the World Bank, which launched its Indigenous Knowledge for Development Program in 1998 and the World Bank Group Climate Change Action Plan 2021–2025 in 2019; and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which has introduced the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) programme and the online platform for Technologies and Practices for Small Agricultural Producers (TECA).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, provide an overarching development framework for action on poverty, peace and environmental sustainability. Administered by the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) in the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the 17 SDGs include SDG 13 on Climate Action and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities; Target 11.4 specifically addresses ‘efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage’. The UNESCO Thematic Indicators for Culture in the 2030 Agenda was developed as a mechanism for measuring and monitoring the progress of culture’s enabling contribution to the implementation of the SDGs.

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#### d) Environment, conservation and biodiversity frameworks

Agencies operating in the environment, conservation and biodiversity sector have had a relatively long engagement with the critical role in environmental stewardship of Indigenous peoples and local communities and their knowledge systems, as well as addressing issues relating to natural heritage and now climate change.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the lead global agency on the environment, with a remit that addresses climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution. Recent initiatives relevant to the focus of this Background Note include the Indigenous Peoples and Climate Technologies report (2021), and the Territories of Life report (2021) on the role in conservation of Indigenous and local communities. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), an independent intergovernmental body established under the UNEP in 2012, maintains a task force on Indigenous and local knowledge. The IPBES promotes or contributes to regional and local initiatives such as the Dialogue Workshop on Arctic Indigenous Knowledge (2018), in collaboration with the Arctic Council and the Technical Support Unit (TSU) on Indigenous and local knowledge, which is hosted by UNESCO’s LINKS programme.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a multilateral treaty effective since 1993, addresses issues of the conservation, sustainable use; and fair and equitable sharing of benefits of biological diversity. The CBD has been particularly attentive to linkages between biodiversity and cultural diversity, and has collaborated closely on the issue through a cross-sectoral Joint Programme with UNESCO since 2010. The CBD has also been informed at its annual meetings since 1996 by a caucus of Indigenous representatives in the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB). The 2022 framework for the post-2020 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) will coordinate action amongst global agreements on biodiversity conservation for the next decade, and places a strong emphasis on the contribution and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. The GBF includes a new commitment to a Joint Programme of Work on the links between biological and cultural diversity, to be led by the Secretariat of the CBD, UNESCO, IUCN and ICOMOS.

The 1971 Ramsar Convention on Wetlands incorporates tangible and intangible cultural criteria in its nomination process, acknowledges the role of Indigenous peoples and local communities in wetland management, and engages in projects that support local wetland managers confronted with the impacts of climate change.

The 1994 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) seeks to combine scientific approaches with traditional and Indigenous land stewardship to halt or reverse desertification processes associated with climate change, though it has not formally engaged with the 2003 Convention or its concepts.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) issued its Principles and Guidelines on Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Protected Areas as early as 1997, and continues to promote inclusive forms of management, most recently through its contributing role in the World Summit of Indigenous Peoples and Nature (2021), the Indigenous Negotiations Resource Guide (2022), and the GEF-7 Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) (2022).

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#### 3.2 State initiatives and collaborations

State initiatives relating to climate change adaptation and cultural heritage are highly significant because they occupy the space between global institutions and instruments, and implementation at a regional, national or local level. These initiatives are variable in terms of intent, capacity and execution, but they target specific challenges of particular relevance to local conditions. Some operate within a broad global framework, such as the short-term National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) and medium- to long-term National Action Plans (NAPs) which structure the planning and implementation of climate change adaptation policies at the country level. However, most State initiatives are developed independently to meet national priorities and needs. Specific examples of this category of action include: the Vanuatu Community-based Climate Resilience Project (VCCRP), hosted by the Ministry of Climate Change, which works with communities to improve climate resilience at a local level; the Aotearoa New Zealand Framework for National Climate Change Risk Assessment, *Arotakenga Huringa Āhuarangi*, which is organised around Indigenous Māori protocols; and the 2014 Guidelines for Considering Traditional Knowledges in Climate Change Initiatives, produced by the United States of America’s Climate and Traditional Knowledges Workgroup (CTKW).

States are also entering into regional and thematic partnerships to address climate change adaptation. An early example was the Arctic Council’s Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2004), which provided the platform for subsequent policy on climate change adaptation, with substantial input from Indigenous communities of the region. More recently, 23 countries have joined in collaboration through the Global Commission on Adaptation (2018-2020) to produce the report “Adapt Now: a global call for leadership on climate resilience” (2019); one outcome of this initiative has been the establishment of a successor institution, the Global Center on Adaptation, which acts as a hub for the sharing of knowledge and setting of research agendas.

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  + Aotearoa New Zealand: *Arotakenga Huringa Āhuarangi*: A Framework for the National Climate Change Risk Assessment for Aotearoa New Zealand (2019), <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Files/arotakenga-huringa-ahuarangi-framework-for-national-climate-change-risk-assessment-for-aotearoa-FINAL.pdf>
  + Australia: Climate Change Toolkit for World Heritage Properties in Australia (2023), <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/climate-change-toolkit-world-heritage-properties-australia-handbook-for-property-managers.pdf>
  + Scotland: Historic Environment Scotland, Climate Change Risk Assessment, <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=55d8dde6-3b68-444e-b6f2-a866011d129a>
  + United States of America: The Climate and Traditional Knowledges Workgroup (CTKW), Guidelines for Considering Traditional Knowledges in Climate Change Initiatives (2014), <https://toolkit.climate.gov/tool/guidelines-considering-traditional-knowledges-climate-change-initiatives>
* International and regional collaborations
  + Arctic Council, <https://arctic-council.org/>
    - Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (2004), <https://acia.amap.no/>
  + Global Commission on Adaptation (2018-2020), and the Global Center on Adaptation, <https://gca.org/>
    - Adapt Now: a global call for leadership on climate resilience (2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/adapt-now-global-call-leadership-climate-resilience?gclid=CjwKCAjwzJmlBhBBEiwAEJyLu296VpJg19PbSBE8mXQ_iX69dkwzhFeMvm1o0sYTuLEVi9FIpkwkkBoCj48QAvD_BwE>

#### 3.3 Researchers and research institutions

The authors of most of the references listed in the bibliography attached here ([Appendix I](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/65029-EN.pdf)) are researchers, writing either independently (as individuals or co-authors) or as consultants within institutional frameworks. As a general observation, the overwhelming majority of authors listed in the bibliography work in fields other than intangible cultural heritage, whether within the frame of other forms of heritage or as specialists in climate change, environmental science, Indigenous studies, anthropology, etc. With a few notable exceptions, scholars who focus explicitly on the work of the 2003 Convention have rarely addressed climate change, disasters or environmental change, leaving a substantial gap in the literature that is currently filled by scholars from other fields. Engaging the interest of established research centres and collectives, such as the UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Networks, the UNESCO Category 2 Centres, the UNU Traditional Knowledge Initiative, and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Network of the Association for Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS), is an important priority.

#### Sources

* UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN Network, <https://www.unesco.org/en/unitwin>
* Intangible Cultural Heritage Network of the Association for Critical Heritage Studies (ACHS), <https://www.criticalheritagestudies.org/intangible-heritage-network>
* UNU Traditional Knowledge Initiative, <https://archive.unu.edu/climate/activities/roleOfIndigenousPeople.html>

#### 3.4 Cross-sectoral initiatives

A number of recent initiatives developed between institutions and across sectors point to the value of collaboration and partnerships in tackling a challenge as complex as the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and climate change. Each of these initiatives successfully engages with climate change, disaster risk reduction, and cultural heritage, including intangible cultural heritage.

The Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) is a standardised, multi-sectoral template for identifying and assessing recovery needs, the product of collaboration between the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the World Bank and the European Union. Initiated in 2008, it is now widely implemented after most major disasters that require international aid and assistance, integrating international experts with national agencies in the affected country. A separate chapter on culture was introduced in 2013, although this has tended to focus largely if not exclusively on material heritage, inviting reflection on the difficulty of identifying impacts to intangible cultural heritage, and assessing the financial costs of any recovery. Recommendations have since been proposed for the incorporation and practical implementation of intangible cultural heritage assessment in PDNAs (Selter 2017).

The Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) programme is co-sponsored by the International Science Council (ICSU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), and UNDRR. It is explicitly multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral in its approach to understanding disasters, reducing vulnerability to disaster risk, and generating policy advice. Research towards these goals is distributed internationally across a series of National and Regional Committees, International Centres of Excellence, and a Young Scientists Programme.

The Climate Heritage Network (CHN) has served since 2019 to link government agencies, NGOs, research institutions, businesses, and others engaged in work on climate policy, planning and action as this relates to culture, including both arts and heritage. The CHN issued a manifesto on culture and climate change at COP27 in 2022 and has published The Climate Heritage Network 2022-24 Action Plan, which further expands the range of cultural voices contributing to knowledge documentation and exchange on climate change adaptation and carbon mitigation.

Finally, the Global Research and Action Agenda on Culture, Heritage and Climate Change was a joint initiative between UNESCO, IPCC and ICOMOS, which organised the International Co-Sponsored Meeting on Culture, Heritage and Climate Change in December 2021, generated a summary report and three White Papers in 2022, and contributed policy recommendations on the integration of culture in the climate agenda. The three White Papers represent a core resource for further research and policy development in the fields of: I, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Diverse Knowledge Systems and Climate Change; II, Impacts, Vulnerability, and Understanding Risks of Climate Change for Culture and Heritage; III, The Role of Cultural and Natural Heritage for Climate Action.

#### Sources

* Post-Disaster Needs Assessments, <https://www.undp.org/publications/post-disaster-needs-assessment>
* Integrated Research on Disaster Risk (IRDR) programme, <https://www.irdrinternational.org/>
* Climate Heritage Network (CHN), <https://www.climateheritage.org/>
  + CHN Manifesto at COP27, <https://www.climateheritage.org/manifesto>
  + The Climate Heritage Network 2022-24 Action Plan, <https://www.climateheritage.org/actionplan>
* Local Indicators of Climate Change Impacts (LICCI) project, <https://www.licci.eu/>
* Global Research and Action Agenda on Culture, Heritage and Climate Change, <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2716/>
  + International Co-Sponsored Meeting on Culture, Heritage and Climate Change (ICSM CHC), 6-10 December 2021, <https://www.ipcc.ch/event/ipcc-icomos-unesco-co-sponsored-meeting-on-culture-heritage-and-climate-science/>
  + White Paper I: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Diverse Knowledge Systems and Climate Change, <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2717/>
  + White Paper II: Impacts, Vulnerability, and Understanding Risks of Climate Change for Culture and Heritage, <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2718/>
  + White Paper III: The Role of Cultural and Natural Heritage for Climate Action, <https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/2719/>

1. Mínguez-García 2020. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. See UNESCO 2019 for a public summary of UNESCO activities on climate change. Other UNESCO Conventions, including the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, do not appear to engage substantively with issues of climate change, emergency, or natural hazard, and are not considered here. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Since 2016, HEF have implemented 12 activities which targeted or addressed intangible cultural heritage, and 7 activities directed at climate change-related disasters. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. UNESCO 1972. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Higgins 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Daly 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. World Heritage Centre 2006. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. World Heritage Centre 2007. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. World Heritage Centre 2014: 1.5 ‘A note on local and indigenous peoples’. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. World Heritage Centre 2021. The process of developing this Update is described in detail at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/climatechange/>; see also Higgins 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. See, in particular, Paras 23, 54, 68, 71, 82, 91, 93, 97, 99 of the Policy Draft document. Annex II, on areas for further focus regarding adaptation, states in Para. 2 that: ‘Adaptation actions should be based on and guided, as appropriate, by traditional knowledge, knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local knowledge systems. The importance of Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ knowledge for understanding impacts and designing and implementing appropriate adaptation action should be valued and utilised via a participatory process characterised by respect for the diversity of cultural expressions. Traditional methods and systems for preventing, conserving and addressing the negative impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties should be included in relevant climate policies.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. The Summary of the online consultation process notes the lack of attention to intangible cultural heritage (Activity-393-29). See also Higgins 2022, 4. Developed in the historical shadow of the 1972 Convention, the 2003 Convention stresses ‘the deep-seated interdependence between the intangible cultural heritage and the tangible cultural and natural heritage” in its preamble, and notes that considerations of intangible cultural heritage cannot alter the status or diminish the level of protection afforded to a site under the 1972 Convention (Article 3(a)). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Kurin 2007, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Living Heritage Entity, Living Heritage in Emergencies <https://ich.unesco.org/en/emergency-situations-01117> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. The growing importance of the relationship between climate change and intangible cultural heritage was recognized as early as 2013, when the Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit commissioned a report on ‘Mainstreaming Intangible Cultural Heritage into Climate Change Adaptation Planning’ (Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit 2013), and a Committee Decision in the same year accepted a proposal for a planned Category 6 Expert Meeting on ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage and Climate Change’, to be held in Việt Nam in early 2014 (Document ITH/13/8.COM/12 Rev para.11-13, Annex II). Although the report was not completed and the meeting did not take place, the Committee maintained its interest in the topic at the 2015 Meeting, adopting a new chapter of the Operational Directives with provisions related to the contribution of intangible cultural heritage to sustainable development and to community-based resilience to natural disasters and climate change. Discussion on the topic resumed at the 11th sessions of the Committee in 2016, within the broader context of emergencies, including natural hazard disasters and conflict. On this occasion, climate change featured only in reference to its potential for displacement of communities (Document ITH/16/11.COM/15 para.12). Reports subsequently commissioned on the topics of intangible cultural heritage and conflict, and intangible cultural heritage and natural and human-induced hazards, were the focus of discussion at the twelfth session of the Committee in 2017, although climate change was not specifically identified (Document ITH/17/12.COM/15). The 2018 Meeting continued this focus on emergencies (again without specific reference to climate change), requesting that a Category VI expert meeting be held ‘to develop recommendations for methodological guidance for stakeholders of the Convention faced with situations of emergency’ (Document ITH/18/13.COM/11 para.15-16). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. The Operational Directives note the role of intangible cultural heritage in ensuring food security (VI.1.1, para. 178) and water security (VI.1.5, para. 182), and directly addresses ‘Community-based resilience to natural disasters and climate change’ (VI.3.3, para. 191), acknowledging the role of traditional bearers of knowledge about geoscience and the climate. States Parties are enjoined to promote research into ‘the effectiveness of knowledge of disaster risk reduction, disaster recovery, climate adaptation and climate change mitigation’ that is recognised as part of intangible cultural heritage, while also ‘enhancing the capacities of communities, groups and individuals to face challenges related to climate change that existing knowledge may not address’. States Parties are also encouraged to take the necessary ‘legal, technical, administrative and financial measures to… promote access to and transmission of knowledge concerning the earth and the climate… while respecting customary practices governing access to specific aspects of it [and to] fully integrate communities, groups and individuals who are bearers of such knowledge into systems and programmes of disaster risk reduction, disaster recovery and climate change adaptation and mitigation.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Lixinski 2022; Living Heritage Entity, Dive into Living Heritage and Threatening Factors, <https://ich.unesco.org/dive/threat/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit 2017; Chatelard 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Reproduced in Living Heritage Entity 2022. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. LHE/19/EXP/5, para.28. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Internal Oversight Service 2021, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Category 2 Centres are described at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/category2>. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Lixinski and Ubertazzi 2019, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. UNESCO, Category 2 Centres explore future avenues for collaboration, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/news/category-2-centres-explore-future-avenues-for-collaboration-13487> [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. Ford, Cameron et al. 2016; Morel 2018; Carmona et al. 2023. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Ford, Maillet et al. 2016. Article 7(5) of the Paris Agreement states that: ‘Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. UNDRR 2022, Item 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. For example, Bennoune 2020. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)