

Role of culture in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

For the 10th anniversary of the Agenda 21 for culture, several thematic notes have been written.

Each note capitalizes our knowledge, quoting drafts we have produced during 10 years, and other basic documents.

These notes have been elaborated by Mariona Peraire and Joana Valent (Ramon Llull University, Barcelona) and Jordi Pascual (UCLG Culture committee coordinator).



“The **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** are eight goals with measurable targets and clear deadlines for **improving the lives of the world’s poorest people and eradicate poverty**. Leaders of 189 countries signed the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit in 2000. Eight goals that range from providing universal primary education to avoiding child and maternal mortality were set with a target achievement date of 2015.” **Web Agenda 21 for culture: [Millennium Development Goals](#)**.

“**Creativity, diversity and heritage are values** which are intrinsic to culture and nowadays are **basic building blocks in any development strategy**.” **Jordi Martí**, Councillor for Culture - Barcelona City Council and President of United Cities and Local Governments’ Committee on Culture, in **“[Introduction](#)”, Report 2: Culture, local governments and Millennium Development Goals** (2009).

“In any comprehensive vision of the struggle against poverty, it would be wrong to ignore the direct link with exclusion on cultural grounds as one of its causes. (...) It is equally important to emphasize that fact that policies and actions geared towards fostering **mutual knowledge** and **cultural exchanges** are a determining factor in preventing social conflict and wars or in restoring coexistence after them, and hence they weave a peace culture that is essential for development. I shall thus mention at least four areas in which culture makes a direct contribution to development:

- a) The added value culture brings to economics
- b) The added value culture brings to social cohesion
- c) The indirect impact on the increase in cultural tourism
- d) The added value culture brings to building a participatory community

(...) There is still some way to go in deepening and making use of all the potential in the relationship between culture and development.” **J.A. González Mancebo**, Expert in international cooperation for development and social policies. At present he works at the United Nations in New York in the MDG-F Secretariat management team, in [“Development, culture and the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund”](#), *Report 2: Culture, local governments and Millennium Development Goals* (2009).



“Cultural issues are more often integrated as instruments to further the objectives of other development sectors, rather than **as major pillars of the strategy.**” **Inge Ruigrok**, Expert on governance, and culture & development. Currently works as an independent consultant. Editor and policy-expert for the Power of Culture, in [“The missing dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals: culture and local governments”](#), *Report 2: Culture, local governments and Millennium Development Goals* (2009).

“An important initiative that attempts to draw local authorities and culture closer into the worldwide policy-framework is the **Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund (MDGF)** launched by the Spanish government and UNDP in december 2006. (...) The Fund committed to the vision of culture as an extremely effective practical instrument for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. (...) It should be noted that work is being done in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Arab countries, and this will afford exchanges of experiences and knowledge management opportunities. (...) **Eight thematic windows:**

- Gender equality and women’s empowerment
- Environment and climate change
- Culture and development
- Economic governance

- Youth, employment and migration
- Conflict prevention and peacebuilding
- Childhood, food security and nutrition
- Development and the private sector” **J.A. González Mancebo**, Expert in international

cooperation for development and social policies. At present he works at the United Nations in New York in the MDG-F Secretariat management team, in [“Development, culture and the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund”](#), *Report 2: Culture, local governments and Millennium Development Goals* (2009).

"MDGs have been the **most successful tool in the worldwide fighting against poverty history**. We have made significant and substantial progress in many of the goals, including halving of the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and the proportion of people without sustainable access to improved drinking water sources". UNDP, [Human Development Report 2013](#).



"The Millennium Declaration failed to highlight the fundamental role that culture plays in the fight against poverty and the achievement of sustainability. Since 2000, although we have witnessed noticeable progress, the development approach followed so far has exposed its **limitations**. As stated by UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, “we cannot continue to burn and consume our way to prosperity” while poverty and inequalities continue to increase: **a transformative change is required** and “business as usual” is not an option. We are convinced that **culture must be at the heart of this transformative change** and that the integration of culture within development efforts is crucial to tackle a large number of the current global challenges more effectively and sustainably." UCLG and others, [Culture as a Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (2013).

"Four global cultural networks (IFACCA, Agenda 21 for culture, IFCCD and Culture Action Europe) have written an **awaring and lobbying** document to promote the inclusion of an explicit **Objective for culture in the United Nations post-2015 development agenda**. We suggest that the wording of this Objective should be "Ensure culture sustainability for the welfare of all." This objective would provide consistency, conceptual clarity and strength to the whole Agenda. Furthermore, it would also accelerate the change on other issues and facilitate the achievement of the other Objectives. (...) **Time has come for culture to be in the heart of a significant and positive change**.

Nowadays, every actor of the international community advocates for its own interests (health, education, children, gender, youth, energy, mobility, climate change...) to be taken in account in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Some of those interests have a clear cultural dimension. We understand them and support them. But overall, we must fight for our own interests, ie, the **intrinsic values of culture: heritage, diversity, creativity and knowledge**. Some people struggle against the inclusion of culture as a real part of the development agenda, persuaded that cultural diversity can be a divisive element, or that arts, construction of meanings and cultural practices can be considered as a luxury and not as a basis for human welfare. **We fight tirelessly and relentlessly**.

During the last decade the international community has collected substantial evidence on the role of culture in development. The conclusion is that, most often, development policies and projects which do not take into account the cultural dimension have failed. Culture effectively contributes to policies, strategies and programs targeting inclusive social and economic development, environmental sustainability, harmony, peace and security. **Culture is both a driver and an enabler of sustainable development.**" UCLG and others, [Culture as a Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (2013).

"Heightened **mobility** of populations, the **access and use of information** and communication technologies worldwide, the emergence of a **'generous' generation**, and the shift towards the **Creative Age**, all have (or will have) an impact on the way MDGs are achieved. (...) While individual-focused creative public programs are necessary to build and strengthen the human capacity central to any kind of development scheme, enhancement of community-based creative initiatives supported by local governments is also critical to sustain development. Whether it is about restoring cultural heritage or developing a modern performing arts center, culture is central to local development from urban to rural and anything in between them." **Nil Sismanyazici-Navaie**, Arts for Global Development, Inc., in ["Achieving Millenium Development Goals with local creativity"](#), *Report 2: Culture, local governments and Millenium Development Goals* (2009).



THE FUTURE WE WANT INCLUDES CULTURE



"We believe that the best way to include considerations on the role of culture in the fight against poverty and sustainable development is through the explicit existence of a goal focused on culture in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. We suggest the following wording: **ENSURE CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR THE WELLBEING OF ALL.**

Indeed, culture plays both an instrumental and constitutive role in development; it is both a means and an end. It contains an instrumental and transversal value, supporting and strengthening interventions in development areas but is also a development priority in its own right, the constitutive basis of our life and, thus, a desirable end in itself." UCLG and others, [Culture as a Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (2013).

"The MDGs have shown that **specific global development goals can make a noticeable difference.** Success (...) not only contribute to improving the lives of millions of people, it also impulse post-2015 plans and subsequent challenges we will have to overcome in order to achieve sustainable development." **Ban Ki-moon**, United Nations General Secretary, quoted in UN, [The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013](#).

"Because culture is both a vector to foster other sustainable development goals and a development end in itself, a specific goal is needed in order to reinforce the potential of cultural resources for sustainable development and to achieve their long-term sustainable use for **current and future generations.**" UCLG and others, [Culture as a Goal in the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) (2013).

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