Role of the arts and culture in addressing the health impacts of climate change

Behavioural and Cultural Insights policy brief series

World Health Organization
European Region

Jameel Arts & Health Lab

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Abstract

Climate change is a growing public health emergency whose impacts extend beyond physical illness to mental, social and cultural well-being. Technical solutions alone are insufficient: effective climate–health action also requires cultural transformation that addresses the values, behaviours and social norms driving environmental harm. This policy brief synthesizes evidence from a rapid literature review, an international expert survey and global case studies to examine how arts and culture can strengthen climate–health responses. Findings show that arts-based approaches make climate–health links more tangible, improve risk communication and enhance public understanding by translating complex science into accessible, emotionally resonant forms. Participatory and community-based arts activities support adaptation and resilience by providing spaces to process eco-anxiety, trauma and loss, strengthening social connection and enabling collective agency. Emerging examples also highlight contributions to mitigation through shifts in norms, practices and sustainable cultural production. Despite growing public demand and increasing recognition in global frameworks, arts and culture remain underutilized in climate–health policy. The brief outlines priority actions for integrating cultural approaches into mitigation, adaptation and communication efforts and calls for coordinated investment, partnership and research to scale effective, equitable and culturally grounded climate–health strategies.

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Cover image: Almigdad Aldikhaiiry, *Degrees of Separation*, 2019. 48 X 72in., oil on canvas. Photo by Stephen Stapleton. © Culturunners

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Contents

Agnes Denes, *'The Future is Fragile, Handle with Care', installation* in Venice Lagoon, 2021. © Culturunners

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Bahia Shehab, *Pyramids of Garbage*, 2020.
Photo by Hadeer Mahmoud. © Bahia Shehab

Executive Summary

The climate crisis is a health crisis and current responses will fall short if they focus on technical solutions without addressing the cultural drivers of environmental harm and the cultural dimensions of health and well-being. Engaging with the arts and culture creates powerful, evidence-informed opportunities to complement science and policy by making climate–health links tangible, strengthening psychological and community resilience, restoring a sense of connection with nature and motivating low-carbon, climate-just behaviours.

Yet despite growing public demand for meaningful climate action and emerging recognition of culture in global frameworks, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Climate Action Agenda *(1)*, the contributions of artists, arts educators, arts therapists and cultural organizations remain under-recognized and under-resourced in climate and health policy.

Key Findings

This policy brief synthesizes findings from a rapid literature review of empirical studies (see Annex 1) *(2)*, an international expert survey *(3)* and global case studies (see Annex 2) to show that arts-based approaches can:

- improve climate–health communication by translating complex science into accessible, emotionally resonant narratives;
- support adaptation and recovery by addressing eco-anxiety, trauma and social isolation; and
- contribute to mitigation by shifting norms, practices and industry standards towards sustainable, equitable futures.

Suggested Actions

To harness this potential, it offers policy-makers the following key considerations:

1. Embed arts and culture in climate–health strategies through existing policy frameworks.
2. Establish interdisciplinary funding mechanisms that link arts, health and climate portfolios.
3. Institutionalize intersectoral partnerships across climate, culture and health sectors.
4. Invest in research and data systems that capture the health and environmental co-benefits of arts engagement, including in climate-vulnerable and low-resource settings.

These four considerations align with Planetary Health frameworks *(4)*, the Health in All Policies approach *(5)* and the WHO Global Action Plan on Climate Change and Health *(6)* which emphasizes intersectoral cooperation. Recognizing arts and culture as essential climate–health infrastructure will enable more equitable, culturally grounded and effective responses to the intertwined crises facing people and planet.

Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing Ice Watch, 2014. Supported by Bloomberg. Installation view: Bankside, outside Tate Modern, 2018. Photo by Charlie Forgham-Bailey, courtesy of the aritst; neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. © 2014 Olafur Eliasson

The purpose of this policy brief

This policy brief provides evidence-informed guidance for policy-makers, ministry officials, health-care leaders, climate adaptation funders and cultural practitioners on integrating arts and culture into climate–health strategies. It shows how arts-based approaches can directly and indirectly support climate-change mitigation, adaptation and communication efforts, while also generating measurable health co-benefits.

Simon Stiell, head of UN Climate Change, addressing the Cop26 climate conference as Grenada's environment minister. Photo by IISD/ENB — Mike Murzurakis © IISD/ENB

> **"In addition to reducing global emissions, arts and culture play a critical role in inspiring people to imagine and realize a low carbon, just and climate-resilient future."**

Simon Stiell, UN Climate Change Executive Secretary *(7)*

The climate crisis is a health crisis and a cultural opportunity

Climate change threatens physical, mental, social and cultural health

Human activities, including the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, resource-intensive agriculture, mining, construction and heavy industry, are the primary drivers of rising global temperatures and widespread climate disruption *(8)*. These changes in turn damage air, water, food systems and living environments, creating the conditions that harm human health and widen existing inequities *(9)*. The climate crisis is therefore an accelerating public health emergency that destabilizes the ecological foundations of life while intensifying health inequities: rising temperatures fuel more frequent and severe heatwaves, wildfires, floods, droughts and air pollution, directly increasing respiratory illness, heat-related deaths, malnutrition, post-traumatic stress disorder, climate-related mental distress, neurological conditions, neurodegenerative disorders and the spread of infectious and vector-borne diseases *(10)*.

These health impacts do not occur in isolation. They interact with existing vulnerabilities, chronic conditions and social determinants of health, creating complex comorbidities that can overwhelm health systems *(11)*. Women, Indigenous people, youth, older adults, people with disabilities and low-income and displaced populations bear disproportionate burdens, highlighting climate change as a fundamental issue of both environmental and social justice *(12,13)*.

Beyond these tangible health consequences, climate change disrupts the cultural fabric that supports mental, emotional and social well-being, including a sense of safety, place, self-determination and belonging. The climate crisis threatens natural and cultural heritage, disrupts creative economies and endangers the stories, rituals and practices that foster identity and social cohesion *(14)*. Climate-induced displacement erodes the cultural identities of already marginalized communities, putting traditions and languages at risk of being lost *(15)*. Preserving and revitalizing cultural heritage is both a human rights imperative and essential for sustaining resilient communities *(16)*.

The health burden requires cultural transformation

Health systems worldwide are already grappling with cascading climate impacts precisely because these challenges are social, cultural and systemic – but this also means they can be transformed through social, cultural and systemic strengths *(17)*. The Peoples' Climate Vote 2024 shows that people are already deeply engaged with the issue, revealing a vast reservoir of care, concern and willingness to act that policy can build on: 56% think about climate change daily or weekly, 53% are more worried than a year ago and 69% factor climate change into major life decisions about where to live or work or what to buy, with 33% reporting significant impacts on these choices (Figure 1) *(18)*. When the psychological impacts of climate change are this widespread, the opportunity is to move beyond individual treatment towards community-level cultural interventions that nurture collective resilience, imagination and agency.

The climate crisis reflects not only failures of environmental management and health systems but also a failure of cultural imagination. Its root causes are embedded in unsustainable societal values, consumption patterns and behavioural norms, so responding to these intersecting crises demands more than technical solutions – it requires a cultural shift in how societies understand and navigate environmental change *(19)*.

Culture is essential to effective climate action in two ways: it provides the meaning-making frameworks through which communities understand concepts such as health, illness, waste, risk and resilience *(19)* and it offers forms of creative expression that enable emotional processing, communication, reconnection with nature and collective action *(20,21)*. The global public recognizes this need for transformation; 72% of people worldwide support a quick transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources – including majorities in the

Figure 1. Data from the Peoples' Climate Vote 2024.

88%

believe countries should set aside geopolitical differences and work together on climate change

72%

people worldwide support a quick transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources

69%

factor climate change into major life decisions about where to live or work or what to buy

56%

think about climate change daily or weekly

53%

are more worried [about climate change] than a year ago

33%

reporting significant impacts on these [major life] choices

Source: UNDP *(18)*.

world's biggest fossil fuel producers – and 88% believe countries should set aside geopolitical differences and work together on climate change *(18)*.

Yet we have insufficiently invested in disseminating imaginative cultural narratives that emphasize collective action and responsibility, moving beyond individual consumption toward sustainable ways of living grounded in care, reciprocity and planetary stewardship (see Box 1) *(22)*.

BOX 1.
Live + Breathe, United Kingdom

Image: The Colours and Culture Festival in 2024. Live + Breathe. © Purpose

Live + Breathe is a creative campaign in London that uses arts, culture and outdoor activities to empower and connect minority voices on air pollution, emphasizing hopeful messaging, community connection and social and racial justice *(23)*. Working with multiple community partners, it offers activities such as awareness-raising performances, creative solution-design workshops, outdoor cultural events and festivals to build momentum and influence local decision-makers toward cleaner air and green solutions. The campaign is led by musician Love Ssega, in collaboration with Julie's Bicycle *(24)*.

From cultural transformation to policy alignment

The urgency of integrating culture into climate responses is increasingly visible both in public opinion and in global climate policy. Recent polling shows strong worldwide support for climate action, nature protection, climate education and climate justice, with especially high concern in Small Island Developing States. This signals a demand for approaches that move beyond purely technical fixes toward responses that are meaningful within people's cultural realities *(18)*. At the same time, culture is increasingly framed as a resource for climate solutions, not only as something at risk: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and partners promote culture-based climate action that mobilizes cultural heritage, Indigenous knowledge and creative practices as tools for adaptation, resilience and behaviour change *(25)*.

The need for cultural transformation in climate responses is now reflected in major policy frameworks that recognize the interdependence of health, environment and society. The Planetary Health Framework calls for integrated responses that address ecological limits, consumption patterns, structural inequalities and the social values shaping behaviour *(4)*, while Health in All Policies emphasizes intersectoral collaboration to ensure climate responses are scientifically sound, socially just and culturally meaningful *(5)*. This alignment is reinforced by the WHO Global Action Plan on Climate Change and Health *(6)*, which mandates leadership, coordination, evidence and country-level action to integrate health across climate policy and explicitly highlights the importance of culturally grounded and community-led approaches.

Momentum is also visible in climate negotiations. At the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP)30 in Belém, Brazil, culture was included in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Climate Action Agenda for the first time,

marking a historic milestone in global climate governance and signalling recognition of culture as a mobilizing force for climate action across societies *(1)*. COP30 outcomes also included the the adoption of heritage-related indicators under the Global Goal on Adaptation, reflecting a growing policy commitment to safeguard cultural and natural heritage in climate adaptation planning *(1)*.

Across cities, rural regions and frontline communities worldwide, cultural resources are already being mobilized to advance health promotion, ecological stewardship and social cohesion *(26)*. As drivers of meaning-making, collective imagination and social connection, arts and culture serve as strategic leverage points for shifting norms, enabling behaviour change and strengthening resilience in the face of unequal climate–health impacts. (see Box 2).

BOX 2.
La Centinela de Mango, Puerto Rico, United States

After Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico in 2017, killing nearly 3000 people and causing billions of dollars in damage, artists in the theatre group Y No Habia Luz reinvented themselves as secondary disaster responders and created the play La Centinela de Mango, which is inspired by a 100-year-old mango tree destroyed in the hurricane *(27)*. The mango tree is used as a metaphor to illustrate the destruction of climate change and as a symbol of hope. Following the hurricane, the group visited communities all over the island to perform the play, which features music, dance and puppetry, as a source of joy and care. The play is still performed today and has been developed into a children's book that the group uses in youth theatre workshops to help parents talk to their children about complex topics like climate change.

A scene from *La Centinela de Mango*. Y No Habia Luz © Yarisa Helfeld

The evidence: arts and culture climate-health action

This section synthesizes findings from three complementary research streams to establish an emerging evidence base. Together, these findings demonstrate the health and well-being co-benefits of arts engagement within climate action, with impacts spaning multiple dimensions of individual and community health.

Key findings from the international survey

Seventy-nine experts from across all WHO regions contributed insights about the value of the arts in addressing the health impacts of climate change *(3)*.

Thematic analysis identified four primary ways that arts practitioners address climate–health impacts:

- building social connection through shared spaces for exchange and community bonding;
- raising awareness by communicating climate-related health impacts through accessible and resonant channels;
- enabling collective action through participatory problem-solving and community mobilization; and
- providing emotional space for processing feelings related to climate change and well-being.

Experts also highlighted four key opportunities to increase impact:

- targeted funding for artists and cultural organizations engaged in climate action;
- stronger collaboration among cultural practitioners, climate scientists and policy-makers;
- formal recognition of artists as legitimate partners in climate–health responses; and
- access to in-kind resources such as space, technology and materials to support experimentation and innovation.

Image: Boys learn boatmaking skills at a workshop in Huwair as part of the *Ark for Iraq* project, 2018. © Rashad Salim

Key findings from the rapid literature review

The rapid literature review identified 16 empirical studies examining arts-based approaches to climate communication, adaptation and mitigation *(2)*. Most studies focused on climate communication and awareness-raising, with comparatively limited attention to adaptation and mitigation, highlighting an important gap for future policy and research investment.

The arts' capacity to improve climate-health communication

Across studies, the strongest and most consistent evidence relates to the arts' capacity to improve climate–health communication *(28)*. Arts-based approaches were shown to translate complex scientific information into accessible, emotionally resonant forms that increased public understanding, reflection and engagement. Participants consistently reported greater awareness of climate–health links, improved understanding of how individual and collective actions affect planetary and human health and increased openness to dialogue across differing perspectives.

How climate change is artistically framed matters

Evidence also suggests that it matters how climate change is artistically presented *(29)*. Artworks that emphasized beauty, inter-connectedness and solutions, rather than dystopian or fear-based narratives, were more likely to elicit reflection, cognitive engagement and a sense of personal relevance. Studies analysing audience responses found that solution-oriented and awe-inspiring artworks fostered awareness of behavioural impacts and policy relevance, while highly polarizing or catastrophic imagery could reduce engagement or sense of belonging. These findings underscore the importance of artistic autonomy and caution against instrumentalizing the arts as purely didactic or propagandistic tools.

Effective arts-based climate engagement combines emotional and cognitive activation

The review further indicates that effective arts-based climate engagement combines emotional and cognitive activation. Interventions that supported both emotional investment and understanding of actionable pathways were more likely to foster reflection, motivation and reported intentions to act, including through civic and policy engagement. Participatory and multidisciplinary collaborations, particularly between artists and scientists, also generated new perspectives, reduced misconceptions and strengthened communication capacity among both practitioners and participants.

Evidence for climate adaptation and mitigation outcomes was more limited but nevertheless promising. Participatory arts practices supported emotional processing of climate-related stress, eco-anxiety and landscape change, helping individuals and communities transform distress into dialogue, agency and preparedness. Some studies reported increased willingness to adopt pro-environmental behaviours or engage with policy processes, particularly among participants who did not previously identify as environmentally engaged. However, few studies assessed long-term behavioural change or health outcomes, pointing to the need for more robust, longitudinal evaluation.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that arts-based approaches can play a meaningful role in climate–health action by enhancing communication, supporting psychological and social resilience and broadening public engagement. At the same time, it highlights significant evidence gaps, particularly regarding the health impacts of arts-based climate interventions, sustained behavioural change, mitigation impacts and applications in low- and middle-income and climate-vulnerable settings— areas where targeted policy support and research investment are urgently needed. (see Box 3).

BOX 3.
Hunting Pollution, Italy

Image: Federico Massa (Iena Cruz), *Hunting Pollution*, 2018.
© Frederico Massa

Awarded as Europe's largest eco-friendly mural in 2018, Iena Cruz's artwork painted in a congested area in Rome was made with paint specifically designed to reduce air pollution *(30).* The paint uses photocatalytic processes to reduce combustion-derived pollutants including nitrogen oxides, which contribute to greenhouse gases and global warming *(31).* The development of the paint was partially supported by European Union funds for addressing societal challenges and climate change.

Key findings from the grey literature and case studies

A global public call for grey literature yielded over 30 submissions including programme evaluations, guidebooks, news articles and digital media (see Annex 2). Visual arts, craft and design were most represented, followed by theatre and performance. Collectively, these sources document how arts-based approaches are already being used to address climate-related health risks through formal and informal education, community-based action, emotional support and sustainable cultural practice.

Across contexts, the grey literature highlights three core functions of arts-based climate–health interventions: **communicating climate–health risks; supporting climate adaptation, recovery and mental health;** and **addressing upstream determinants and enabling systems-level change.**

Communicating climate-health risk

Arts-based projects across diverse global settings have demonstrated effectiveness in communicating the health impacts of climate change, particularly those related to air pollution, extreme weather and environmental degradation, by making abstract risks visible, personal and emotionally resonant.

Examples include women in New Delhi, India, repurposing waste materials to raise awareness of air-pollution-related illness *(32,33)* and a photography exhibition in London, United Kingdom, documenting rising childhood asthma rates *(34)*. Other initiatives translated complex climate and health data into accessible public narratives, such as Sweat and Concrete, which used interactive storytelling to raise awareness about heat stress among labourers in low-income areas *(35)*; Show Your Stripes, which translates temperature rise into color bands *(36)*; and HighWaterLine which used chalk markings across New York City, United States of America, to render projected sea-level rise visible in public spaces *(37)*.

Collectively, these projects humanize climate science, amplify under-represented voices and support behavioural and policy engagement, including among populations disproportionately affected by climate risks (see Box 4).

Supporting climate adaptation, recovery and mental health

Arts and health practitioners also play critical roles in preparing communities for and supporting recovery from, the health and emotional impacts of climate-related disasters. Arts-based interventions provide culturally grounded spaces for processing climate-related distress, fostering psychological resilience and sustaining hope.

Examples include the Refuge project in Melbourne, Australia, which transformed cultural venues into heatwave relief and disaster coordination centres *(39)* and The Draw at Sugar House in Utah, United States, where a large-scale public artwork simultaneously functioned as flood infrastructure and a site for community engagement *(40)*. Theatre productions such as Flood Stories, Too integrated lived experience

BOX 4.

Hawa Mein Baat, India

The community art initiative Hawa Mein Baat [Talking in the Air], organized by Help Delhi Breathe in collaboration with Mahila Housing Trust, FICA, and artists Niroj Satpathy and Moumita Basak, brought together women engaged in home-based work and waste picking from two Delhi neighbourhoods *(38)*. The women, whose voices are often left out of conversations about urban development and climate change, stitched stories about their lived experience of air pollution and local issues into tapestries, making an intangible part of their lives visible to the public. The tapestries were showcased in an exhibition, which was widely covered in the media, bringing attention to the community's concerns. This arts-based approach built momentum and empowered the women to continue to advocate for cleaner air within their communities and with decision-makers.

Image: Women waste workers from Bhalswa at a participatory art workshop to address the impacts of air pollution. *Hawa Mein Baat* © Purpose

with climate data to foster social cohesion and public dialogue about flood risk and adaptive infrastructure *(41)*. Visual installations, participatory projects and arts therapies have also addressed eco-anxiety and solastalgia by creating spaces to process fear, grief and uncertainty, while strengthening social connection *(42–44)*.

Youth-focused initiatives, including Scotland's Climate Circus *(45)*, theatrical works such as Love in the Time of Climate Change *(46)* and the Arts and Climate Initiative *(47)* demonstrate the arts' capacity to empower young people, reduce climate-related anxiety and support collective agency (see Box 5).

Addressing upstream determinants and enabling systems-level change

Beyond individual projects, the grey literature shows that arts-based approaches address upstream determinants of health through participatory, localized and low-cost interventions – qualities especially important in climate-vulnerable and low-resource settings. Across cases, arts and culture support communities to imagine low-carbon futures, process climate-related stress and grief, translate scientific information into lived experience, co-create hopeful narratives, strengthen social bonds and foster pro-environmental behaviours and values *(49)*. Consistent with academic evidence, successful programmes share common features: building community connection for isolated populations;

BOX 5.

Culture Dose for Kids, Australia

Developed as a partnership between the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Black Dog Institute, Culture Dose for Kids is an eight-week arts engagement programme that supports children, aged 9–12, who suffer from anxiety or have been affected by natural disasters *(48)*. Believed to be the first programme of its kind, it is offered in a non-clinical setting and provides a safe, structured space for children to engage with the arts while their parents attend parallel sessions. The programme emphasizes the calming, meditative aspects of arts engagement, sparks creative ideas and creates social connections in a peer-group setting to build self-confidence. Culture Dose for Kids is part of an ongoing research study into the role of arts-based community care in children's mental health and well-being. Given the number of recent climate-induced natural disaster events throughout the state, it is expected to expand to several other cities.

Image: Children participating in a *Culture Dose for Kids* programme. © Black Dog Institute

engaging children early to strengthen relationships with nature; fostering cross-sector partnerships across health, climate and culture; and sustaining practitioner well-being through stable funding models *(21)*.

Illustrative examples include youth theatre and spoken-word programmes in the Marshall Islands that translate drought-related family stress into collective action *(50,51)*; Indigenous-led cultural preservation in the Amazon that links storytelling, food security and public health *(52)*; children's climate education through narrative-based books that foster intergenerational dialogue *(53,54)*; nature-based arts programmes that improve mental well-being among children in deprived areas *(55)*; and sector-wide cultural initiatives advancing low-carbon, climate-just practices across the arts, including the Theatre Green Book, Materials for the Arts, the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, the Entertainment and Culture for Climate Action and Culture Declares Emergency (see Box 6) *(56–60)*.

While many such initiatives are already underway, proactive policy support is needed to scale their impact and embed arts-based approaches within climate–health strategies.

BOX 6.

Indlela Yokuphila: The Soul's Journey, South Africa

In 2020 the South African theatre company Empatheatre partnered with Shells & Spells to create the animated film Indlela Yokuphila: The Soul's Journey *(61)*. The five-minute film explores parallels between Zulu spirituality and scientific understandings of the ocean's role in the global water cycle and was used as evidence in three successful court cases brought by Indigenous fisher leaders and ocean defenders against Shell and the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, resulting in the suspension of seismic exploration off South Africa's Wild Coast *(62)*. These rulings marked the first time an animation was accepted as evidence in a South African court, with the film serving as a proxy for intangible ocean-related cultural heritage and demonstrate how the arts can work with science and activism to articulate the intertwined harms of fossil fuel extraction, ecological degradation and climate change.

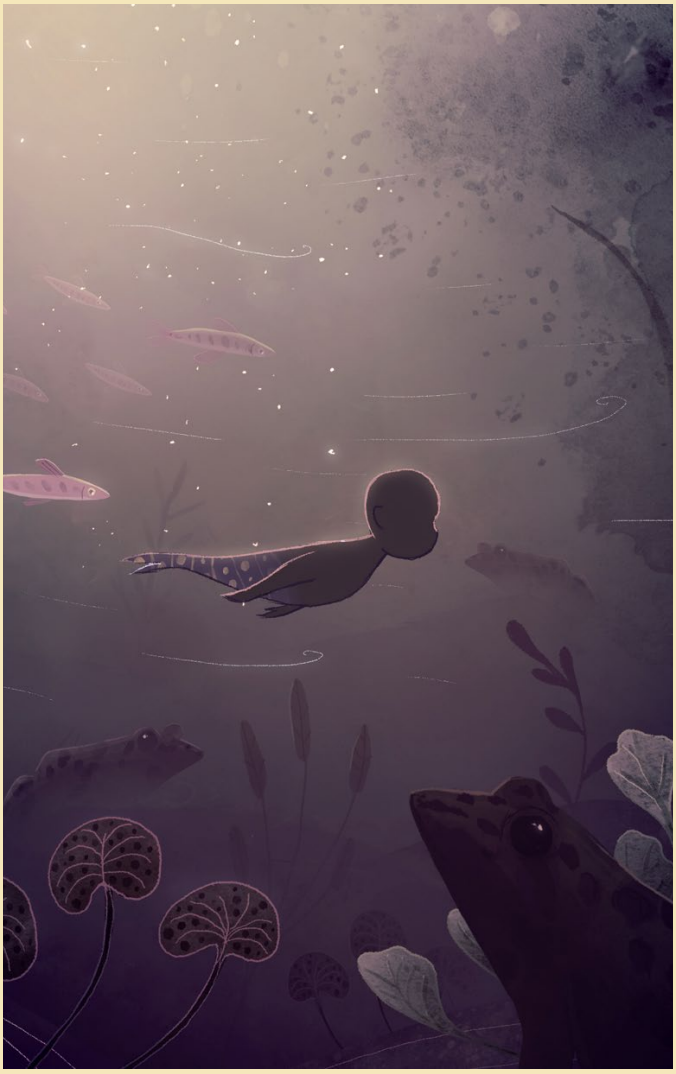

Image: A still from *Indlela Yokuphila*. Empatheatre, Shells & Spells © Dylan McGarry

Considerations for policy action

These considerations focus on integration, investment, partnership and evidence, conditions needed to move from pilot projects to systems change. Together, they advance an equitable, effective and sustainable climate–health agenda in which arts and culture are fully embedded as drivers of behaviour change, community cohesion and intergenerational resilience.

1 Embed arts and culture in climate-health strategies through existing policy frameworks

Action

United Nations agencies, ministries of health, cultural and environmental organizations and local governments should formally recognize the arts as a strategic lever for public engagement, climate resilience and health promotion in existing policy frameworks and national climate adaptation plans.

Implementation

Integrate arts-based approaches, such as participatory storytelling, community theater and cultural heritage programmes, into national climate and health plans to support:

- mitigation: cultural shifts toward low-carbon lifestyles and sustainable consumption patterns;
- adaptation: emotional resilience to climate stress and community preparedness for climate impacts; and
- communication: tangible, audible, visible and locally relevant climate–health links.

Example

The New European Bauhaus, launched by the European Commission, bridges the European Green Deal with culture and community-led innovation. It emphasizes the integration of beauty, sustainability and inclusion, championing pilot projects across aesthetics, environmental stewardship and social integration. The initiative reimagines sustainable living in emotionally and culturally resonant ways, illustrating how art, heritage and creativity can animate Europe's transition to a greener, more inclusive future *(63)*.

Potential Leads

Ministries of health, culture and environment; WHO; UNESCO; city governments; national adaptation plan task forces.

2 Establish interdisciplinary funding mechanisms that link arts, health and climate

Action

Create funding streams that incentivize cross-sector collaboration among cultural, health and environmental stakeholders to support research, implementation and scale-up of arts-based climate–health initiatives.

Implementation

Funding should support diverse models, from site-specific art installations promoting behavioural change to climate communication campaigns and mental health support programmes addressing eco-anxiety.

Example

Creative Climate Action Ireland is a €5.8 million government-funded initiative supporting artistic, creative and cultural projects aimed at raising awareness and driving behaviour change related to climate change, led through cross-sectoral collaboration among the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; and the Department of the Taoiseach. The initiative supports projects such as campaigns to imagine alternative futures, empower neurodivergent communities and engage citizens in mapping air quality *(64)*.

Potential Leads

Ministries of health, environment, social affairs and culture; research councils; funding agencies with mandates in climate, health or sustainable development.

3 Invest in research and data systems that capture the health and environmental co-benefits of arts engagement

Action

Focusing on climate-vulnerable and low-resource settings, allocate targeted funding for transdisciplinary, mixed-methods research that measures health and environmental co-benefits of arts engagement and incorporates non-academic sources reporting on good practices.

Implementation

Prioritize participatory, equity-centred and inclusive methods that highlight outcomes such as behavioural change, community resilience and reductions in climate-related mental health burdens. Integrate findings into climate and health policy.

Example

Culture Dose for Kids was designed through a collaboration between a mental health research institute and the state art gallery in New South Wales, Australia. It employed mixed methods, including quantitative mental health scales, qualitative analyses of interviews and analyses of artworks, demonstrating comprehensive evaluation approaches *(65)*.

Potential Leads

Ministries of education, health and culture; research institutions; WHO collaborating centres; climate–health funders.

Culture Declares Emergency 2019, Launch Procession. Tate Modern. Photo © Ackroyd & Harvey

4 Institutionalize intersectoral partnerships across climate, culture and health sectors

Action

Formalize collaboration among arts and culture councils, public health institutions and climate-focused agencies by embedding culture in national adaptation plans, urban planning policies and public health responses.

Implementation

Include mandates for artistic participation in community engagement, environmental education and emergency preparedness.

Example

Taikusydän is a Finnish intersectoral coordination centre and network for arts and health, enabled by a joint policy initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health *(66)*. Culture for Climate Scotland is an intersectoral collaboration among civil society, public and private entities that leverages culture's power to address climate challenges *(67)*.

Potential Leads

WHO, UNFCCC, national ministries, local authorities, arts and planning councils, cultural and heritage institutions.

Conclusion: culture as climate-health infrastructure

This policy brief outlines the ways in which arts engagement can contribute to addressing the health impacts of climate change and makes the case for integrating arts and culture into cross-sectoral climate–health policy. Drawing on multiple sources of evidence, it shows how arts-based approaches can support climate communication, adaptation and mitigation while addressing health impacts directly and indirectly.

A key strength of arts-informed approaches is their ability to engage people through multiple ways of knowing, combining understanding with emotional and social connection. By connecting people to place and to one another, the arts support mental health, strengthen social cohesion, build community resilience and make climate impacts visible and actionable.

While academic evidence remains emergent, practice-based literature highlights innovation and points to the need for more inclusive, fit-for-purpose evaluation approaches that capture health outcomes and action-oriented impacts. Together, the evidence aligns with growing international momentum for integrated, community-centred climate–health responses, including those articulated through recent COP processes and the WHO Global Action Plan on Climate Change and Health. Strong public support for climate action underscores the mandate for this work. By strengthening the role of arts and culture in climate–health policy, this brief seeks to enable scalable, culturally grounded solutions to the interconnected challenges facing health, environment and society.

Ultimately, we cannot solve an existential threat through technical means alone. The mitigation of, and adaptation to, the health impacts of climate change require cultural evolution alongside ecological adaptation, which is impossible without the arts, culture and the creative industries. To realize their full potential, they must be formally recognized, resourced and integrated into the policies and practices of ministries of health, culture and environment as strategic partners in communication, public engagement and community resilience.

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