



Henry McGhie, Curating Tomorrow
40 Acuba Road
Liverpool
UK, L15 7LR
henrymcghie@curatingtomorrow.co.uk

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Aligning climate goals and the Sustainable Development Goals: the potential of museums and other cultural institutions to animate policy goals and agendas

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this inquiry. I work as a museum consultant, focussed on supporting museums and their partners to contribute more effectively to sustainable development agendas. I am also a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellow, working on these topics. I have collaborated with UNFCCC since 2017 and presented at UN Climate Change conferences several times. I have co-edited two books on climate change communication.

What experience is there of building synergies between climate goals and SDGs? Please include practical actions and case studies where possible, including examples of benefits arising from connecting across policy processes.

While policy processes are typically separate or siloed, or developed and reported in silos, cultural activities, such as in museums, galleries and community settings, bring (or at least have the potential to bring) together different policy topics in ways that empower people to know, care and act in relation to them. From a practitioner's perspective, climate goals and the SDGs are practically synonymous, as climate action is implicit in all 17 SDGs, providing they are properly understood as an interconnected set of goals, rather than a series of separate boxes. In that sense, the SDGs do not operate as a policy process or agenda, but as a practical planning tool or results framework that can be used as the blueprint or the 'how' to address climate goals, and other sustainable development challenges, simultaneously, avoiding trade-offs. I have previously written guides (freely available) to support the museum sector and their partners to incorporate the SDGs into their work on:

- *Museums and the Sustainable Development Goals: a how-to guide for museums, galleries, the cultural sector and their partners. (2019)*
- *Museums and Disaster Risk Reduction: building resilience in museums, society and nature. (2020)*
- *Museums and Human Rights: human rights as a basis for public service (2020).¹*

In the first of these, I set out a framework that aligns museums' activity with the SDGs, which contributes to all 17 SDGs and a third of the 169 targets. The framework of seven activities can be applied to the SDGs as a whole, or to individual sustainable development challenges, including climate change.

There is a close alignment with the overall aims of the Paris Agreement, as included in the Preamble, and the overall aims of the 2030 Agenda, as set out in Transforming Our World. Focussing clearly on the **shared visions** of Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement (as a context for the SDGs and targets) helps to ensure clear alignment in subsequent activity, rather than using the SDGs and targets in isolation, which leads to their misapplication.

¹ <https://bit.ly/3yKryit>, <https://bit.ly/2TiBi38>, <https://bit.ly/3vba64x>

Action for Climate Empowerment is the informal name for activity for Article 6 of the UNFCCC and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement: public education, training, access to information, public awareness, public participation and international co-operation on climate change matters. The UNFCCC Secretariat holds annual workshops (Dialogues) to help enhance activity for Action for Climate Empowerment. A significant outcome of this work was the incorporation of an 'ACE Decision' into the operational Work Programme for the Paris Agreement at COP24 in Katowice, which formally recognised the contribution of a range of non-state actors to climate goals, including "...cities, **education and cultural institutions, museums**, the private sector, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, decision makers, scientists, the media, teachers, youth, women and indigenous peoples, play in ensuring Action for Climate Empowerment".² A Synthesis report to inform the development of the next programme of activity for Action for Climate Empowerment (replacing the 2012-20 Doha Work Programme) prepared by UNFCCC highlights the synergy between climate goals and SDGs.³

The SDGs, or rather their targets, can form **an effective monitoring or evaluation framework** for the six elements of Action for Climate Empowerment, in terms of climate education (SDGs 4.7, 12.8, 13.3), training (SDG 4.4, 13.3), public awareness and access to information (SDGs 4.7, 12.8, 13.3, 16.10), public participation in climate change matters (SDGs 5.1, 10.2, 11.3, 16.7, 17.17) and international co-operation (SDG 17.16). Other aspects of climate action can be monitored by other targets (notably in SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 16).

Education for Sustainable Development is a well-developed pedagogy that is included in the SDGs (4.7, also supporting 12.8, 13.3. and 16.10); the **ESD2030** initiative from UNESCO, with the recent **Berlin Declaration** presents an excellent roadmap that can be incorporated into all educational programmes, bringing together climate and sustainable development goals. ESD has little profile in England, but more profile in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.⁴

The **UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-30)** is an excellent example of a constructive, proactive programme that invites everyone to participate in ecosystem restoration, which simultaneously addresses climate and broader sustainable development goals. Similarly, the **UN Decade on Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-30)** achieves the same integration. Promoting these to the public and schools and creating opportunities for people to actively do things gets beyond the hopelessness and paralysis that pervades climate change discourse.

The **UN Global Compact**, and its ten principles, is an excellent opportunity for non-state actors to participate in action for sustainable development, including climate action. Public sector organisations of all kinds could be encouraged to join or support the UN Global Compact, or its principles. The **UN Guiding Principles for Business** are another excellent

² https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/CMA2018_03a02E.pdf

³ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2020_09E.pdf

⁴ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/toolbox>

opportunity to accelerate support for sustainable development, including climate action. As is clearly stated in the Principles, they relate to organisations of all kinds, and of all sizes.⁵

- **What progress has the UK government made in aligning the climate and SDG agendas, either in the UK or internationally?**

The UK's progress with the SDGs is outlined in the 2020 Sustainable Development Report, which shows that no goals have yet been met, 'major challenges' for five goals (including SDG 13, urgent climate action, and SDG 12, responsible consumption and production), 'significant challenges' for another five, and 'challenges remaining' for the remaining seven goals. The situation has no doubt worsened since June 2020 due to COVID-19.⁶

The way the SDGs are implemented is different in the four UK nations. Scotland has an excellent National Performance Framework that is closely linked to the SDGs.⁷ Learning for Sustainability, which is closely aligned with Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education, is recognised as an entitlement of every child, and supports the Rights of the Child. Wales uses the SDGs extensively, notably linked to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which does not have a clear comparator in England or across the UK.⁸ England has no clear national strategy for the SDGs, and there is little cross-society co-ordination, or opportunities for government funded or led activity.

The single departmental plans from the UK government handle the SDGs in a way that creates a number of challenges. For example, to look at the departmental priorities of DCMS, climate change (which could include awareness, education, participation and empowerment) is not mentioned, and the section on 'growth' doesn't feature green growth, the circular economy or just transition. The objective (5.1) to 'make our society safe, fair and informed' could readily be aligned with climate change, adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction.⁹ The Department for Education's plan does not mention either climate change, sustainable development, or SDG 13. The Bond Group has previously identified a number of issues in the Single Departmental Plans in terms of how they do not support the achievement of the SDGs.¹⁰

Arts Council England's ten-year strategy 'Let's Create' does not mention the SDGs, Agenda 2030 or sustainable development; it highlights the importance of environmental sustainability and social inclusion, but not as part of broader sustainable development, or as part of people's rights.¹¹ Arts Council England's reporting requirements to funded organisations include environmental impacts, but not Agenda 2030 or the SDGs.

The UK does not have a national plan for Action for Climate Empowerment, in comparison with e.g. Ghana, which has Action for Climate Empowerment embedded across its government departments and agencies, or the US, which has recently developed a national plan. Action for Climate Empowerment is 'owned' by BEIS, rather than the Department for Education or DCMS.

⁵ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

⁶ <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/GBR>

⁷ <https://bit.ly/353EK4v>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/3cyhjnV>

⁹ <https://bit.ly/3g9xA4R>

¹⁰ <https://bit.ly/3gaCK0y>

¹¹ <https://bit.ly/3gaCE9c>

The British Council is the agency that appears to use the SDGs most, and in the most sophisticated way, both within the UK and internationally.

- **When designing and implementing policies to meet climate goals and SDGs, what actions should be taken to uphold the SDG principle of ‘leave no-one behind’? (For example, engaging with local stakeholders; guaranteeing gender equity; etc.). Please provide examples/case studies if possible.**

It is important that activities that claim to support the SDGs are rooted in the overall ambitions and visions as set out in the Preamble of both the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030, namely that they are about securing human rights and using rights-based approaches to addressing climate change and achieving sustainable development in ways that are inclusive, fair, and based on people’s active, free and meaningful participation.

While the SDGs are set out as a call to all of society to collaborate, the official indicator set is geared to national reporting. There are limited mechanisms for practitioners or the wider public to contribute to the Voluntary National Review. This means that the great majority of climate action, and action that contributes to the SDGs more generally, does not get featured in the VNR. The great bulk of people, sectors and their actions can be said to be being ‘left behind’.

The SDG targets can be used to set sector-specific indicators to drive action for results in sectors, including museums and cultural organisations. Creating opportunities for information from non-state actors to feature in VNRs and VLRs, and generally in their reporting to funders, would help strengthen the connection between policy and practice, and build collaboration, accountability and transparency (itself the subject of SDG 16.6 on effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and SDG 12.6 on adopting sustainable practices and sustainability reporting).

Who determines what ‘leave no-one behind’ means is also important. As with the phrase ‘build back better’, which comes from Disaster Risk Reduction, it is important that these terms are used in accordance with their proper meaning, which contributes to the aims and goals of Agenda 2030 and human rights-based approaches. ‘Build back better’ means progress towards sustainable development, and a better balance of considerations of people, planet and prosperity. Similarly, ‘leave no-one behind’ does not simply mean addressing inequality, but ensuring everyone has equal opportunity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from society’s sustainable development.

Public bodies and public funding could incorporate questions as to how activity they fund or oversee is **supporting the aims of the overall 2030 Agenda**, and use the goals and targets as the reporting framework, rather than simply aligning activity to particular goals, which leads to a shallow use of the SDGs. For all activities reported upon, the main positive and main negative impacts on sustainable development and the SDGs should be identified, and the steps taken to maximise the former while minimising the latter clearly explained, as sustainable development involves both maximising positive and minimising negative impacts.

Sectors have been embedding the SDGs into their activities in different ways. In terms of museums, the International Council of Museums adopted a resolution to incorporate the SDGs as the blueprint for global museums to contribute to sustainability and sustainable development in 2019. UNESCO, as a UN agency, has the SDGs mainstreamed across its activity.

- **What are the barriers to achieving synergies among climate goals and SDGs? What incentives and resources are needed to overcome these barriers / strengthen opportunities for building synergies, and at what level (local, national, global), and for which stakeholders?**

1. Lack of visibility, publicly and in sectors, especially in England; Agenda 2030 and the SDGs are not thoroughly incorporated into the planning or reporting cycle of most sectors.
2. Lack of small-scale funding to support SDG-related initiatives.
3. Lack of thorough understanding of Agenda 2030 or the SDGs and how they relate to activity in many sectors, and of the public education and participation aspects of the Paris Agreement.
4. The cultural sector, which could play a crucial role in empowering people to contribute to sustainable development, is not very familiar with the SDGs, or the aims of the Paris Agreement, or how to use them, beyond awareness-raising.
5. Department-by-department approach to the SDGs across government, and with Agenda 2030 sitting with FCDO rather than across government, which creates a silo approach that will not necessarily achieve the overall Agenda. It would be preferable if the SDGs and climate reporting were addressed as a whole-of-government approach, so DCMS would ask how culture, media and sport are embracing all of the 2030 Agenda, SDGs and climate action; BEIS would ask how business activity is doing the same, etc etc. Applying small numbers of goals to each department impedes the Agenda.
6. Lack of a mechanism for local action to contribute to the Voluntary National Review.
7. Limited amount of engagement by government with civil society or with the public, which is in conflict with the principles of self-determination and the right to development, and 'leave no-one behind'.
8. Lack of prioritisation of sustainable development, both in the UK and internationally.
9. The COVID pandemic recovery provides an opportunity to 'build back better', in the proper sense of the term, but also presents a time of great risk, when the institutions that can most support people to participate in climate action and the SDGs – museums, community organisations, civil society organisations – face funding crises. It is important that this opportunity is not lost, but that the potential is maximised.

- **What role do non-government UK stakeholders (e.g. civil society, multinationals, trade unions, etc) have in ensuring equitable implementation of joint climate and SDG agendas, in the UK and internationally?**

As set out in the Preamble of the 2030 Agenda, all people have a right to participate in sustainable development, as part of their rights under the Right to Development. All sectors that impinge on people's rights regarding sustainable development – whether that be health, education, participation in cultural life, or any other rights – have obligations as duty holders in supporting people as rights holders. Empowering sectors to understand their rights-based obligations would enable them to provide better services. Non-government stakeholders have roles in supporting the climate and SDG agendas, but they need

government to provide an enabling environment, notably by ensuring continued funding that supports people's rights to education, information, to participate in sustainable development, and to participate in cultural life and in public affairs.

Recommendations

- All government departments, sector support organisations and public bodies should recognise the SDGs, and the overall Agenda, as an integrated set of goals, and become familiar with the aims and visions of both the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 as the context for the SDGs.
- Government-funded activity can ask 'how is this activity supporting the overall aims of the 2030 Agenda, and in the most effective/impactful way possible?', and 'please explain how, using the SDGs and targets?', rather than people simply aligning their activities to particular goals or targets.
- Mechanisms to invite and collate activity across society are needed to build momentum and ownership, and in ways that are not 'top down', using the principle of 'leave no-one behind'.
- Government to give more priority to both the SDGs and climate action, in terms of supporting a national Action for Climate Empowerment action plan, and for government, departments, sector support organisations, public bodies and cultural institutions to embed Education for Sustainable Development across all of formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- Sectors, such as museums and other cultural organisations, should recognise that they can use the SDGs as a results framework that can help them develop activities that meet the challenges of today and the future, and integrate their activity with other sectors, to help demonstrate their contribution, the impact of the activities they support, and to enable more people to fully claim their rights to take part in cultural life and their Right to Development, in order to participate in the necessary transformations required for a sustainable future.

Thank you for your attention.