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Grant, C. (2020). Roles of culture and cultural sustainability in eliminating poverty. In Leal Filho W., Azul A., Brandli L., Lange Salvia A., Özuyar P., & Wall T. (eds) *No Poverty. Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69625-6_127-1

Roles of culture and cultural sustainability in eliminating poverty

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Definitions

Broadly defined, **culture** is the way of living generated and acquired by people and intergenerationally transmitted in ways other than through genes (Erickson and Murphy 1998:35). By this definition, nearly all aspects of human experience and society relate to culture. A narrower and somewhat wieldier conceptualisation suggests that culture can be at least partly understood from what it produces – that is, from what UNESCO terms *cultural heritage*. Intangible cultural heritage in particular can be directly affected by circumstances of poverty, and by efforts to eliminate them.

Definitions of **cultural sustainability** vary between scholars and disciplines, but often centre around the agency of artists or culture-bearers and their communities to make their own decisions about the practice, transmission and maintenance of their cultural expressions for the enjoyment and benefit of present and future generations. UNESCO's 2003 *Convention for the Urgent Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* offers a framework for understanding ways to support strong and sustainable cultures.

Introduction

Focusing on how strong and sustainable cultures can advance Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 'No Poverty', this chapter explores the relationship of poverty to culture and cultural sustainability. Poverty can inhibit the capacity of individuals and communities to engage with culture and cultural practices, and can adversely affect the vitality and sustainability of those practices over time. On the other hand, vibrant and sustainable cultures can play a distinctive human-centred role in helping eliminate poverty in its various dimensions, including by enhancing the wellbeing, freedoms, capabilities, and capacities of individuals and societies. This chapter principally refers to intangible expressions of culture, as these are particularly closely connected with the lives and livelihoods of artists and culture-bearers and their communities.

This chapter begins with an overview of common conceptualisations of poverty, culture, and cultural sustainability, then outlines and reflects on the relationship of culture to the SDGs and the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda. It then surveys existing understandings of the relationship of poverty to culture and cultural sustainability, grouping the literature into

three broad and non-mutually exclusive categories: theoretical studies, geographically or culturally bounded studies, and grey literature. The final two sections of the chapter explore in more depth two specific, particularly salient aspects of the relationships between poverty, culture and cultural sustainability. The first of these is the mostly adverse effects of poverty on the strength and sustainability of cultural expressions – that is, how poverty may inhibit cultural vitality and sustainability. The second aspect is the significant positive potential of strong and sustainable cultural expressions for advancing SDG 1 ‘No Poverty’ – that is, how strong and sustainable cultures may help alleviate poverty.

Conceptualising poverty

Economists and other scholars have conceptualised *poverty* in different, sometimes significantly divergent, ways. Dimensions that have been used to quantify or measure poverty variously include a lack of material wealth or goods, the absence of secure or sustainable livelihood, a low income, an inability to meet one’s basic needs, and an inability to participate in activities that are considered ‘normal’ for a person in that society (Engberg-Pederson and Munk Ravenborg 2010). Poverty can be *relative*, where people lack a standard of wealth, resources or living that is held by most others in that society; or it can be *absolute*, referring to a level of basic subsistence. Economist Sen influentially describes poverty as a lack of at least one ‘freedom’, such as freedom of opportunity or freedom of political rights, and relates poverty to a privation of the ability to develop individual capacities (1985, 2001). All these conceptualisations are useful in underscoring the complex and multifaceted nature of poverty.

Recognising the detrimental effect of poverty on people’s lives, the United Nations designated ‘No Poverty’ as the first of its Sustainable Development Goals. The UN claims that around 10% of the world’s population lives in *extreme poverty*, meaning that they are not able to fulfil their basic needs, such as access to water, health, and education (2020). Children and women are disproportionately among them, as are people living in rural areas. However, people of vastly diverse backgrounds and life circumstances may experience poverty. A historical tendency to oversimplify poverty, and to stereotype people living in poverty, has more recently been supplanted by new understandings of the many profound ways in which poverty affects individuals and societies. Poverty is not always a problem to be solved: those who are perceived by some to be ‘poor’ may not conceive of themselves in that way, and/or may not feel the need or desire for outside intervention. While acknowledging the damaging effects poverty can and does have on people’s lives, including in terms of education, health, and social relationships, many scholars and organisations have recently tended to advocate an approach to understanding poverty that integrates deficit and strengths-based models – that is, one that takes into account the assets as well as the paucities of the populations in question (Frankenhuis and Nettle 2020).

Conceptualising culture and cultural sustainability

Tangible cultural heritage exists in space and through time, for example as monuments, archaeological sites, sculptures, and collections of objects. Especially since the mid-twentieth century, much international attention and funding has been devoted to preserving, maintaining and protecting the world’s tangible cultural heritage from a range of threats, including theft and looting, intentional destruction in contexts of war or civil unrest, and natural deterioration due to weather and time. UNESCO has been a key player in these safeguarding efforts, adopting several legal instruments to this end, perhaps most prominently the *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (1972).

Culture can also be intangible (UNESCO 2020), manifesting only through the actions of living humans and constantly recreated anew, as when a mother sings her infant a lullaby, a bard recounts an epic tale, or a community gathers to perform a ritual ceremony. Like tangible culture, the preservation and maintenance of intangible culture can be threatened by war, oppressive regimes, poverty, and other social factors. Tangible and intangible cultural heritage are themselves closely intertwined, and both intersect in deep and complex ways with the economic circumstances of individuals and communities around the world. However, intangible cultural heritage necessarily depends on the actions of humans for its existence at any moment, and is therefore arguably particularly and directly dependent on the life circumstances of its bearers.

Significant global shifts in recent decades have been culturally advantageous in some respects, but present challenges to the sustainability of intangible culture. For example, the rise of mass media and digital technologies has, in many cases, enabled arts and culture to flourish locally and globally, and offers various possible (if often fraught) sources of income for artists; but on the other hand, these phenomena have arguably led to a degree of cultural 'greyout' (Lomax 1972), diverting local attention away from minority or 'minoritised' cultural practices. Urbanisation is another example: while it can result in heightened economic opportunities for individuals, it can concurrently lead or force people to abandon their cultural traditions as they move, sometimes *en masse*, to new lives and livelihoods away from their communities of origin. Similarly, cultural tourism brings economic benefit and opportunity, but can result in 'sanitised' versions of cultural practices being developed for the tourist taste, bearing little resemblance to 'tradition' (Harnish 2016). Institutionalised school and higher education can bring many benefits for students and societies at large, not least in terms of greater opportunities for secure income and stable livelihoods. However, standardised arts curricula tend to favour certain traditions and cultures, while others remain conspicuously absent – or even worse, inconspicuously so (Schippers and Campbell 2012).

Recognising how these and other major global geopolitical, social, economic, and technological changes were jeopardising intangible culture, in 2003 UNESCO adopted its *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Among the aims of the Convention were: to raise widespread awareness of the global risks to intangible cultural heritage; to ensure that such heritage, and the people who practice it, are respected and valued; and to provide for international co-operation and assistance to safeguard it (UNESCO 2003: Article 1). Especially since the Convention, scholars from various disciplines have engaged in vigorous critical discourse on the theories and practicalities of cultural endangerment, safeguarding and sustainability (e.g. Throsby 2008, Soini and Birkeland 2014, Auclair and Fairclough 2015). In relation to intangible culture, ethnomusicologists in particular have recently turned renewed attention to the present vitality of, and future prospects for, musical heritage, both in general terms (e.g. Titon 2008-2020, Grant 2014, Schippers and Grant 2016) and for specific traditions (e.g. Corn 2013, Burns 2016, Harnish 2016).

Scholarly framings of cultural sustainability generally acknowledge that living culture is mutable, and that targeted efforts to maintain a given cultural practice should not mandate its preservation in fixed form. Another point of general consensus is that culture-bearers and their communities should hold decision-making agency regarding the practice of, and future prospects for, their cultural expressions. Both these tenets are underscored by the UNESCO 2003 Convention: it defines *safeguarding* as simply 'ensuring the viability' of cultural heritage, rather than preserving it unchanging (Article 2); and it emphasises the fundamental

role of culture-bearers and communities in all matters relating to the sustainability of cultural heritage (Article 15).

Culture ‘at the heart’ of sustainable development

For some decades before the UN launched the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, policymakers, governments and cultural agencies around the world had recognised and aimed to strengthen the contribution of culture to sustainable development. The World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-1998) propelled widespread public and political attention to the relationship between culture and development, over time leading to a raft of assessment tools, standard-setting instruments, maps and inventories, cultural statistics and other resources linking culture and sustainable development.

In the lead-up to the 2015 announcement of the UN's sustainable development agenda, UNESCO and other major regional and international cultural agencies reinvigorated attention to this matter, launching a concerted effort to ensure that culture was adequately represented in the SDGs. One of these agencies was the European research network ‘Investigating Cultural Sustainability’, formed in 2011 to inform policy and action around the role of culture in sustainable development. It argued that this role was still little understood and poorly operationalised, yet that integrating culture into the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda would significantly advance its goals (Dessein et al. 2015:16). Around that same time, in 2012, a ‘task team’ charged with informing the UN on matters relating to its Sustainable Development Agenda delivered a ‘thematic think piece’ that framed culture as a driver and enabler of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development; the piece argued that integrating culture into sustainable development policies and strategies would ‘advance a human-centred and inclusive approach to development, in addition to serving as a powerful socio-economic resource’ (UN System Task Team 2012:5-6). UNESCO too prepared a suite of statements and resources relating to the integral role of culture in sustainable development (e.g. 2014, 2015; UNESCO, UNDP and UNFPA 2015), including a ‘toolbox’ of ‘22 indicators highlighting the multidimensional contribution of culture to development processes’ (UNESCO 2014). Around these policy propositions flourished, and continues to flourish, a corpus of scholarly literature that explores and emphasises the role of culture in sustainable development (e.g. Auclair and Fairclough 2015, Duxbury et al. 2012, Watene and Yap 2015). Common themes include the inseparability of development from culture, the importance of valuing and prioritising community perspectives in decisions around culture and development, and the view that healthy cultures are, in many ways, a precondition for the achievement of the SDGs.

Ultimately, none of the SDGs centres on culture. However, the efforts just described have served to heighten general awareness that culture has a fundamental part to play in advancing the SDGs. Recognising that development means more than just economic growth, but is in fact ‘a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence’ (UNESCO 2017: para 4), UNESCO has an ongoing strategy aiming to incorporate culture ‘into all development policies, be they related to education, science, communication, health, environment or cultural tourism’ (2017, para. 2). Despite progress, culturally integrated approaches to realising the SDGs are still to gain widespread traction. In May 2020, eight major global cultural networks launched the #culture2030goal campaign, arguing that culture should be central to strategies surrounding the UN Decade of Action for the SDGs (2020-2030). Calling on UN agencies, governments and other stakeholders to act, it laments that culture is ‘an accelerator under-used’ (#Culture2030Goal 2020).

In some senses, culture arguably has bearing on all the Goals – not least because the SDGs themselves are a human construct and therefore inevitably informed by cultural norms and understandings. However, in UNESCO's view culture has particular relevance those SDGs relating to '...quality education [SDG 4], sustainable cities [SDG 11], the environment [SDGs 13-15], economic growth [SDG 8], sustainable consumption and production patterns [SDG 12], peaceful and inclusive societies [SDGs 10, 16], gender equality [SDG 5] and food security [SDG 2]' (UNESCO 2019, para 3). Research also suggests important roles for culture in eliminating poverty (SDG 1) and achieving good health and wellbeing (SDG 3; see e.g. Marsell and Yamada 2000, Chatterjee and Noble 2016, Clift and Camic 2016).

Regarding intangible culture specifically, several scholars provide insights into its relationship to the SDGs. For example, Harrison (2013a) explores the relationship of poverty to music (SDG 1), and Kim (2011) proposes a framework for integrating climate change considerations into the safeguarding of intangible culture (SDG 13). Caldwell and Vaughan (2011) argue that the arts should be an integral part of a quality education (SDG 4), while Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) explore the contribution of arts and theatre to peacebuilding (SDG 16). Barclay and colleagues (2019) outline how artistic uses of underwater soundscapes have advanced scientific methods of monitoring and conserving freshwater ecosystems, and have engaged and inspired local communities to learn about, and care for, life underwater (SDG 14).

Existing understandings of poverty and culture

Theoretical contributions to understandings of culture-poverty relationships are found across a range of disciplines, from cultural heritage to sustainable development to economic theory. From a cultural industries standpoint, Moore (1998) examined poverty and access to the arts in Europe and the USA, identifying barriers to cultural participation and proposing strategies for equity and targeted interventions. More recently, Kaminiski et al. (2013) have examined a range of contemporary issues in cultural heritage tourism including its many possible socioeconomic ramifications for local communities. Clammer (2014) examines the role of arts in international development and social transformation, with implications for understandings of poverty and the arts. A sub-set of the theoretical literature develops or expands theoretical frameworks for understanding the connection between poverty and specific expressions of culture. A prominent example is a poverty-themed edition of the *Yearbook of the International Council for Traditional Music* (Harrison 2013c), a significant advance in theoretical and applied scholarship on that topic. With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Fiol 2013 and Moisala 2013), few sources explicitly explore links between poverty, culture and cultural sustainability.

Geographically or culturally bounded studies offer context-specific insights into relationships between poverty and culture, often contributing theoretical insights too. Anderson (2015) examines cultural tourism's contribution to poverty alleviation in rural Kilimanjaro, Tanzania; Fiol (2013) explores how changing socioeconomic circumstances interplay with what he calls 'cultural and musical poverty' in Uttarkand, India; and both Dowdy (2012) and Grant (2016) examine youth and music in relation to socioeconomic circumstance and poverty, though in different countries and continents – Grant in Cambodia and Dowdy in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Several scholars have used participatory or action research methodologies, ultimately hoping to contribute directly or indirectly to poverty mitigation efforts. In the course of a project examining issues of cultural sustainability for Southern Ewe dance-drummers in Ghana, Burns (2016) engages in a collaborative commercial recording initiative to help ameliorate socioeconomic challenges confronting the artists. Araújo and Cambria's (2013) long-term participatory ethnography with *favela* residents in Maré, Brazil, conceptualises

‘both empirically and theoretically’ the links for those residents between poverty, social participation and ‘sound praxis’. Harrison (2013b) explores socioeconomic, health wellbeing outcomes of music projects in the socio-economically depressed urban area of Vancouver, Canada. While these case studies relate to music and dance, others exist relating to arts and crafts (e.g. Mande 2015); traditional cultural rituals (e.g. Cheer et al. 2013); and theatre (e.g. Muhumuza 2014, Osnes 2013).

‘Grey’ (non-scholarly organisational) literature provides valuable insights into the agendas, approaches and decision-making processes of cultural agencies, policymakers, governments and non-government organisations in relation to poverty and culture. Many of these agencies ‘develop and implement policy measures that may better enable music and other cultural expressions to stimulate sustainable development and contribute to poverty eradication’ (Grant 2019:3). UNESCO manifestly recognises the role of a strong cultural sector in contributing to poverty alleviation, and to that end proclaims its intention to help governments and non-government organisations bolster local creative industries (2017: para 4). The United Nations and International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies are two further international bodies that produce working papers, reports, and other resources with strong relevance to poverty and culture in the context of the UN’s Sustainable Development agenda (e.g. UN General Assembly 2019, IFACCA 2018).

Implications of poverty for cultural strength and sustainability

Poverty can undoubtedly impede cultural strength and sustainability. The vitality of cultural practices is inevitably dependent, at least to some extent, on the economic ability of individual artists and culture-bearers to engage in them. Poverty can (and does) inhibit the capacity of individuals to participate in cultural activities and the broader cultural lives of their communities. According to Bhattacharya, for example, over time practitioners of folk art in West Bengal found themselves less and less able to engage with their cultural practices due to ‘poverty and lack of scope for performance and practice in [the] changing sociocultural environment’, leading in turn to a weakening of those traditions (2014:344–345). Another instance is provided by Burns (2016), who describes the economic hardship confronting the Southern Ewe dance-drummers in Ghana: although appreciated by the broader population, their social contribution is acknowledged primarily in non-financial ways in a cash-based society, making it difficult for the artists to survive and to maintain their cultural practices. Generally speaking, artists even in wealthier Western countries may face relative socioeconomic hardship or income instability that jeopardises their continued livelihoods in the arts. In Australia, for example, the average annual income artists generate from their creative work places them below the poverty line; most supplement their work with income from other sources (Griffiths 2017). For many culture-bearers around the world, the degree of social prestige that artists garner for their artistry and creative skills – sometimes garnering high media attention, especially in the West – is not generally matched by the level of financial return that makes ‘artist’ a lucrative, or sometimes even viable, livelihood. In turn, this adversely affects the strength and the sustainability of the arts and arts sector at large, as some artists seek alternative more stable livelihoods and income sources.

Participating in cultural activities, or generating cultural ‘product’ broadly defined, often requires material resources: musical instruments, equipment, costumes, ritual paraphernalia, performance areas, and even access to the internet for creating and disseminating artistic product (Schippers and Grant 2016:13). Individual artists may be expected to bear the cost, potentially preventing those with fewer financial resources from engaging in cultural production to the same degree as those with more. In other contexts, the financial burden of cultural participation is shared across a community, whether through

some form of taxation or in more direct ways. In such instances, cultural vitality – especially as represented in communal activities such as festivals, rituals, performances, and community events – is closely intertwined with the economic circumstances of the community at large. Harnish (2016) offers the striking example of Lombok, Indonesia, where in times of particular hardship, whole villages have been compelled to sell their sets of shadow puppets or *gamelan* musical instruments to raise money for food for the residents. These considerations underscore the fact that limited economic resources and capacity – not only of individuals but of whole communities – can act as barriers to a vibrant cultural life (Grant 2016:17).

This phenomenon exemplifies what Fiol (2013) terms *cultural poverty*, the reduction or absence of the means for people to express and engage in cultural practices. The CoVid19 pandemic offers a particularly striking illustration of how social and economic circumstance is intimately connected with cultural poverty. In the first weeks of the pandemic, cultural performances were cancelled in their thousands – not, at that early stage, due primarily to economic hardship of the artists or the population at large, but out of concern for public health. Within a matter of weeks, however, this reduction in the ability for people to engage in cultural performances and events became intertwined with other rising dimensions of poverty, such as precarious income and livelihood, both for music industry artists (who generate on average around three quarters of their income from live performances; Hall 2020) and for the general population. The World Economic Forum estimates that within the first five months of the pandemic, revenue from performances in the global music industry had dropped from over \$50 billion to around half that figure (Hall 2020). The pandemic egregiously demonstrates that it is not only individuals and local communities whose economic circumstance affects the vibrancy and sustainability of cultural practices: the condition of whole nation-states, indeed the global population at large, also plays a role.

In some societies, the livelihoods and social roles of artists are stigmatised due to their close association with low socioeconomic status. In Nepal, the ‘untouchable’ caste *Gāines/Gandharva* is associated both with poverty and with music; there are close intersections between social deprivation, poverty, cultural rights and cultural vitality among that population (Moisala 2013). Certain bardic or epic story-telling traditions are also associated with culture-bearers of low socioeconomic status. In Cambodia, the improvised oral performance tradition known as *chrieng chapei*, where artists offer social commentary through song, is closely associated with poverty. Through the twentieth century, its most famous exponents were blind, and took their art to the streets in an effort to reap a modest income (UNESCO 2016). The ensuing stigma surrounding *chrieng chapei* is understood to be one of the primary reasons for the tradition’s precarious contemporary situation, and it has been officially recognized by UNESCO as ‘in need of urgent safeguarding’. *Chrieng chapei* exemplifies a multitude of cultural practices around the world associated with an underprivileged social class and popularly perceived as ‘backward’ or out of step with modern lives. Perceptions about these traditions often lie in contrast with preferences for other forms of recreation and entertainment, often Western-influenced, that are seen to be more in step with new lifestyles and modern living (Grant 2016:16).

The case of *chrieng chapei* gives rise to another important consideration about the relationship of poverty to culture and cultural sustainability. Historically in Cambodia, playing the accompanying lute instrument known as *chapei* was one activity that was perceived to be appropriate for, and within the capabilities of, people without sight (UNESCO 2016). Given the imperative to earn a living, the risk or reality of economic hardship may have initially led (blind) individuals to engage with the tradition and become *chrieng chapei* artists. For some decades through the mid-twentieth century, it seems the tradition may have relied

almost wholly on these individuals for its perpetuation (Grant and Chhuon 2016). Among other things, this example illustrates that poverty does not necessarily or inevitably impede participation in cultural practices: in some instances, it may even enable it, and thereby support cultural sustainability.

This section has laid out a few ways in which poverty can act as a barrier to individuals' involvement in culture and diminish the cultural lives of communities, while also noting that in some contexts, poverty can facilitate cultural engagement. In cases where poverty inhibits cultural strength, this may place the future of cultural expressions in jeopardy. A cycle manifests: individuals under socioeconomic pressure are unable to fully participate in the cultural lives of their communities; this weakens the cultural sector and perhaps certain cultural practices too, further disallowing individuals and their communities the socioeconomic and wellbeing benefits that attend vibrant cultures. A weakened cultural sector may justify targeted cultural sustainability initiatives; yet ironically, such initiatives themselves often come at financial cost. The implication is clear: cultural sustainability efforts should not only seek to support cultural practices but must also attend to the socioeconomic wellbeing of culture-bearers (a recurring theme in Titon's long-running blog on relationships between music and sustainability, 2008-2020).

The corollary is that eliminating poverty can be vastly beneficial for cultural sustainability. In fact, it is arguably even a precondition for vibrant and healthy cultures, as several examples in this section suggest. Poverty reduction can lead to a flourishing of the arts and culture, as people, communities and nation-states achieve a socioeconomic condition that affords resources and capacity for vibrant cultural practices. In this sense, reducing or eliminating poverty advances *cultural rights*, a group's social and economic capacity to sustain its cultural practices and pass them on to future generations (Moisala 2013). This link between poverty elimination, cultural rights and cultural sustainability (explored in Weintraub and Yung 2009) is key in understanding the relationship of SDG 1 'No Poverty' to culture.

Roles of vibrant cultural practices in eliminating poverty

Strong cultures and cultural practices can help eliminate poverty in several ways. Perhaps most obviously, arts and culture provide employment and an income for artists and culture-bearers. Arts training builds transferable skills that can enable people to secure employment and generate income, both within and outside of the cultural sector. Strong employment opportunities in the cultural sector increase demand for arts and cultural training and education; in turn, this further bolsters the sector, as artists are employed or find private work in educational settings (Grant 2016:16). When a cultural sector is strong, it is best placed to support the livelihood sustainability of artists; and with livelihood sustainability, those artists are empowered and enabled to practice their skills in a sustainable career with stable income. For all these reasons, some cultural sustainability initiatives take the approach of strengthening the cultural sector, for example by supporting artists to develop, implement and maintain sustainable, income-generating small enterprises (Bhattacharya 2014). Cultural and creative initiatives like these contribute to a thriving economy, in turn further supporting the economic circumstances of individuals and communities. By helping artists and culture-bearers recognise their potential to improve their lives and those of their community, projects like these align with a 'capabilities' approach to poverty reduction (Sen 1985, Nussbaum 2011).

Cultural practices, if inclusive, also have potential to counteract the marginalisation and social barriers that frequently attend poverty. One prominent arts-based anti-poverty program that has attracted both praise and criticism in this regard is *El Sistema*, founded in

Venezuela in 1975 and now present in some form in many other countries around the world (Uy 2012). The program provides a structured (Western) music education program to socially disadvantaged children, at no cost to participants. Over the years, national and international media have promulgated a raft of claims about the positive health, social and educational outcomes for *El Sistema* participants and their families; commentators have also observed that the resulting performances gave cause for the more advantaged in society to reshape and expand their notions about the capabilities of the program participants. However, *El Sistema* has attracted criticism on various charges, including those of 'deficit thinking and cultural colonialism' (Sheih 2015:567; see also Baker 2016). These criticisms highlight the complexities of anti-poverty cultural programs and the need for rigorous and ongoing critical reflection and evaluation.

Across a range of studies, participation in cultural life has been shown to improve individual and collective health and wellbeing. The health and wellbeing benefits of cultural activities have direct relevance to poverty alleviation efforts: when people are healthier and happier, they are better able to participate in meaningful and economically productive social lives – which, by some characterisations of poverty, meets the very definition of poverty reduction. Over a period of some years following its establishment in 2004, the large-scale project 'Art for Life' in West Bengal (India) supported thousands of visual and performing artists to develop 'an eco-system for revival and rejuvenation of traditional art skills as livelihood' (Bhattacharya 2014:341). The project reportedly led to 'improved opportunity to perform, improved income from performance, lower average age of artists with the young taking interest, rejuvenation of the skill transmission systems, increased number of artists groups practicing and performing together and greater awareness on [sic] the art forms' (Bhattacharya 2014:341). Similarly, in Uganda, certain initiatives of non-government organisations to promote local intangible cultural heritage brought positive socioeconomic and wellbeing outcomes for the local population (Drani 2014). These and other projects make clear that cultural strength, cultural sustainability, poverty reduction and health and wellbeing are closely connected.

Finally, by advancing political and social change agendas, cultural expressions can be a tool in advocacy and action against poverty. The Theatre of the Oppressed, a form of community-based education inspired by the work of Paulo Freire, engages participatory theatre as a way for people to explore collective struggles, overcome oppression and move toward liberation; it has become a tool for social change and political activism (Boal 1985). Music too has played a prominent role in social justice and equality movements. Whole musical genres have emerged from the use of music in this way: African American spirituals recount stories of exploitation, oppression, deprivation, and life in slavery of black people in the United States (Dennis 2015), and blues, reggae, funk and soul all give voice to people with experience of societal disadvantage, their lyrics calling out social injustices and systemic inequalities, and often urging action. Generally, however, the use of music and other arts in social movements has been more successful in effecting political and social, rather than economic, change.

Conclusion

Poverty, culture and sustainability intersect in complex ways. The capacity of individuals and communities to engage in cultural practices is affected by their socioeconomic circumstances. Poverty can inhibit cultural vitality and sustainability at large, while poverty reduction can lead to a flourishing of culture. In turn, strong and sustainable cultures can help advance SDG 1 'No Poverty', including by providing employment in the arts and cultural sectors, developing in individuals the transferrable skills that lead to secure livelihoods in

other sectors, improving individual and collective health and wellbeing, and advancing social and political resistance against the systemic disadvantage and other societal barriers that arise from poverty. Since culture affords uniquely holistic and people-centred approaches to addressing contemporary global challenges, integrating it into this and all SDGs arguably 'constitutes an essential investment in the world's future' (UNESCO 2017: para 1).

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