

Case study: Innovative approaches to addressing cultural loss in the fashion sector through documentation and preservation

Category:	Long-term rehabilitation, rebuilding, recovery and resilience efforts for irreversible losses of a non-economic nature, such as loss of biodiversity, territory and life, and those induced by mobility, such as societal and cultural identity
Submitted by:	SLYCAN Trust
Source/cause of L&D:	Extreme weather events, long-term environmental changes, ecosystem degradation, and human mobility
Regional coverage:	Sri Lanka/Global
Hyperlink(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Exhibition page to be shared soon via https://www.slycantrust.org/▪ https://www.climafrontlines.org/▪ https://www.slycantrust.org/knowledge-resources/scoping-paper-understanding-climate-induced-cultural-and-non-economic-loss▪ https://www.slycantrust.org/ethicalx-global
Reference(s):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ SLYCAN Trust (2023). Scoping Paper: Understanding Climate-Induced Cultural and Non-Economic Loss. Colombo, Sri Lanka: SLYCAN Trust.

1. Overview

The traditional fashion and garment sector in Sri Lanka is affected by climate-related impacts, such as extreme weather events, long-term environmental changes, ecosystem degradation, and human mobility. These impacts threaten the sector with cultural loss regarding existing practices, knowledge, materials, and overall cultural heritage, which especially affects small-scale artisans and entrepreneurs in climate-vulnerable communities, including women and youth. These climate-related impacts are also further compounded by economic shocks and risks related to supply chains, lack of reliable market information, and limited financial literacy, which further endanger livelihoods as well as the preservation of cultural heritage in the sector.

To address this form of cultural loss in the fashion sector through documentation and preservation of cultural heritage, SLYCAN Trust is working with entrepreneurs, artisans, vulnerable communities, and young designers in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, this entails a structured support programme and collaborations on collections, helping fashion entrepreneurs and their supply chains to develop, produce, and market products that blend traditional techniques and materials with new design approaches and sustainable, climate-friendly, and resilient entrepreneurship.

On the other hand, SLYCAN Trust is organizing a multi-media exhibition that showcases traditional techniques and handicraft parallel to UNFCCC negotiations (such as SB60 in Bonn), highlighting the stories of artisans and designers working on sustainable fashion, from traditional techniques such as *beeralu*, *dumbara*, handloom, and batik to waste-based materials, upcycling, and innovative natural dyes. The pieces shown are unique creations at the cutting edge of fashion and document the creative

process from village artisans to fashion show runways in the context of climate change and climate-induced loss and damage.

2. Arrangements and enabling factors

The activities around the work with communities, entrepreneurs, and designers is closely interlinked with evidence-based engagement on the policy level, for example, by linking entrepreneurship support and documentation of existing practices with NDCs, national adaptation planning, and local-level planning processes. It is necessary to directly engage with actors on the local and national level based on in-depth mapping and understanding of risks, impacts, and the cultural heritage at stake. Furthermore, enabling factors include the ability to document ground realities in ways that combine research findings with artistic expression and transport them into relevant spaces, such as the UNFCCC negotiation process.

3. Lessons learned and future support

The concept of the exhibition developed in collaboration with affected communities and key local-level actors is based on the success of a previous exhibition organized by SLYCAN Trust, which documented and visualized climate-induced cultural loss and human mobility. The partnership model between vulnerable communities, a think tank, and an art gallery has produced unique results and received very positive feedback and acclaim.

As a model, the use of artistic showcase approaches can reach a large audience on a deeper level and transport the reality of non-economic losses and their meaning for affected individuals, households, and communities to various stakeholders and into the UNFCCC negotiation process. In addition, the sustained engagement with local actors and support provided for their work allows them to not only document the cultural heritage at stake but actively preserve and protect it, helping to bring these traditional techniques, materials, and practices back to the forefront and conserving them for future generations while providing economic benefits and strengthening livelihood resilience.