



# **CAMPUS EURO-AFRICANO DE COOPERAÇÃO CULTURAL**

**22-26 de junho de 2009. Maputo, Moçambique**

**Plenary session: the Governance of Culture**

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**Maputo, 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2009**

## **Euro African Campus Presentation on Governance**

It has been a momentous week. The Spanish football team lost in the Confederations Cup. The King of Pop, Michael Jackson, has died. And we have had the first Euro-Africa Campus on Cultural Cooperation. Tomorrow, life will continue. For some, especially on our continent, the quality and length of their lives will depend on development. Please indulge me as I approach the governance issue by reflecting broadly on the themes of this past week.

Two of the primary divides in the world today are poverty and culture. Culture has probably overtaken poverty as one of the greatest threats to global security. The current debate about banning the burka in France and the rise of nationalism in Europe generally, are responses to perceived threats from immigrant communities with a culture different to that of the status quo, and irrespective of even the middle class positions of the immigrant community. Similarly, while they share the misery of poverty, refugees from Somalia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique and the under-classes of South Africa are divided by culture, accounting for the recent xenophobic violence.

In a post-9/11 world, with the cold war and its ideological divides now assigned to the scrapheap of history, culture is the primary global faultline. Is it visionary, idealistic or naïve that we seek to appropriate one divide – culture – to try to eradicate another – poverty?

The Millennium Development Goals aim to eliminate extreme poverty by 2015. A much-repeated theme during this week has been the cultural dimension of development, the ultimate implication being that culture is integral to the attainment of the MDGs.

Yet, we have to ask why it is that after two UNESCO World Decades for Culture and Development, after more than thirty years of repeating the mantra about the cultural dimension of development with almost religious fervour, there is such a lack of a critical mass of concrete evidence of successful, practical examples of development rooted in culture?

Is it because the actual development agenda and strategies are set by the economist policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank rather than European culture-centric development agencies? Maybe it's because international conferences to advance the integration of culture and development invite Ministers of Culture who are at the bottom of the political food chain, rather than ministers of finance or trade and industry who wield the real power in determining development strategies? Or perhaps it is because despite the plethora of correct theory around the anthropological relationship between culture and development, there has been little training of development practitioners who understand and have experience in devising and implementing programmes that give practical content to such theory.

Could it be that the culture of development as it is generally practiced militates against the development of culture? But that cannot be true, for development is not ideologically neutral or value free, and the very act or process of development - however defined or practiced - shifts values, beliefs, behaviour and social relationships. In short, development – whether it genuflects to the notion of the cultural dimension of development or not - directly impacts on culture. Who decides whether a community needs to be “developed” or not or whether development is a good thing? A community might experience a devastating rupture when its traditions and cultural practices are adversely impacted upon by “development”.

When asked what he thought about western civilisation, Gandhi is famously reputed to have said that he thinks it would be a good idea. The point is that notions of “being developed” are contested.

We glibly speak about development as if we have a common understanding of it, but what do we mean?

Do we mean political development? And what is considered the highest form of political development? Democracy? Because it is regarded as a system that best advances and protects human rights and freedoms? Then consider this: the African country rated the

highest in terms of the Human Development Index is Libya, hardly renowned for its democratic practices.

Perhaps we mean economic development. But what does that mean? A free market economy? Then why is it that Cuba – long marginalised as the last communist country - is rated higher than any African country on the Human Development Index that measures literacy, education, living standards and life expectancy? Why is it that South Africa – having embraced free market fundamentalism so that it now has the strongest and largest economy on the continent – also now boasts the largest gap between rich and poor, and the highest rate of unemployment in its history, at more than 35%?

By development, do we mean social development where citizens enjoy material human rights such as education, housing, jobs, health care, etc? Should we then aspire to be like Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, rated among the top 32 countries on the Human Development Index, but where other fundamental human rights like freedom of expression – crucial to artistic practice - are severely restricted?

So, which model of development should we aspire to on a continent where, of the 179 countries ranked on the Human Development Index - and after more than three decades of development - 27 of the bottom 29 countries are African? The world average life expectancy is 66 years. But what does the noble idea of development being incomplete without cultural development – repeated throughout this week – mean for a continent where only nine countries – out of 53 – enjoy a life expectancy of 50 or more?

Anecdotal experience in South Africa reflects a development practice that largely expands the middle class, an elite driven by values of individualism rather than the collective good, creating new markets for global corporates peddling the consumerist dream. Development at a local level thus increasingly reflects the global inequities of a resource-consuming elite on the one hand, and an impoverished majority on the other.

This traditional trickle-down model of development has also undermined South Africa's post-apartheid cultural policy. Initially premised on the principles of access articulated in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "everyone shall have the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts", the policy has shifted towards a market-driven, creative industries approach. So desperate were we to prove to political philistines that the arts have value and are therefore worthy of public funding support, that we in fact devalued the arts by reducing them to generators of jobs, personal income and tax revenue. By implication, those art forms that are resource-consuming or are not given value by "the market" or that might be more appropriate to developmental challenges but are subsidy-dependent, are neglected.

The anthropological approach to the cultural dimension of development has largely been overtaken by an emphasis on creative industries as drivers of development within a free market economic model.

But what do the creative industries mean for countries where poverty is such that there is a lack of disposable income, the primary means to sustain local creative industries?

As a playwright and cultural activist, there is nothing that I would love more than for culture and the arts to be recognised within development process, but I would hate for us to conclude in thirty years time that the cultural dimension of development has been a failure, like the first models of development were deemed failures for not being rooted in the culture of the intended beneficiaries. There are simply too many lives at risk for us to fail again.

If I were a culturally-sensitive European policy-maker keen on partnering with Africa in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, I would link each of the 27 European countries with two African countries, thereby covering all countries on the continent. These partners would have a mandate to achieve the following ten outcomes by 2015:

1. every African country would have an arts and culture policy premised on numerous existing documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, various UNESCO Conventions, the

- Nairobi Plan of Action, etc, ensuring that these policies cover the range of artistic practice: art for developmental purposes, art for its own sake and market-driven creative industries
2. the establishment of at least one institution that provides training and builds capacity in arts management, leadership and cultural entrepreneurship, and that produces 50-100 graduates per year
  3. establishing a research entity that publishes a print and on-line directory with information on the arts, statistical data about the creative industries, and profiles of the country's artists.
  4. creating physical infrastructure in each discipline to underpin the creation and distribution of arts and creative products
  5. establishing a multidisciplinary national festival that showcases the best art practices of the country annually and builds local and international markets
  6. creating a sustainable fund with public, private sector and international resources to support artistic production and distribution
  7. approving legislation to protect the rights of artists in accordance with the Belgrade Recommendation on the Status of the Artist
  8. creating formal channels for accessing each other's arts markets and to address related issues such as artists' mobility like visas and travel costs
  9. supporting journals and mechanisms that facilitate debate and critical discourse about the arts and train a new cadre of cultural leaders and experts
  10. key to most of these would be the establishment of a sustainable national network to represent the interests of the creative civil society, to lobby for and monitor cultural policy and to serve as national and international partners

Rather than constantly try to make meaning of the cultural dimension of development, my view is that we need to concentrate on building a strong, vibrant and sustainable arts sector and development will take care of itself.

In Africa, we hate being patronised. We resent being beggars, being at the mercy of the benevolence of others. We reject that we are simply a factory for trials at the International Court of Justice. But we cannot deny that too often, it is poor governance that has compromised development, and that the lives of millions of people on this continent remain miserable because of poor governance. Zimbabwe did not go from bread basket to basket case of the region because of the Smith regime; but because of exceptionally poor governance. One thousand South Africans do not die everyday of HIV/AIDS-related causes and life expectancy has not declined in the last fifteen years because of apartheid, but because of extraordinarily poor governance.

There is no one size fits all formula for governance of cultural programmes on the continent; appropriate forms of governance need to be forged in practice and relative to the conditions related to capacity and resources.

Before embarking on the kinds of country partnerships proposed earlier, a generic protocol needs to be devised that acknowledges the structural inequities in the distribution of resources and expertise between the partners, that articulates the peculiar interests of each partner, and that stipulates how the partnership and its components will be governed. Not another noble declaration nor an unenforceable convention, but a mutual agreement that creates the conditions for appropriate forms of governance for that partnership from the outset.

If 27 countries partnering with 53 is too ambitious, the 2015 Millennium Development Goals deadline notwithstanding, then let's start with fewer, but let's stop talking and let's just do it.

Thank you.