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Organización
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la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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Towards a UNESCO Suite of indicators on Culture and Development (2009 – 2010)

Analytical Framework

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Historical Background

For the past sixty years, supporting and ensuring the development of poor countries has been one of the main priorities of the international community. Significant investments have been made in terms of aid and infrastructure, accompanied by a number of different proposed models to support economic growth and sustainable development. Until recently, culture was not taken into account in such investments or models: indeed, the concept that culture should play a more important role in development processes had a mixed reception with key actors and agencies in the international development community.

The vision for development has evolved significantly during the past half century. The first approach focused on promoting economic growth, as it was perceived that modernization of industries and infrastructures would naturally boost national GDP, with important cross-cutting benefits for all citizens. This approach consisted primarily of transferring resources, credits, technological contributions and assistance.

Culture was not seen as an important factor in development processes, and was thus excluded from programming and policies. Culture was perceived as synonymous with “tradition”, and as such, at odds with modernization and a brake to economic development. Moreover, a widespread presumption underpinning these perceptions was that cultural differences may prevent certain countries from fully benefiting from the implementation of Western-style economic models.

The dominance of the modernization model was significantly challenged, however, with the economic crisis of the mid-1980s when developing countries were particularly affected. This situation both exposed the weaknesses, and prompted a re-evaluation of the aims and methods of international development cooperation.

The inclusion of culture in international development

As a result, new approaches to development widened the focus to include alongside economic growth, investments in literacy, education, agriculture and gender equality. In the early 1990s, the UNDP advanced a broader and more integrating concept of development, putting human beings at the centre of all actions:

“A nation's true wealth lies with its people. The overarching objective of development is to create an atmosphere allowing human beings to enjoy a long, healthy and creative life.”

Experience accumulated over the years pointed to the need to make development inclusive of all the factors that make up societies in order for interventions to be sustainable. It was as a result of this shift that culture was recognized as playing a role in development processes alongside and in combination with education, health and the environment.

Most development theories, for example modernization theories (Rostow, 1960; Deutsch, 1961; Inkeles and Smith, 1974), the dependency theories (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979) or economic growth theories (Domar, 1946; Harrod, 1939; Solow, 1957; Arrow, 1962; Lucas, 1988; Romer, 1990), make the assumption that development is a linear and evolutionary process, progressing from a less developed or lower, 'primitive' or 'traditional', level to a more developed and higher, 'advanced' or 'modern', level. However, applying the term 'development' in varied cultural and geographical contexts becomes problematic, as and what may be considered of high value for some may not be as important for others. Thus defining the direction to head in from only one perspective not only limits the positive effects of a development policy, but may even cause negative side-effects, such as dependency or loss of traditional ways key to sustainable farming. It is in this line of thought that culture began to make its place among other themes in the development discourse.

Culture strongly influences all aspects of daily public and private life. It is deeply interwoven with all levels of political and economic decision making, popular media and education, and impacts on social relations. Yet its richness makes developing policies and programmes that are sensitive to cultural diversity can embrace and take into account culture's diversity without more complex. "one size does not fit all".

UNESCO and "Culture and Development"

Over the past four decades, UNESCO has worked to promote its vision of culture and Development and press for greater recognition of the interrelationship within the international development community. Through conferences and publications, notably of the seminal study, *Our Creative Diversity* (1996) REF, this vision has been strengthened and complemented by data and research. UNESCO adopts a two-fold approach, which equally emphasises evaluative and instrumental roles played by culture in development processes.

UNESCO recognizes that culture plays an evaluative role in development since it shapes a society's values, traditions and way of life. Culture also plays an instrumental role since no matter what goals we value, their pursuit is to some extent influenced by the nature of our culture and ethics (Sen, 1996).

During the 17th session of its General Conference in 1972, UNESCO adopted a resolution calling for a series of international conferences to be held on cultural policies. The Accra Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policy in Africa (1975), identified culture as "a *conditio sine qua non* of endogenous, compatible and balanced development". The 1982 Mexico World Conference on Cultural Policy (Mondiacult) concluded this series with the *Mexico Declaration on cultural policies*. The declaration and the conferences led to the United Nations World Decade for Cultural Development (1988–1997) and the 1988 Stockholm proceedings of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policy for Development.

At the 26th session of its General Conference (1991), UNESCO adopted a resolution requesting that the Director General, in co-operation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations,

“establish an independent World Commission on Culture and Development comprising women and men drawn from all regions and eminent in diverse disciplines, to prepare a World Report on Culture and Development and proposals for both urgent and long-term action to meet cultural needs in the context of development”.

Our creative Diversity

The 1996 publication of *Our Creative Diversity*, the landmark report of the World Commission, collected up-to-date research and statistics to present a strong case for placing culture at the centre of development thinking. It highlighted culture as the best medium through which individuals can express their ability to fulfil themselves and therefore be an integral part of development.

Following this key call for greater prioritization of culture within development programmes and policies was the significant contribution by the UNDP’s 2004 Human Development Report, *Cultural Liberty in Today’s Diverse World*. This report stressed the importance of culture and multiculturalism in human development strategies.

Centralizing Culture in Development Practices: Issues

Despite the publications, commitments and research, attempts to include culture in development have only achieved limited success to date. To an extent, culture has been an “add-on”, a secondary consideration in existing development policies and programmes: it is not seen as a driver of development. Ensuring culture’s centrality requires, therefore, a reconsideration of existing practices and policies, which undermine its importance in development processes.

From a cultural approach, development practitioners can understand and respect local nuances and differences, and better engage with and support communities. Methods and processes drawing from cultural resources, for example in education, promoting good governance, or addressing issues of gender inequality, help to foster better development. In order to integrate communities and win their support, folk forms, heritage, local languages and traditional governance structures can all be drawn on.

The reevaluation of the role of culture in development has also raised new questions on the objectives of development, and notably, the importance placed on economic growth in their achievement. Indeed, UNESCO has defined development as ‘a process that enhances the effective freedom of people involved to pursue whatever they have reason to value’ (UNESCO, 1995). The ultimate purpose of development is hence to enlarge

human capabilities, to expand the set of choices open to each individual, to enable each person to live a life of his/her choice. Following these definitions, culture is the basis, context and very purpose of development.

For these reasons, culture must be fully integrated into the economic, social and ecological aspects of development, leading to an alternative approach to human development that should prioritize the following elements:

- Cultural identity (the social unit of development is a culturally defined community and the development of this community is rooted in the specific values and institutions of this culture).
- Self-reliance (each community relies primarily on its own strength and resources).
- Social justice (the development effort should give priority to those most in need).
- Ecological balance (the resources of the biosphere are utilized in full awareness of the potential of local ecosystems as well as the global and local limits imposed on present and future generations).

However, this discourse has not become as influential as it could and so, rather than restricting its actions and perspective to the evaluative role that culture can play in development, UNESCO also advocates its instrumental use. In promoting culture in this manner, UNESCO is opening the way for further practices and models, with the final objective of transforming these into a full-scale part of development. By demonstrating the effectiveness of culture in development, through promoting cultural industries, for example, it can increase attention given to the cultural riches of developing countries and not only their natural resources or economic power.

The UNESCO culture and development indicator suite

Critical issues that hamper culture playing a fuller role in development include the lack of easily available and relevant information on many cultures, the isolation within which many creative practitioners continue to work, and a lack of cultural policy support and creative capacity. If the intimate relationship between culture and development has yet to become a major policy concern, this is mainly due to the slow progress in producing hard data on the linkages.

In response to this problem, the indicator suite being developed under the aegis of UNESCO aims to provide a snapshot of the situation of culture in social, political, and economic spheres at national level and its contribution to development. This project is based on and adapted from a holistic approach developed by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation which focuses on global ethics, cultural vitality and equity and governance. As such, it reflects, prolongs and sharpens previous publications and reflections on the subject, both in the sphere of academia and policymaking, benefiting from existing systems, whilst aiming to avoid the problems that were encountered in the past.

Regarding the indicator system developed in this project, the relationships between culture and development are viewed from a perspective that is both analytical and factual: analytical as cultural development does not exist independently of other development processes and fields of activity; factual as it explores the various processes taking place. The indicator system examines seven different dimensions of this complex relationship:

- Political dimension
- Educational dimension
- Impact of communication and culture
- Cultural dimension in human rights and development
- Economic dimension
- Social dimension
- Sustainable management of cultural heritage

Some issues have been considered transversal, and this is the case in particular for gender. For each dimension, two to three key indicators that provide a synthesis of complex phenomena need to be identified, based on existing data. Taken together, these seven dimensions should provide an overall picture of the relationships between culture and development and the contribution of culture to development at national level. It is important to note that no dimension is considered to weigh more than another.

At present, only one set of indicators is planned to be devised for the whole world. Consequently, this suite of indicators will not be adapted to regional specificities (the 'toolkit approach'), but be a broad trend instrument. Data collected in the first year would provide the baseline against which data collected thereafter would be analyzed. Because of the specificities of culture, no comparison would be drawn between countries, each considering its data independently. The development community, to whom this suite will be made accessible, would then have a simple but comparable set of data for implementing policies or strategies at a national level.

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