



Commonwealth
Foundation

Commonwealth Statement on Culture and Development

Prepared by the Commonwealth Group
on Culture and Development



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For further information contact:
Commonwealth Foundation
Marlborough House
Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HY
United Kingdom

Tel: +44(0) 20 7930 3783
Fax: +44(0) 20 7839 8157
E-mail: geninfo@commonwealth.int
Web: www.commonwealthfoundation.com



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Prepared by the Commonwealth
Group on Culture and Development
Chaired by Baroness Lola Young





Purpose of this Statement

The aim of the Commonwealth Statement on Culture and Development is to highlight the importance of the multiple connections between culture and development, and the added value that can be achieved by taking greater consideration of culture in development. By raising awareness amongst Commonwealth Governments, donors, civil society and wider audiences of the close connections between culture, creativity and successful development, the aim is to encourage more sustainable development methods and practices, and enhance culture's contribution to economic and social development and conflict prevention.

This Statement has been prepared by the Commonwealth Group on Culture and Development. The Group was established in early 2009 by the Commonwealth Foundation, following calls from civil society at the 2007 Commonwealth People's Forum to take the role of culture in development more seriously. It has sought to take forward the recommendations of the Foundation's 2008 report, *Putting Culture First*, which called for a series of activities to better support and recognise the connections between culture and development. It seeks to win greater commitment to and action on work that integrates culture with development.

The Commonwealth Group on Culture and Development is urging Commonwealth Heads of Government to endorse its findings at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Trinidad and Tobago, November 2009. It asks that Heads of Government, in the Port of Spain Communiqué, take note of this Statement, recognise the connections between culture and development that it outlines, and mandate Commonwealth agencies and networks to take forward its recommendations through strengthened partnerships.

Members of the Group will work closely with civil society at the 2009 Commonwealth People's Forum to develop an action plan for taking forward its recommendations.

Commonwealth Statement on Culture and Development

Introduction

- 1** The Commonwealth Group on Culture and Development¹ presents this Statement to Commonwealth Governments in order to foster the creation of a closer and deeper relationship between culture and development.
- 2** The current global context is one of unprecedented economic and environmental emergency, compounded by continuing challenges of poverty, inequality, mass unemployment and conflict. This demands new ways of thinking and a fresh look at how development proceeds. Because a consideration of cultural values, practices and resources has often been left out of development analyses, many development interventions have failed to achieve their objectives. The potential of culture² to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not been realised, while beyond these goals, much is yet to be done to satisfy the full range of people's needs. Development still pays insufficient attention to the fulfilment of human aspirations. A sustainable, balanced model of growth can only be ensured by integrating culture with economic and social development.

Background

- 3** This Statement, the first at a Commonwealth level calling attention to the connections between culture and development, is taking forward the call from the 2007 Commonwealth People's Forum to make culture a central pillar of the Commonwealth's mandate³, alongside development and democracy. It is framed by, and contributes towards the realisation of, the Commonwealth's fundamental goals and values, as articulated in the 1991 Harare Declaration. This statement will further help deepen the Commonwealth's recent commitment to respect and understanding, as articulated in the 2007 Munyono Declaration. It has been prepared for consideration at the 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, but will be of continuing relevance.
- 4** This Statement has been informed by a wide range of material solicited by the Commonwealth Foundation through a consultative process. This includes over 40 submissions and case studies received from civil society and government stakeholders, and approximately 500 people from all sectors around the Commonwealth who were consulted for the Commonwealth Foundation's 2008 report *Putting Culture First*.

¹ Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey (Chair), John Akomfrah, Tahmina Anam, Gregory Ch'oc, Anna Feuchtwang, Sitharamam Kakarala, Keith Khan, Letila Mitchell, Sandy Nairne, Éric Thérooux, Professor David Throsby, Mike van Graan and Ayeta Anne Wangusa.

² Culture, following the 1982 UNESCO Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies, is understood as "the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs." Cultural expressions, such as the arts, and cultural

resources, such as traditional knowledge, can be seen to be grounded in and to manifest aspects of this broader definition of culture. Cultural industries, following the 2008 UNCTAD Creative Economy Report definition, are taken to refer to those industries that "combine the creation, production and commercialisation of contents which are intangible and cultural in nature."

³ Realising People's Potential: The Kampala Civil Society Statement to the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, paragraph 116.

5 It further draws upon, and complements, pre-existing international agreements and understandings. These include the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the 1980 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist; the 1982 Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Policies and Development; the recent suite of UNESCO culture conventions, particularly the 2005 Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions⁴; and the 2008 UNCTAD Creative Economy report. It also takes note of a range of regional agreements which seek in different ways to connect culture with development, such as the 2001 New Partnership for Africa's Development Framework, the 2007 Pacific Plan, the 2008 EU-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement and the 2009 Declaration of Commitment of the Fifth Summit of the Americas



Umalali: The Garifuna Women's Project gives a voice to women of the Garifuna community in Belize. © Sarah Weeden, Stonetree Records

Context

- 6** Development has frequently been conceived in quantitative terms, without taking into account its qualitative dimensions, namely the satisfaction of individual and community aspirations.
- 7** The aim of development should be the enabling of physical and mental well-being, the fulfilment every individual's potential and the creation of conditions in which people are able to enjoy the full range of human rights. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community [and] to enjoy the arts..." This is indivisible from, and contributory to, all other human rights.

"Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community [and] to enjoy the arts..."

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- 8** Development models have often been applied in different cultural contexts to those in which they were conceived, with the result that attempts made to deliver them are often inappropriate. An understanding of worldviews, values, heritage and other aspects of cultures should form the starting point for development strategies.
- 9** A broad understanding of culture should underpin and inform attempts to support culturally-based development, including the use of cultural resources and cultural expressions to advance development objectives, and support for the creative economy to contribute to economic development. Investments in the cultural sector, including support for practitioners and cultural institutions, are required in order to ensure that culture can contribute fully to development.

⁴ The Convention affirms the developmental benefits of support for culture, but has not been adequately taken forward in many of our countries.



Issa Nyaphaga. Photo taken by Angele Essamba.
© Image courtesy of Angele Essamba and freeDimensional.

- 10** People are culturally impoverished if they are unable to access and enjoy the expressions of the range of cultures around them, and therefore unable to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world. Individuals and communities should be empowered to represent themselves and tell their own stories.
- 11** Diversity is acknowledged as one of the Commonwealth's greatest assets, and its rich array of cultural heritage and languages, and traditional and indigenous knowledge, has intrinsic value. Globalisation can both promote and imperil diversity, and the continuation of diversity therefore needs to be actively supported. Equitable and balanced inter-cultural exchange is required to enhance inter-cultural understanding and foster diversity.
- 12** Culturally-rooted identities and values have long been viewed as a cause or accelerator of conflict. Many people are affected by crime, violence, humiliation and displacement, while regressive aspects of cultures can impede development. Freedom of expression and respect for diversity are often collateral victims of security-led attempts to tackle conflict. But it is precisely because many conflicts have a cultural dimension that culture offers resources that support mutual respect and understanding, challenge oppressive attitudes, and move communities away from conflict.
- 13** Yet in conflict and post-conflict situations, support for cultural expressions and culture-based processes is rarely a priority. And more broadly, where attempts have been made to include culture in development, these have usually seen cultural expressions and resources used as an additional and secondary tool inserted into existing development approaches rather than as drivers of development. When culture is used as a supplementary instrument, development practice may still insufficiently encompass local norms and values, and development interventions can meet with resistance and failure. Making culture more central may require a wider variety of development practice than has been the case in the past.
- 14** Other critical issues that hamper culture playing a fuller role in development include the lack of easily available relevant information about many cultures, the isolation within which many creative practitioners continue to work, and a lack of cultural policy support and creative capacity.
- 15** Despite the strength and vitality of creativity and cultural expression in many countries of the Commonwealth, culture has been treated by most Commonwealth organisations and many governments as peripheral. While other groupings have made progress towards including aspects of culture in their approaches to development, the Commonwealth has not engaged to the same extent.⁵

⁵ For example, while two thirds of members of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie had ratified the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions by 2008, just one third of Commonwealth members had done so.



Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago. © Shirley Bahadur

Connecting culture with development

- 16** In light of the above, some of the different ways in which culture connects to economic and social development are highlighted below. The importance of culture in its own right and the value of cultural development must also be emphasised.
- 17** Support for creative industries offers significant potential for economic growth, including for small states which each have unique cultural resources from which comparative advantages can be realised. This requires support for domestic creative industries backed by commitment from a range of government departments and a coherent stance on copyright, royalty collection and intellectual property. It also calls for a proper consideration of the distinctive nature of cultural goods in international trade and trade agreements.
- 18** Yet culture's value should not be seen only in economic terms; cultural expressions can help define an individual's and a community's sense of self-worth. An over-focus on economic aspects can be harmful if only a narrow band of mainstream forms are prioritised. Support for a diversity of cultural expressions should be seen as an investment in national and local pride and confidence. A cultural festival, for example, drives tourism and knowledge transfer, but it can also change how a host community feels about itself and its place in the world. An investment in cultural spaces, such as community arts centres and museums, and cultural processes, gives opportunities for people to express themselves, articulate their needs and identify their own solutions.

19 By understanding culture, 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 achieve developmental objectives. Forum theatre has helped communities learn about participation in democracy, popular music raised awareness of HIV and AIDS prevention, and film has stimulated debate on climate change. Cultural practitioners bring approachability and neutrality to development processes. Folk forms, aspects of heritage, local languages and traditional governance structures can all be drawn on to help win support, work with the grain of communities and advance change.

20 Culture-based processes, such as culture-led training initiatives for young people, allow people to participate more easily, and develop self-confidence and life skills. Ultimately, cultural spaces⁶ and processes offer the opportunity to turn around the way development is practiced, by giving people the safe space, time and opportunity to define the development they want, on their terms and in their words, and become the owners rather than recipients of development.

21 The above connections will be better enabled by long-term policy and government level commitment, to promote multiple channels for self-expression, exchange, mutual support and the formation of international partnerships, between government, the private sector and civil society.

Recommendations

22 In the light of the above analysis, the following recommendations are put forward, around which further dialogue on future actions and partnerships is now invited.

23 Commonwealth member states are urged to:

- Empower and strengthen cultural ministries and national heritage, cultural and arts agencies, and ensure cross-sector working, including integration of cultural considerations in other policy areas, for example, social welfare, trade, health and education.
- Recognise and work with local and indigenous cultural resources, languages and governance processes to ensure more sustainable economic, environmental and social development.
- Promote investment in the creative industries, in cultural expression, and in the safeguarding of cultural assets, and the development of cultural policies, in recognition of the contribution of these to development.



Commonwealth Writers' Prize authors visit secondary schools in Tonga
© Yvane Fifita

⁶ Cultural spaces can be defined as any physical space where culture is practiced or transmitted. This can be an already established space, such as an arts centre or museum, or somewhere more informal, such as a public square in which a performance is held.



The Yoneco Cultural Troupe communicates HIV and AIDS prevention messages in Malawi. © Youth Net and Counselling (YONECO), Malawi

Conclusion

- 24** The many existing international agreements to which Commonwealth governments are signatory are outlined in paragraph five of this text. The opportunity to deliver on the benefits of these agreements has not been fully realised. The cultural community offers a substantial and hitherto unrealised resource that could work more closely with governments to help delivery on commitments, and so help to make a substantial impact on people's wellbeing.
- 25** The time to act is now, given the growth in critiques of development practice and aid effectiveness, and in the light of the global emergencies outlined above. A lack of understanding of culture and the resulting absence of its integration are part of the reason why insufficient progress has been made. Yet other international initiatives are now showing a greater appreciation of culture, and the groundswell of interest in this work suggests that the Commonwealth could and should take on a more visible leadership role. The cultural community, and broader civil society, stands ready to forge new partnerships to take this agenda forward.

Contact information

Commonwealth Foundation, Marlborough House, Pall Mall

London SW1Y 5HY United Kingdom

Telephone +44 (0)20 7930 3783 Fax +44 (0)20 7839 8157

E-mail geninfo@commonwealth.int Website www.commonwealthfoundation.com

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