



CULTURE IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Small Islands and Indigenous
Knowledge Section.UNESCO

Despite some cultural specificities, SIDS share the same concerns and develop strategies in face of similar threats related to their isolation, vulnerability, size and natural elements. The rapid development currently taking place on small islands may eventually have certain adverse effects on the human, cultural and natural environment, which are interdependent.

With new and emerging challenges, such as globalization, loss of control over most of the coastal areas, limited land resources, climate migration and human displacement (with impacts on culture in both the left islands and host countries), the need to preserve culture becomes more and more obvious.

In this context, the complexity of the cultural response should also be considered, as it can be either the solution or the exacerbation of the problem. In this multiplicity and complexity of challenges, there is a need to resort to traditional cultural values that include strong societal organization to support the different generations in the community, cope with natural disasters (through traditional knowledge and food, solidarity, informal training), support and preserve nature and its biodiversity, adopt healthier ways of life. SIDS cultural assets must be protected, valued and powered so that they can strengthen and find ways to flourish in a globalized and changing world. Culture plays an important and unique role in the life of the SIDS peoples, and can highly contribute to advance their sustainable development agenda.

In this respect, Local and Indigenous Knowledge is one of the key resources for empowering communities to fight against marginalization, poverty and impoverishment. In the context of SIDS, of particular importance are the issues of (i) traditional practices of land, water and marine resource use in the context of the contemporary world; (ii) nurturing of new kinds of partnerships between indigenous peoples and protected areas ecosystems multipurpose relationships between cultural diversity and biological diversity; (iii) transgenerational transmission and the use of vernacular languages, mainly in primary and secondary education; (iv) as well as the relevance of intellectual property regimes for the protection of traditional knowledge held collectively.



In the SIDS international processes, Culture was acknowledged as a dimension of the development paradigm in the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA), adopted in 1994. The opening paragraph clearly highlighted its importance: "The survival of small island developing states is firmly rooted in their human resources and cultural heritage, which are their most significant assets; those assets are under severe stress and all efforts must be taken to ensure the central position of people in the process of sustainable development." Despite this clear recognition, little emphasis has been placed on culture in the implementation of the BPOA. The situation started to evolve into a new perspective in the years since 2000, as reflected in the UN Secretary General's report of 9 February 2004 (E/CN.17/2004/8), in which culture

emerges as a key component in the development strategy that must be embraced by SIDS.

Likewise, the 2004 Human Development Report 2004, titled Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World, highlighted that the objective of building culturally diverse societies needs to be better integrated and acknowledged as an important precondition for realizing people-participation in the development process, economic growth and poverty eradication. This principle is particularly relevant in SIDS.

In January 2005, during the 2nd International meeting for SIDS in Mauritius for the 10-year review of the BPOA, UNESCO organized the Plenary Panel on 'The Role of Culture in the Sustainable Development of SIDS', one of only four plenary sessions at the Mauritius meeting. Five

panelists, experts in small-island cultural development, representing the 3 SIDS regions provided an overview of the importance of culture for the sustainable development of SIDS, emphasizing the issues of cultural identity and diversity, the protection of the tangible and intangible heritage, the incorporation of local languages and traditional knowledge in formal education, as well as the economic opportunities provided by culture, in particular through cultural industries.

Four main questions structured the debate of the Panel:

1) How does culture (i.e. the products of human action, as well as the all-pervasive ensemble of values and knowledge that are shared by a society), play a role in fostering sustainable development?

2) How to safeguard, enhance and promote the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of small islands and use it in a sustainable way to generate tangible benefits to national societies and local communities?

3) How to turn creativity into commercially viable activities so as to create jobs, generate income and increase trade of creative goods and services from SIDS?

4) What will be the follow-up to the Mauritius International Meeting, including the role of the international community, in terms of advancing culture?

As outcome, the panelists proposed concrete actions for follow-up and consideration by Ministerial Round Tables. This resulted in the integration of a Chapter dedicated to Culture (XIX) in the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the BPOA. Culture was recognized as representing the unique identity and expressions of the people; the foundation of the richness of cultural diversity, traditions and customs; and the basis for spiritual and moral values of the people of SIDS. Culture is mentioned not merely as a subsidiary or ornamental dimension of social development, but as a fundamental component of society itself and its continuity, a key ingredient of meaningful and sustainable development. The SIDS affirmed that the design of sustainable development strategies for their countries should be cognizant of and responsive to the unique historical and cultural realities of their people.

SIDS continue to feel the importance of advancing culture in the ongoing SIDS agenda for the further implementation of the BPOA/Mauritius Strategy, which will lead to the Third International Conference on SIDS in Samoa in September 2014, for the 20-years review of the BPOA.

During the early stages of this review process, representatives of Caribbean governments, UN and regional agencies and organizations, met on July 2013 in Kingston (Jamaica) for the Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting and stressed the critical role of cultural industries in national and regional economic development, calling on the international community to commit to protect the natural and cultural heritage. The Kingston Outcome Document recognizes the importance of promoting cultural identity for advancing sustainable development and calls for a people-centred approach to poverty eradication.

Later on, this crucial role was also put forward in the outcome of the succeeding Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting in Barbados (August 2013). This outcome document was used as the base for the development of the zero draft of the SIDS outcome document of the first Preparatory Committee Meeting, launched in 14 March 2014. The zero draft outlines several SIDS priorities of strategic importance for their countries: Sustainable Economic Development, Climate Change, Sustainable Energy, Disaster Risk Reduction, Oceans and Seas, Biodiversity, Forests, Food Security, Water, Sustainable Consumption and Production, and Social Development (including Gender equality and Women's empowerment, Local and traditional knowledge, Culture, Sport, and Promoting Peaceful Societies).

It contains in particular a number of paragraphs that relate to culture, both in terms of Sustainable Economic Development and Social Development:

18. b) Support SIDS' promotion and development of sustainable eco- and cultural tourism.
d) Protect the SIDS' natural and cultural heritage, especially their ecosystems and biodiversity.
48. SIDS possess a wealth of culture, which is an enable for sustainable development. In particular, indigenous bio-cultural heritage recognizes the deep connections among people, culture, knowledge and the natural environment, and can meaningfully advance sustainable development,
49. Measures to protect and preserve the natural, tangible and intangible cultural heritage practices and traditional knowledge of SIDS have been inadequate, and efforts capitalizing on SIDS strong capacity in sport can be enhanced. We will therefore seek to:

a) Increase resources for the development and strengthening of national and regional cultural activities including through the UN Education, Science and Culture Organization's (UNESCO) networks of sites, such as the World Heritage sites, which reinforce local capacities and promote awareness in SIDS.

b) Encourage the development of creative industries and creative tourism that capitalize on the rich capacity of SIDS in music, performance and art.

UNESCO, as the specialized agency in charge of Culture, plays a big role and is quite active in this domain. In the context of the current SIDS preparatory process which started in 2013, a series of events have taken place to advance reflection on the role of Culture in the Sustainable Development of SIDS and the Post 2015 Agenda.

Among recent UNESCO interventions in SIDS in the domain of Culture, mention can be made of several new SIDS sites added to the World Heritage list, including the Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison in Barbados. Five SIDS (including Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica) ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The organization has also a fully operational Capacity Building Project in the Caribbean, benefiting 16 Member States and 20 World Heritage sites. It includes among other benefits: capacity strengthening in heritage management, regional cooperation fostering, further understanding of synergies between heritage conservation and new developments.

The use of cultural property to raise the standard of living together with the preservation of cultural heritage and cultural diversity and promote creativity and entrepreneurship is another area of crucial importance to

SIDS. Among the areas offering opportunities are craft, design, music, heritage tourism and publishing. These industries are knowledge and labor, they create jobs and wealth. In this domain, UNESCO promotes sustainable tourism, as well as creative industries as strategic outlets for income generation and poverty eradication. Culture is indeed a powerful engine for economic growth to generate income, stimulate employment, nurture creativity and foster innovation in production processes and marketing.

UNESCO provides capacity building support to countries on how to enhance the economic and social potential of the culture sector through cultural preservation, entrepreneurship and marketing. As recognized in the resolution adopted by UNGA in 2010 (A/RES/65/1), "16. We acknowledge the diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. We emphasize the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals".

The big challenge to overcome here is the large gap between the North and the South, which prevents most of the developing countries to reap the benefits of this growth. To assist countries meet this challenge, all societal groups need to be actively involved in promoting cultural diversity and creating the conditions for its prosperity. Building partnerships between governments, businesses and individuals at national and international levels is therefore crucial to enable opportunities for cultural exchanges, which, in the case of small islands, cannot be guaranteed by international trade only.

This challenge is clearly highlighted in the 2013 Special Edition of the UNESCO-UNDP Creative Economy Report titled 'Widening Local Development Pathways': "The small size of the islands of Anglophone Caribbean gives a "local" character to any development challenge. Their experience is indeed similar to – and in many ways a model for – small island States all over the world.... The notion of "creative tourism" currently advocated on these islands emphasizes the tangible as well as the intangible heritage, together with symbolic elements, such as the "buzz" of particular places, their art scene, ethnic neighbourhoods or gastronomy... ..It has been argued, however, that there remains an institutional and commercial bias against indigenous creative content in the home market, discouraging creative entrepreneurship, investment and market development. This is compounded by uncompetitive packaging and branding, weak marketing and poor distribution. The island economies thus have large and widening trade imbalances in creative goods, services and intellectual property. The marketing and audience-development challenge is to shift away from "commodity tourism" that involves high levels of external control, foreign exchange leakages and low local value addition towards a branded tourism product that builds customer loyalty and draws on local capabilities, resources and identities.

Aware of these complexities and challenges surrounding the cultural sector, UNESCO will continue to advocate for the crucial role of culture for development and will support SIDS in designing and implementing innovative cultural policies to strengthen heritage and creativity. This approach will benefit not only their economy but also the overall wellbeing of their peoples by reinforcing their sense of dignity and fostering their social cohesion and equality. Various events are already planned in the framework of the Samoa conference and its related meetings, including side and parallel events on "Cultural Heritage and its Potentials for Sustainable Tourism in SIDS, in particular Underwater Cultural Heritage" (April and August 2014), as well as on "Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) for Sustainable Development in SIDS" (September 2014). [C&D](#)